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**Correspondence, Conferences, Documents, Volume XII.  
Conferences to the Congregation of the Mission vol. 2**

Vincent de Paul

Pierre Coste C.M.

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SAINT  
VINCENT DE PAUL

CONFERENCES  
TO THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION

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VOLUME XII



*Vincent Desaul /*

Copy of the painting by Simon François de Tours 1660,  
preserved at Moutiers-Saint-Jean (France)

**SAINT  
VINCENT DE PAUL**

**CORRESPONDENCE  
CONFERENCES, DOCUMENTS**

**II**

**CONFERENCES**

**VOLUME XII**

**NEWLY TRANSLATED, EDITED, AND ANNOTATED**

**FROM THE 1924 EDITION**

**OF**

**PIERRE COSTE, C.M.**



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*Vicar General, Archdiocese of Baltimore*

*September 24, 2009*

To

**THE ORGANIZERS  
OF  
THE INTERNATIONAL FORMATION CENTER (CIF)**

In recognition of their efforts to facilitate a return to the sources by offering programs and experiences that encourage confreres to keep alive the fire of knowledge, love, and appreciation of Saint Vincent de Paul in living the spirit and charism today.

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## 180. - OBSERVANCE OF THE RULES

May 17, 1658

*Although Missioners are always bound to collect, if possible, all the words of M. Vincent because every one of them contains some instruction for them and for posterity, this is, nevertheless, a very particular obligation when he speaks to them as a father, treats them as his dear children, and addresses them on some important topic. For this reason, since the conference he gave on Friday, May 17, 1658, when he distributed the book of our Rules, was filled not only with good, useful teachings but also with the fatherly sentiments he has for the Company, certain persons<sup>1</sup> have endeavored to collect them with the greatest possible fidelity, and even to describe all that took place, so that those who were absent might share in the edification and remarkable consolation of those who had the happiness to be present for it.*

*The subject of the conference was the observance of the Rules, and contained two points: first, the motives; and second, the means*

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Note: This English edition of the conferences uses an informal, conversational style in order to preserve the spontaneity and simplicity of the exchanges between Saint Vincent and the conferees and to provide a translation that appeals to the modern reader. In his enthusiasm, he often uses exclamations such as O Sauveur!, Or sus!, Jésus!, Et quoi!, etc. Since these are sometimes awkward to translate in context, they have been left in French. —Ed.

**Conference 180.** - Manuscript of Conferences.

<sup>1</sup>According to the testimony of Bro. Pierre Chollier at the beatification process of Saint Vincent, these were Fr. Jacques Éveillard and Bro. Bertrand Ducourneau (cf. **XI**, xix, n. 14).

As in the case of this footnote, biographical information given in Vol. XI, the first of the two volumes of conferences to the Congregation of the Mission, is not repeated in Vol. XII; the reference in the preceding volume is cited. For this and for other volumes of this series, the number of the volume will be given in **bold characters**, the page in *italics*, and, if applicable, the number of the footnote preceded by n.; for example, (cf. **V**, 243, n. 4).

Jacques Éveillard, born in Nogent-le-Bernard (Sarthe), entered the Congregation of the Mission on October 12, 1647, at sixteen years of age, took his vows on October 13, 1650, and was then sent to Poland. Because of political unrest there, he was recalled to France the following year and was given the chair of philosophy at Saint-Lazare by Saint Vincent. René Alméras appointed him Superior of Saint-Charles Seminary in 1662, but sent him during the year to Noyon in the same capacity. In 1668 he put him in charge of the Collège des Bons-Enfants. Éveillard left there in 1674 to become Superior of the Warsaw house. He found such favor with the King, Queen, and Ministers there that Edme Jolly, who was dissatisfied with his administration, had to use great circumspection to recall him. Because Éveillard continued to connive in order to remain in his position, the Superior General expelled him from the Congregation, notifying the Visitors of this in a circular letter dated June 29, 1680.



of observing our Rules well. M. Vincent arrived in the conference hall while a Brother was speaking. On the first point, the Brother said that if we didn't observe the Rules well now, with far greater reason would they not be observed well a hundred or two hundred years from now. M. Vincent had him repeat this; then, after allowing him to finish, spoke himself in almost the following way:

“My dear confreres, God hasn't granted me the grace of giving me such pressing reasons for keeping our Rules well, or with means as good as the ones I just heard mentioned. Blessed be God! May His holy name be forever blessed.”

Here he paused for a moment, then said, “I think that one reason that should prompt us to observe our Rules well, my dear confreres, is that, by the grace of God, all the Rules of the Mission<sup>2</sup> are aimed at disengaging us from sin—and even from imperfection—to procure the salvation of souls, to serve the Church, and to give glory to God. It seems to me that all of them, by the grace of God, tend so well to this end that anyone who observes them as he should will be in the state God asks of him, personally free from vice and sin and useful to the Church, and will give Our Lord the glory He expects from him. What a motive, Messieurs, for the Company to observe its Rules well, to be free from faults as far as human frailty may allow, to glorify God, and to see that He's loved and served on earth! *O Sauveur!* What happiness! I can't reflect on that enough!

“A good servant of God<sup>3</sup> once said to me concerning the *Introduction to the Devout Life*,<sup>4</sup> ‘You see, anyone who observed well everything in this book would attain great holiness,<sup>5</sup> even though all the practices recommended seem ordinary and adapted to human weakness.’ Couldn't I say the same of our Rules, which apparently prescribe for us a rather ordinary way of life, yet can lead those who practice them to great holiness, and not only that but also to the destruction of sin and imperfection in others? Frankly,

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<sup>2</sup>Saint Vincent often refers to the Congregation of the Mission simply as “the Mission.”

<sup>3</sup>Saint Francis de Sales (cf. XI, 21, n. 3).

<sup>4</sup>Francis de Sales. *Introduction à la vie dévote* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Lyons: P. Rigaud, 1610). This is the edition Saint Vincent probably would have used.

<sup>5</sup>Saint Vincent frequently uses the word *perfection* in the sense of “growth in holiness.” In this English edition, both expressions are used to fit the context.

Messieurs, could those who fail to observe them work toward their own holiness and that of their neighbor? And what glory will they give to Our Lord? On the contrary, if, by the grace of God, the Company has made some progress in virtue, and if each man has abandoned the state of sin and advanced in holiness, isn't it the observance of the Rules that has brought all that about? If the Company, by the mercy of God, is doing some good on the missions and for the ordinands, isn't it again our Rules that are the cause of this? And without our Rules, how could we have done it? Oh, we have great reason then to observe them inviolably. And happy will the Company be if it's faithful to them!

“Another motive why we should be exact in keeping our Rules is that they're all drawn from the Gospel, as you'll see, Messieurs, as you'll see. All of them aim at conforming our lives to that which Our Lord led on earth. Our Lord came and was sent by His Father to evangelize poor persons. *Pauperibus evangelizare misit me.*<sup>6</sup> *Pauperibus*, to the poor, Messieurs, to the poor, as, by the grace of God, the Little Company strives to do.

“An important reason for the Company to humble itself is that there's never been one—for that's unheard-of—whose purpose was to do what Our Lord came into the world to do, namely, to announce the Good News to the poor alone, to the forsaken poor: *Pauperibus evangelizare misit me*. For that's our purpose, you see, which God has been pleased to leave for a short while as a monument to the Company and a reminder to posterity.

“When the Queen heard of the lack of faith and of certain disorders prevalent in the town of Metz,<sup>7</sup> even among the clergy, she decided, some time ago, to have a mission given there, and sent me word through two Prelates that I should go to see her about it. So, I

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<sup>6</sup>*He sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor.* Cf. Lk 4:18. (NAB)

<sup>7</sup>The mission of Metz was one of the most famous missions organized by Saint Vincent, both for the quality and number of missionaries who participated in it and for its excellent results. Bossuet did the preparatory work; Louis de Chandénier (Abbot of Tournus) directed it, aided by such collaborators as Omer de Champin, Nicolas Gédoyne, Claude-Charles de Rochechouart de Chandénier (Abbot of Moutiers-Saint-Jean) and some fifteen other outstanding priests. From March 6 to May 22, 1658, the inhabitants of that ancient town in Lorraine flocked around the pulpit to hear the preachers.

went, and, when Her Majesty told me of her devout plan, and that she wanted the Company to go to Metz to give a Mission there, I replied, ‘Madame, Your Majesty must not know that the poor Priests of the Mission are only for poor country people; however, we have another group of priests, who meet every Tuesday<sup>8</sup> at Saint-Lazare and are well able, if Your Majesty has no objection, to carry out this ministry more worthily than we could.’ In answer to this the Queen replied that, before this she hadn’t realized that our Company didn’t minister in the towns, that she’d be very sorry to cause us to act contrary to our Institute, and that she willingly consented to have the priests of the Tuesday Conferences give the mission in Metz. They did give it, by the grace of God, and were very successful. They’re just now returning from it.

“So then, my dear confreres, poor persons are our portion, the poor; *pauperibus evangelizare misit me*. What happiness, Messieurs, what happiness! To do what Our Lord came from heaven to earth to do, and by means of which we’ll go from earth to heaven to continue the work of God, who avoided the towns and went to the country to seek out those who were poor. That’s what our Rules engage us to do, to help poor persons, our lords and masters. O poor but blessed Rules of the Mission that oblige us to serve them and to bypass the towns! You see—for that was unheard of—that those who observe them are blessed because they will conform their lives and all their actions to those of the Son of God. *O Dieu!* What a reason the Company has for observing its Rules faithfully: to do what the Son of God came into the world to do! That there should be a Company, and that it should be the Company of the Mission, composed of poor men, and that it should be entirely dedicated to that purpose, going here and there through hamlets and villages, leaving the towns behind—something that’s never been done—and going to announce the Gospel only to persons who are poor; yet, those are our Rules!

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<sup>8</sup>The Tuesday Conferences (cf. **XI**, *xvii*, n. 11). The Superior of the Congregation of the Mission or his delegate directed these Conferences, which were attended by more than 250 priests during Saint Vincent’s life. Similar conferences, modeled on those of Saint-Lazare, were organized in dioceses throughout France and Italy.

“But what are those Rules? Are they the ones the Company has had in its hands until now? Yes, they are, but it seemed advisable to explain them a little and to have them printed, so that each individual might have them in a more convenient form. We’re going to distribute them to the Company this very evening. You’ve had a long wait for them, Messieurs, and we’ve delayed giving them to you for a long time, but for good reasons. First of all, to imitate the way Our Lord acted, who began to do before He began to teach: *caepit Jesus facere et docere*.<sup>9</sup> He practiced the virtues for the first thirty years of His life and used only the last three to preach and teach. So, the Company has tried to imitate Him, not only by doing what He came on earth to do, but also by doing it in the same way He did; for the Company can also say this, namely, that it acted first and then taught, *caepit facere et docere*. It has been thirty-three years or so since God established it, and during that time we’ve always, by the grace of God, practiced the Rules we’re now about to give you. So you won’t find anything new in them, nothing but what you’ve been practicing for many years with great edification.

“Secondly, had we given the Rules first, it would have been difficult to avoid certain inconveniences that might have arisen from this, from which, by the grace of God, delaying has preserved us. If the Company were given Rules it hadn’t practiced at all, it might have experienced some difficulty; but, by giving it something it has carried out and practiced for so many years in an edifying way, and which it didn’t find difficult in the past, there’s

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<sup>9</sup> *Jesus began to do and to teach*. Cf. Acts 1:1. (D-RB); also *Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission*, chap. I, 1 (cf. XIIIa, 431).

Translations of scripture quotations are usually taken from *The New American Bible* (NAB), unless a passage cannot be found in that edition or a more suitable rendering of the quote is found in the *Douay-Rheims Bible* (D-R B). Where there are variations in the numbering of the psalms in these two editions, both versions may be cited. Saint Vincent referred to Scripture innumerable times; occasionally he gives an incorrect rendition or attributes the passage to the wrong person. This edition does not give references for all the allusions, many of which are already familiar to the reader. For further study of Saint Vincent’s use of Scripture, see the following studies: Warren Dicharry, C.M., “Saint Vincent and Sacred Scripture,” *Vincentian Heritage*, VII, no. 2, 1989, 137-49; Maurice Vansteenkiste, C.M., “Les Règles Communes et la Bible, Citations explicites, implicites, et réminiscences,” CD-ROM *Documents vincentiens, Écrits et Images*, Claude Lautissier, C.M., Paris 2002; and François Garnier, “Enchiridion Spirituale Sanctii: Vincenti a Paulo, IV: Textes Bibliques Cités par Saint Vincent,” *Vincentiana*, 23 (1979): 214-19, among others.

nothing in them that the Company shouldn't find equally easy in the future. We've acted like the Rechabites mentioned in Holy Scripture,<sup>10</sup> who, by tradition, kept the Rules their fathers had left them, even though they weren't set down in writing. Now that we'll have ours written out and printed, the Company will have only to keep on doing what it has been doing for many years and continue to do always what it has done and practiced until now.

"In the third place, Messieurs, if we had given the Rules right from the start, before the Company had put them into practice, there would have been reason to think that there was something more human than divine in this, and that it might have been a plan adopted and worked out in a human way rather than a work of God. But, Messieurs, I don't know how all these Rules and all that you see done here came about, for I never thought of them; that was all introduced gradually, so that no one could say what brought it about. Now, it's a principle of Saint Augustine that, when we can't find the cause of a good thing, it must be brought back to God and acknowledge Him as its principle and author. According to this rule of Saint Augustine, isn't God the author of all our Rules, which have all been introduced in some way of which I'm unaware, and in such a way that we can't explain how or why?

"*O Sauveur!* What Rules! And where do they come from? Had I ever thought of them? Not at all! For, Messieurs, I never had a thought either of our Rules, or of the Company, or of the very term 'Mission.' God did all that; men had no part in it. As for myself, when I consider the means God was pleased to use in bringing the Company to birth in His Church, I confess that I don't know where I am, and everything I see seems to be a dream. Oh! That's not human; it's from God. Would you call human what human understanding didn't foresee and what the human will neither sought after nor desired in any way whatsoever? Poor M. Portail<sup>11</sup> never

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<sup>10</sup>Cf. Jer 35. (NAB) The Rechabites represented the conservative defenders of Israelite traditions, also exemplified by Elijah, Elisha, and Jehu. They did not drink wine, dwell in houses, sow, plant, or own vineyards, but lived in tents. Jeremiah praises them for their fidelity to their traditions.

<sup>11</sup>Antoine Portail (cf. XI, xv, n. 5).

thought of it; neither did I; it has all come about contrary to my every hope and without my ever thinking of it in any way. When I consider that and see the ministries of the Company, it truly seems like a dream to me, and I think I'm dreaming; I can't explain it to you. It's like the poor prophet Habakkuk, whom an angel grabbed by the hair of his head and carried off a great distance to console Daniel, who was in the lions' den; then the angel brought him back to the place where he had seized him and, when the prophet saw himself in the same place from which he had set out, he thought he had dreamed all that.<sup>12</sup>

“Would you call the origin of our missions human? One day I was called to hear the confession of a poor man who was seriously ill. He had the reputation of being the most upright of men—or at least one of the most upright men—of his village. Yet, he was burdened with sins he had never dared to confess, as he himself afterward declared aloud in the presence of the late wife<sup>13</sup> of the General of the Galleys. ‘Madame,’ he said, ‘I would have been damned had I not made a general confession, because of the serious sins I had never dared to confess.’ The man died shortly afterward and the said Lady, realizing the necessity of general confessions, wanted me to preach a sermon on this subject the next day. I did so, and God blessed it so much that all the inhabitants of the place made a general confession. There was such a throng of people that I had to send for two Jesuit Fathers to come to help me hear confessions, preach, and catechize. This led to doing the same thing for several years in the other parishes on the estates of the said Lady. In the end she wanted to maintain some priests to continue these missions, and, for this purpose, obtained for us the Collège des Bons-Enfants,<sup>14</sup> where M. Portail and myself went to live, taking with us a good priest to whom we paid fifty écus<sup>15</sup> a year. The three of us used to go

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<sup>12</sup>Cf. Dn 14:31-39. (NAB)

<sup>13</sup>Françoise-Marguerite de Silly, Madame de Gondi (cf. XI, 3, n. 2).

<sup>14</sup>The Collège des Bons-Enfants (cf. XI, xiii, n. 1).

<sup>15</sup>Throughout this edition the various denominations of money have been left in French, since no adequate, unchanging value in American dollars can be assigned. In the time of Saint Vincent, one écu equalled three livres; one thousand livres could support two priests and a Brother for one year on the missions (cf. V, 485).

off to preach and give missions from village to village. When we were leaving, we'd give the key to one of the neighbors, or ask him to sleep in the house at night. However, everywhere I went I had only one sermon, which I adapted in a thousand different ways: it was on the fear of God.

“That’s what we used to do; God, meanwhile, was doing what He had foreseen from all eternity. He gave a certain success to our works, which, when some good priests saw it, they joined us and asked to stay with us. *O Sauveur! O Sauveur!* Who could ever have imagined that this would reach its present state? If anyone had said that to me then, I would have thought he was making fun of me; yet, that was the way God was pleased to give a beginning to what you now see. *Eh bien*, my dear confreres, would you call human something no one had ever intended? For neither I, nor poor M. Portail ever thought of it. Ah, we never thought of it! It was very far from our minds!

“Had we ever imagined the ministries the Company now has, with the ordinands, for example, who are the richest and most precious deposit the Church could entrust to us? That had never entered our minds. Did we ever think of the Confraternity of Charity? How did we happen to undertake the rescue of poor foundlings? I don’t know how all this came about; for my part, I couldn’t tell you. M. Portail over there can attest that nothing was further from our thoughts than all that.

“And how were the Community practices introduced? In the same way; little by little, and I couldn’t tell you how. The conferences, for instance—of which this may be perhaps the last I’ll give you—we never thought of them. And Repetition of Prayer,<sup>16</sup> something that was as yet unheard of in the Church of God, but which has since been introduced into several well-regulated Communities, where it’s now practiced successfully. How did the thought of it occur to us? I have no idea. How did the thought of all the other exercises and ministries of the Community occur to us? Again, I haven’t the slightest idea.

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<sup>16</sup>Repetition of Prayer (cf. XI, *xiii*, n. 3).

“That happened gradually, almost on its own, one thing after another. The number of those who joined us increased, everyone worked at acquiring virtue, and, as the numbers grew from one day to another, good practices were introduced to help us to live closely united and to assure uniformity in our ministries. Those practices have always been observed and, by the grace of God, are still observed today.

“Finally, it seemed advisable to us to set them down in writing and to formulate them into Rules, and these are the Rules we’re now going to distribute to the Company. Now, there are two kinds of Rules, Messieurs: the first are particular ones for the Superior, the Assistant, and the other Officers and are to be given only to those in office, as is done in all well-regulated Communities. There are others that apply to everyone—priests, seminarians, and coadjutor Brothers. These are the ones we’ve had printed and are going to give you. I hope, Messieurs, that, as the Company has always observed them loyally and sincerely, I hope, I repeat, that it will accept them, now that we’ve gathered them together, with the same good faith, sincerity, and simplicity, not considering them as coming from men but from God and emanating from His Spirit, *a quo bona cuncta procedunt*,<sup>17</sup> and without which *non sumus sufficientes cogitare aliquid ex nobis*.<sup>18</sup>

“*O mon Sauveur!* O Messieurs! Am I asleep? Am I dreaming? For me to give Rules! I don’t know how we’ve reached that point; I can’t conceive how it happened; it always seems to me as if I’m still at the beginning. The more I think about it, the further it seems to me from human invention, and the clearer I see that it’s God alone who has inspired the Company with them, yes, Messieurs, inspired the Company. For, if I’ve contributed anything to them, I’m afraid it’s that little bit which keeps them from being well observed and from producing all the good they might have done. What now remains, Messieurs, but to imitate Moses who, when he had given God’s law to the people, promised all those who would observe it

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<sup>17</sup>*From whom all good things come.* Cf. Jas 1:17. (NAB)

<sup>18</sup>*We are not sufficient to think anything of ourselves.* Cf. 2 Cor 3:5. (NAB)



every manner of blessings in their bodies, in their possessions, and in all things! So, my dear confreres, we should hope for all kinds of benefits and blessings from God's goodness for all who will observe faithfully the Rules He's given us: a blessing on their persons, a blessing in what they undertake, a blessing on everything they do, a blessing on their comings and goings, in short, God's blessing on all that concerns them.

"But also, just as Moses threatened with the vengeance and curse of God all those who wouldn't keep His holy Commandments, there's reason to fear—great reason to fear—that those who would not observe these Rules, with which God inspired the Company, may bring God's curse on themselves; a curse on their bodies and souls, a curse on all their plans and enterprises, in a word, a curse on all that concerns them.

"But I have confidence in the grace of God and in your goodness, Messieurs, that all of you, on this occasion, will renew the fidelity with which you observed them even before they were written, and that the man whose exact observance stood at level three will henceforth go to level four and the man who was at four will, in the future, be at five or six. In short, Messieurs, I hope that your past fidelity in keeping these Rules, and your patience in waiting so long for them, will obtain for you from the goodness of God the grace to observe them with even greater ease in the future."

He asked that the Rule books be brought to him and continued as follows:

"O Lord, You who have blessed so abundantly certain books—for example, the one now being read at table<sup>19</sup>—with the result that souls who are well prepared are drawing great benefit from them in ridding themselves of their faults and advancing in holiness, give Your blessing to this, Lord, and please accompany it with the anointing of Your Spirit, so that it may produce in the souls of all who read it separation from sin, detachment from the world and all its vanities, and union with You."

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<sup>19</sup>The copyist notes that this was *The Practice of Perfection and of Christian Virtues* (Seville, 1609), written by Alphonsus Rodriguez, S.J. (1538-1616).

Then he said that he was going to distribute the books only to the senior priests, but would give them to the students the following day, and that there would be one or two copies in the seminary for common usage, so that everyone would be able to read them. Since the coadjutor Brothers don't understand Latin, the Rules would be printed in French for them and would be given to them as well. Then he asked the senior priests to come up to get their copies, saying that, if he were able, he'd spare them this trouble and would bring a copy to each one at his place. He concluded as follows:

“Come, M. Portail, come on, you who have always put up with my infirmities; may God bless you!”

Next, he gave them to MM. Alméras, Bécu, and Gicquel,<sup>20</sup> who were nearest to him on either side, and said that the others should come up in the order in which they were seated. Each man received them kneeling, with great devotion, kissing respectfully the book and M. Vincent's hand, and then the floor. While they were doing this, M. Vincent said a word or two to each, such as “Come, Monsieur; God bless you!”

When the distribution was finished, M. Alméras knelt down and asked for his blessing in the name of the whole Company, who also knelt down. Following this, M. Vincent himself went on his knees and added the following words:

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<sup>20</sup>René Alméras the younger (cf. **XI**, xxii, n. 17), was First Assistant to Saint Vincent. When the latter had the Rules sent to those living outside of Paris, Fr. Alméras sent an accompanying circular letter of explanation. A copy of this letter, written in Italian, is preserved in the Archives of the Province of Turin (Italy). From the contents of other writings of Saint Vincent, it is possible to assign a date to it between July 30 and October 2, 1658.

Jean Bécu, born in Braches (Somme) on April 24, 1592, was ordained a priest in September 1616 and came to join the first companions of Saint Vincent in September 1626. Two of his brothers, Benoît and Hubert, followed him into the Congregation, the latter as a coadjutor Brother; two of his sisters, Marie and Madeleine, became Daughters of Charity. Bécu was Superior of the house in Toul (1642-46) and spent the rest of his life in Paris. He died on January 19, 1664, having been Vice-Visitor, then Visitor, of the Province of France. (Cf. *Notices*, Vol. I, pp. 125-33.)

Jean Gicquel, born in Miniac (Ille-et-Vilaine) on December 24, 1617, was ordained a priest during Lent of 1642, entered the Congregation of the Mission on August 5, 1647, and took his vows on May 6, 1651. He was Superior of the Le Mans Seminary (1651-54) and at Saint-Lazare (1655-60), and was Director of the Daughters of Charity (1668-72). Gicquel wrote an interesting diary of Saint Vincent's final days (cf. **XIIIa**, 191-208), which is preserved in the Archives of the Mission, Paris. He died in 1672.

“O Lord, You are eternal law and unchanging reason and govern the whole universe by Your infinite wisdom. From You all the governance of creatures and all the laws of good living have emanated, as from their living source; may You be pleased to bless those to whom You’ve given these Rules and who have received them as coming from You; give them, Lord, the grace necessary to observe them always and inviolably until death. In this hope and in Your name, I, a wretched sinner, will say the words of blessing: *Benedictio Domini Nostri Jesu Christi descendat super vos et maneat semper, in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti. Amen.*”

When he had finished that, he began the prayer *Sancta Maria*, etc., and then the Company left.

These words of M. Vincent were given in a moderate, humble, gentle, and devout tone of voice, and in such a way as to make the hearts of all those who were listening to him sense the paternal affection of his own heart. It seemed to all those listening that they were with the Apostles, listening to Our Lord speak, especially at that last sermon He gave them before His Passion, when He also gave them His rules in giving them the commandment of love and charity. *Mandatum novum do vobis; hoc est praeceptum meum ut diligatis invicem, sicut dilexi vos.*<sup>21</sup> Several men couldn’t hold back their tears, and all experienced in their souls various sentiments of joy at what they were seeing and hearing, of love of their vocation, of a renewed desire to advance in virtue, and a firm resolution to be faithful in the observance of their Rules. And, had it been permitted, each would have said that very evening what some were saying to one another, especially these words of the Gospels of Saint Luke and Saint Matthew: *Beati oculi qui vident quae vos videtis,*<sup>22</sup> *et aures vestrae, quia audiunt.*<sup>23</sup> Blessed are the eyes that see what you see, and blessed are the ears that hear it!

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<sup>21</sup>I give you a new commandment: This is my teaching. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. Jn 13:34. (NAB)

<sup>22</sup>Cf. Lk 10:23. (NAB)

<sup>23</sup>Cf. Mt 13:16. (NAB)

181. - REPETITION OF PRAYER <sup>1</sup>

[1658]<sup>2</sup>

“God bless you, my dear confrere! You do well to pray that God will give us good Bishops, good Pastors, and good priests, and all of us should ask Him for this. As the Pastors are, so will the people be. The success or failure of a war is attributed to the officers of an army; and we can even say that, if the Church’s ministers are good and do their duty, all will go well; but if, on the contrary, they don’t, they’re the cause of all disorders.

“In the state we’ve embraced, we’ve all been called by God to work on a masterpiece; for, if there’s a masterpiece in this world, it’s the formation of good priests; nothing greater, nothing more important can be conceived. Even our Brothers can contribute to this by their good example and their exterior work; they can do their duty with the intention that God may be pleased to give His Spirit to the ordinands. Each of the others can do the same, and all must make an effort to edify them well; if it were possible to foresee their inclinations and desires, we should anticipate them in order to satisfy them as far as is reasonably possible. In a word, those who will have the happiness of speaking with them and of being at their conferences should raise their hearts to God when they’re talking to them, in order to receive from Him what they have to say to them. Because God is an inexhaustible source of wisdom, light, and love, it’s from Him that we must draw what we say to others; we have to efface our own spirit and personal feelings to give place to the operations of grace, which alone enlighten and enkindle hearts; we must set ourselves aside in order to be in communion with God; we must consult Him to learn His language, and ask that He himself speak in us and through us; then He’ll be doing His own work, and we won’t spoil anything. When Our Lord conversed with people,

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**Conference 181.** - Louis Abelly, *La vie du Vénérable Serviteur de Dieu Vincent de Paul* [Paris: F. Lambert, 1664], bk. II, chap. II, sect. IV, p. 229.

<sup>1</sup>*Subheading:* Ministry to the Ordinands.

<sup>2</sup>This conference followed, by a few days, the mission of Metz, which closed in May 1658.

He didn't speak in His own name. 'My knowledge,' He said, 'doesn't come from me but from my Father; the words I speak to you aren't mine but are from God.'<sup>3</sup> That shows us how much we should have recourse to God so that it's not we who are speaking and acting, but God. It could perhaps be that, if God is pleased that we have some good results, it will be due to the prayers of a Brother who won't even be in contact with these men; he'll be engaged in his ordinary duties and, while working, will often raise his heart to God to ask Him to be pleased to bless the ordination retreat; and, perhaps also, without his ever thinking of it, God will do the good he desires, because of the good dispositions of his heart. It's said in the Psalms: *Desiderium pauperum exaudivit Dominus.*<sup>4</sup>

M. Vincent paused here because he couldn't remember the rest of the verse, and asked, "How does the rest of the verse go?" So, his Assistant completed it, saying, "*Praeparationem cordis eorum audivit auris tua.*"<sup>5</sup>

"God bless you, Monsieur," said M. Vincent, with a great sentiment of joy at seeing the beauty of that passage, which he repeated several times with devout and touching emotion in order to instill this in his children. "What a marvelous way of speaking," he added, "worthy of the Holy Spirit! The Lord has granted the desire of the poor, He has heard the preparation of their hearts to show us that God hears souls that are well disposed, even before they pray to Him. That's very consoling, and we should certainly encourage one another in God's service, even though we may see in ourselves only wretchedness and poverty. Do you remember that beautiful reading we had at table yesterday? It was telling us that God conceals from the humble the treasures of grace He's placed in them. And a few days ago one of our men was asking me what simplicity was. He doesn't know what this virtue is, and yet he has it. He doesn't think he has it, but he is, nevertheless, one of the most candid men in the Company.

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<sup>3</sup>Cf. Jn 14:10. (NAB)

<sup>4</sup>*The Lord has heard the desire of the poor.* Cf. Ps 10:17. (NAB)

<sup>5</sup>*Your ear has heard the preparation of their heart.* Ibid.

“A few men told me that, when they went to work in a place where there are many priests, they discovered that almost all of them are useless. They read their Breviary and celebrate Mass, but they do it very poorly; some of them administer the Sacraments after a fashion, and that’s all. But the worst of it is that they’re living a life of disorder and vice. If God were pleased to make us truly interior and recollected, we might be able to hope that God would make use of us, weak as we are, to do some good, not only with regard to the common people, but also and principally with regard to priests. Even if you never said a word, if you’re really united with God, you’ll touch hearts by your mere presence. The Chandéniers<sup>6</sup> and those other priests who just gave a very successful mission in Metz in Lorraine, used to walk two by two, wearing their surplices, from the place where they were staying to the church, and from the church back to their house, without saying a word and in such great recollection that those who saw them admired their reserve, having never seen anything like it. Their reserve, therefore, was a silent sermon; but I’ve been told that it was so efficacious that perhaps it contributed as much, or even more, to the success of the mission than anything else did. What the eye sees affects us much more than what the ear hears, and we believe in a good that we see rather than in one we hear. And, although faith may enter by the ear, *fides ex auditu*,<sup>7</sup> nevertheless the virtues we see practiced make a greater impression on us than the ones we’re taught.

“All physical objects have their different characteristics by which they’re distinguished one from another. Every animal, and human beings themselves, has its distinctive quality causing it to be known for what it actually is and differentiating it from another spe-

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<sup>6</sup>Louis de Rochechouart de Chandénier (cf. XI, 157, n. 11) and Claude-Charles de Rochechouart de Chandénier.

Claude-Charles de Rochechouart de Chandénier, Abbot of Moutiers-Saint-Jean, was, like his brother Louis, remarkable for his virtue, especially his humility. After the death of their uncle, François Cardinal de La Rochefoucauld (1645), the two brothers went to live at Saint-Sulpice Seminary, which they left in 1653 for Saint-Lazare. Claude-Charles died on May 17, 1710. François Watel, Superior General at the time, announced his death to his priests and recommended him to their prayers. The long, beautiful epitaph placed on his tomb is found in Collet, *La vie de St Vincent de Paul* (2 vols., Nancy: A. Leseure, 1748), I, pp. 584-88.

<sup>7</sup>*Faith through hearing*. Cf. Rom 10:17. (NAB)

cies of the same genus. Likewise, God's servants have their characteristics which distinguish them from carnal persons: a humble, recollected, and devout exterior manner and bearing, which stems from the grace within them and produces its effects in the souls of those who regard them. There are persons here in this house so filled with God that I never look at them without being touched. Artists, in their pictures of the saints, represent them surrounded by rays because the just who live a holy life on earth diffuse a certain light around them that's characteristic only of themselves. There was so much grace and modesty apparent in the Blessed Virgin that she inspired with reverence and devotion those who had the happiness of seeing her. This was even more apparent in Our Lord and holds true, in due proportion, of the saints.

“All that shows us, my dear confreres, that if you work at acquiring virtue and fill yourselves with divine things, and if each individual strives continually for holiness, even if you have no exterior talent that may be beneficial to those ordinands, God will see that your very presence will bring light to their understanding and warmth to their wills to make them better men. May God be pleased to grant us this grace! This is so difficult and lofty a work that God alone can bring about any progress in it. That's why we have to ask Him constantly to bless the modest services we'll be trying to render the ordinands and the words we say to them. Saint Teresa<sup>8</sup> who saw, in her own day, the Church's need of good workers, used to ask God to be pleased to make good priests, and she wanted the Sisters of her Order to pray frequently for that. Perhaps the change for the better that is found at present in the priestly state is due in part to the devotion of this great saint, for God has always made use of weak instruments for great plans. When He instituted His Church, didn't He choose poor, ignorant, rustic men? Nevertheless, it was through them that Our Lord overthrew idolatry, subjected Princes and the powerful ones of this world to His Church, and extended our holy religion throughout the world. He can also make use of us, weak as we are, to assist the priestly state to advance in

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<sup>8</sup>Saint Teresa of Avila (1515-82), who reformed the Carmelite Order.

virtue. In the name of Our Lord, my dear confreres, let's give ourselves to Him that we may all contribute to this by our services, good example, prayers, and mortification."

## 182. - DETACHMENT FROM THE GOODS OF THIS WORLD

June 8, 1658

The conference was on detachment from earthly things and had three points: first, the reasons why the Company should detach itself entirely from earthly things; second, from what things in particular Missioners should detach themselves; and third, the means of detaching ourselves so that we may live, from now on, only in and for God.

This conference was the second on the same topic.<sup>1</sup> After a few men of the Company, both Brothers and priests, had spoken, M. Vincent concluded this topic, saying that "one of the motives the Company had for giving itself entirely to God and detaching itself from all earthly things—from attachment to goods, honors, and conveniences—is that, without this detachment, it will never do much or be capable of rendering any great service to God. The Apostles left everything when it was a question of following Our Lord; we, too, have given ourselves to God to follow Him, even having taken vows for this, because, by the vow of chastity we've promised God to renounce the pleasures of body and mind; by the vow of poverty, the goods and conveniences of this life and the gold, silver, and riches of this earth; and by that of obedience, honors, high positions, and worldly praises. These three vows, namely, chastity, poverty, and obedience, aim at destroying, and are opposed to, the three vices that reign in the world, of which Saint John speaks, namely, concupiscence of the flesh, the pride of life, and covetous-

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**Conference 182.** - Repetitions of Prayer, MS, f° 69.

<sup>1</sup>In Appendix 2 of this volume, *Topics treated in the Conferences at Saint-Lazare (1650-60)*, mention is made of a conference on "Detachment from the Things of This World," given on May 31, 1658, but no text for it is available.



ness of the eyes.<sup>2</sup> Another motive that occurred to me, and which should incline us to that, has just been mentioned by the man who spoke last, so I won't repeat it.

“*Second point*: What is this detachment, and from what things should Missioners be particularly detached? It's good to explain this for the sake of our coadjutor Brothers. It means to have no inclination for, or attachment to, any of those things we've just mentioned, with regard to ourselves and our senses, avoiding anything that tends toward impurity either of mind or body; not to pamper ourselves so much; not to be so easy on ourselves or so weak as not to be able to endure the lack of anything, either in food or drink. We want good bread, good wine, fine clothes—I repeat, *fine clothes*—to be well fitted out and to want for nothing. Messieurs. Shall I call you *Messieurs*? Or shall I say *brothers*?<sup>3</sup> Or *sus*, I told you recently that, in the future, I'd only call you *brothers*, and here I am calling you *Messieurs*; that word slipped out; maybe it will escape me again; be that as it may, my intention, however, is always to call you *brothers* from now on; that's the term Our Lord used with His Apostles.

“Now, to go back to where we were, I say then that you should know that there was someone among us who was so contemptible as to refuse to accept a certain article of clothing, a cassock he was given, because he didn't like it. Isn't that strange? *Quoi!* To refuse what someone offers you and to say, 'I don't want it; it doesn't please me!' Now I ask you, to what is a person reduced when he's reached a stage like that? Is that practicing the virtue of poverty? *Quoi!* Instead of being glad to find an opportunity of practicing an act of virtue, he does just the opposite! O brothers! O brothers! What reason we have to fear God's punishments if we don't improve!

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<sup>2</sup>These are expressed in the New American Bible as “sensual lust, enticement for the eyes, and a pretentious life.” Cf. 1 Jn 2:16. (NAB)

<sup>3</sup>Saint Vincent uses the term *Monsieur* (*Messieurs* in the plural) when speaking of or to a Priest of the Mission. He refers to the clerical students, coadjutor Brothers, and the generic confrere, all of them members of the Congregation, as *confreres* or *brothers*. The context usually helps us to know in which sense he is using the term *brother*.

“Wretched man, vile person that I am, to make use of an infamy!<sup>4</sup> A beggar, a swineherd, riding in a carriage! Oh, what a scandal! Savior of my soul, forgive me! Consider for a moment the miserable state into which God has allowed me to fall, that I’m obliged to use a carriage, since I can’t get around otherwise.

“Well, to go back to where we were, I say that, when we have something to say to women, we should cut short the conversation; when we have to discuss anything with them, it should always be in a place where people can see us. If it’s in the parlor, keep the door open; in fact, it’s wise not even to use the parlor. I have to tell you that there’s an individual among us who, as soon as he’s told that a woman is asking for him at the door, immediately goes off and plants himself in this little parlor. Once he’s there, he closes the door halfway and often stays there for a rather long time. Now, brothers, let’s avoid these frequent, useless appointments with women; let’s talk to them only when necessary. I’m well aware that we’re sometimes obliged to discuss matters with persons of their sex, but let’s do it only when necessary; furthermore, this should be kept short, giving them, however, the time they need to tell us what they have to propose to us. Take those poor Daughters of Charity; I certainly have to discuss matters with them in order to take care of what has to be done. Because of my infirmities, I can’t remain standing, so I have to go and sit down in the parlor.

“Just consider for a moment whether the establishment of those poor Sisters isn’t a work of God. I’ve received three or four letters this week from various places in the kingdom asking me for those poor Sisters. The Duchesse d’Aiguillon<sup>5</sup> is writing to me for some

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<sup>4</sup>The “infamy” Saint Vincent here mentions is the carriage he is obliged to use—a cause of shame and embarrassment to him.

<sup>5</sup>Marie de Vignerod de Pontcourlay, Duchesse d’Aiguillon, was born in the Château de Glenay near Bressuire in 1604, the daughter of René de Vignerod and Françoise de Richelieu, eldest sister of the great Cardinal. She married the nephew of the Duc de Luynes, Antoine de Beauvoir de Grimoard de Roure, chevalier, Seigneur de Combalet, whom she had never seen and did not love. During the two years of the marriage, the couple lived together only six months. The Marquis de Combalet, kept away from home by the war, died at the siege of Montpellier on September 3, 1622. His wife, widowed at the age of eighteen, left the Court and entered the Carmelite convent in Paris. After a year of novitiate, she received the habit from the hands of Fr. de Bérulle and took her first vows. Richelieu, who loved her dearly, did his utmost to bring her back to the Court. At his request the Pope forbade her to remain in the cloister, Marie de Médicis

for Havre de Grâce. On the other hand, the Queen<sup>6</sup> is asking for some; she didn't write herself but had a letter written to me by M. de Saint-Jean,<sup>7</sup> one of her chaplains, to ask me to send some of them to assist the poor sick and wounded soldiers. The Bishop of Sarlat<sup>8</sup> is also asking for Sisters for Cahors, since he wants to have some for a little hospital he established there a short time ago. Now, what's that, my dear confreres? Isn't it a work of God? *Quoi!* poor, weak village girls, and most of them uncultured! And yet, see how they're being asked for from all sides! Tomorrow I have to give them another conference on their Rules.

“Pride of life: to want to succeed everywhere, to choose newly-invented words, to seem brilliant in the pulpit, or in talks to the ordinands, and in catechetical instructions. And why? What are we looking for in all that? Do you want to know, brothers? It's ourselves. We want people to talk about us, we're looking for praise; we want it said that we're a great success, are working wonders, we

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chose her as lady of the bedchamber on January 1, 1625, and the King elevated her estate of Aiguillon to a duchy-peerage on January 1, 1638.

The Cardinal gave her a small mansion on rue de Vaugirard, one of the dependencies of the Petit Luxembourg Palace, where he lived. The Duchess made noble use of her immense wealth and great influence. She frequented and protected men of letters and took charge of all works of charity. She established the Priests of the Mission in Notre-Dame de la Rose and in Marseilles, entrusting them in the last-named place with the direction of a hospital she had built for sick galley convicts. The Richelieu and Rome houses subsisted on her generosity. She had the consulates of Algiers and Tunis given to the Congregation of the Mission. She contributed to the foundation of the General Hospital and of the Society of the Foreign Missions, took under her protection the Daughters of the Cross and the Daughters of Providence, and was a great benefactress of Carmel. She was President of the Confraternity of Charity at Saint-Sulpice, and replaced Mme de Lamoignon as President of the Ladies of Charity of the Hôtel-Dieu. The Duchesse d'Aiguillon must be placed, along with Saint Louise de Marillac, Mme de Gondi, and Mme Goussault, in the first rank of Saint Vincent's collaborators. No one perhaps gave him more; few were as attached to him. She watched over his health with maternal solicitude; the carriage and horses the saint used in his old age came from her stables. Saint Vincent's death grieved her deeply. She had a silver-gilt reliquary made in the shape of a heart, surmounted by a flame, to enclose his heart. The Duchess died on April 17, 1675, at the age of seventy-one and was buried in the Carmelite habit. Bishops Bresacier and Fléchier preached her funeral oration. (Cf. Comte de Bonneau-Avenant, *La duchesse d'Aiguillon* [2nd ed., Paris: Didier, 1882].) Le Long mentions in his *Bibliothèque historique de la France* (Fontette ed., 5 vols., Paris: Hérisant, 1768-78), Vol. III, no. 30.854, a manuscript collection of her letters, which has since been lost. Any further mention in the text of “the Duchess” refers to her, unless a footnote indicates otherwise.

<sup>6</sup>Anne of Austria, Queen Regent of Louis XIV.

<sup>7</sup>Nicolas de Saint-Jean.

<sup>8</sup>Nicolas Sevin.

want to be exalted. That's the point. Look at that monster, look at that ugly person! O human wretchedness! O cursed pride! How much trouble you cause! In short, that's preaching ourselves and not Jesus Christ or souls.

"Today—this very afternoon—I listened to the talk the Bishop of Sarlat gave to the ordinands. When it was over, I was chatting with him and I said, 'Excellency, you converted me today.' 'How is that, Monsieur?' 'Because,' I said, 'you said everything in such a plain, simple way that I was so touched by it I couldn't help but praise God for it.' 'Ah, well, Monsieur,' he replied, 'I certainly could have said something more lofty, more polished, but I thought I'd be offending God if I did.'

"So," said M. Vincent, "think about the view of this Prelate, brothers; you see, that's how men who seek God and the salvation of souls act—quite plainly and simply. If that's how you act, you see, God is, in a sense, obliged to bless what you say, to bless your words; God will be with you, He'll act with you. *Cum simplicibus sermocinatio ejus*,<sup>9</sup> God is with the simple and humble; He assists them, blesses their work, blesses their undertakings. *Quoi!* Are we to believe that God will help a person who's trying to ruin himself? *Quoi!* That He'll help a man ruin himself, as do those who preach other than humbly and simply, who preach themselves, etc.? Such a thought can't even enter our mind! O brothers, my dear confreres, if you only knew how harmful it is to preach other than the way Our Lord Jesus Christ did here on earth, as the Apostles preached, and as many servants of God still do today, you'd be horrified!

"God knows that on three different occasions I went down on both knees at the feet of a member of the Company—he was one of us then but is so no longer. I did this on three consecutive days, begging him with hands joined to be good enough to preach simply and plainly and to say only what was in the notes that had been given him, but I could never get him to do this. He was giving a talk at the ordination retreat. You can see what this cursed attachment was and what a great hold it had on him! So God didn't bless him; he had no

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<sup>9</sup>*His communication is with the simple.* Cf. Prv 3:32. (D-RB)

success in his sermons and conferences; that whole pile of beautiful words and sentences went up in smoke.

“Simplicity, then, my dear confreres! Let’s preach Jesus Christ and souls; let’s say what we have to say simply, plainly, and humbly, but firmly and charitably; let’s not try to gratify ourselves but to please God, to win souls, and to dispose them to do penance, for everything else is only pride and vanity; yes, to act otherwise is nothing but pride—pure pride—you see, and some day God is going to punish those who have allowed themselves to be carried away by it.

“If the Mission should ever reach such a wretched state, we can say that it’s the end of it; it will be on the way to its destruction and will be left at that. For, please tell me, for example, what draws those gentlemen of the Sorbonne here for the ordination retreats? Nothing but the humility and simplicity with which, by the mercy of God, we strive to act and have striven to do so up to the present. Take the licentiate in theology who’s here now; what could have induced him to come? Is it to learn anything else but virtue? And as soon as they no longer see humility, simplicity, and charity sparkling in the Company, they’ll stop coming here because, as far as learning is concerned, they know much more than we do. Therefore, brothers, what we have to hope for, and to ask God for, is that He may be pleased to grant each member of the Company in particular, and the whole Company in general, the grace to act simply, humbly, and plainly, to preach the pure truth of the Gospel in the way Our Lord himself taught it, so that everyone may understand us and benefit from what we say.

“As for attachment to goods, such as, *verbi gratia*,<sup>10</sup> to be delighted to have some money left over when we come back from a Mission, to keep some of it, and then to go to the Superior and say, ‘Monsieur, I have some money left over; may I buy a book or something else with it?’ now, brothers, that shows that we’re still attached to goods and conveniences. We mustn’t do that but, as soon as we get home, any money remaining should be given to the person

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<sup>10</sup>For example

whose duty it is to keep it, namely, the Procurator of the house. In addition, we have to detach ourselves from what we have or from something that may be willed to us, free our spirit of all those things and have no attachment to them, or even to our relatives and friends; yes, my dear confreres, that's what I'm saying, we have to detach ourselves from too great a love of relatives and friends and from their interests, etc. In short, whoever says 'Missioner' (I mean a true Missioner) says a man who has God alone in view, his own salvation and that of his neighbor, a man who has no other attachment than the one that unites him more closely to God.

*"The means:* First, to give ourselves wholeheartedly to God and to make a firm resolution, beginning right now, not to prize anything whatsoever in the future, to detach ourselves from any earthly thing that might hamper our progress in virtue and the holiness Our Lord asks of each of us in our vocation, but always to seek God purely and simply, and never ourselves or our own interests. Believe me, if the Little Company acts in this way, rest assured, brothers, that Our Lord will bless it and all that it does, and that this state is a good disposition for the reception of the Holy Spirit.

"Second, since tomorrow is the feast of Pentecost, the day on which the Holy Spirit came down upon on the Blessed Virgin, the Apostles, and the other disciples gathered together, a good means for obtaining this detachment from ourselves and from all earthly things will be to unite ourselves in spirit with the Blessed Virgin and the Apostles and to pray fervently to God for a share in that same Holy Spirit. May the Divine Majesty be pleased to grant us this grace!"

183. - REPETITION OF PRAYER <sup>1</sup>

June 9, 1658

“Regarding what has just been said about the gift of tongues, I think it will be well for us today to ask God for the grace, for those who will be sent to far-off countries, to learn foreign languages well, because, since the Divine Majesty has been pleased to raise up this Little Company to do, throughout the world, a little of what the Apostles did, we need to share with them this gift of tongues, so necessary for teaching the people the doctrines of our faith. For, if faith enters by hearing, as Saint Paul says, *fides ex auditu*,<sup>2</sup> those who announce it have to make themselves understood by those on whom they want to shed this divine light. Now, there’s a very great diversity of languages, not only in Europe, Africa, and Asia, but even in Canada; for we see in the *Relations*<sup>3</sup> of the Jesuit Fathers that there are as many languages as there are tribes. The Hurons don’t speak like the Iroquois, or the latter like their neighbors, and a person who understands one group can’t understand the others.

“With such differences of language, how can missionaries go throughout the world to proclaim the Good News if they know only their own language? And how can they learn other languages if they don’t ask God to teach them, and apply themselves to studying them? What’s the meaning of the word ‘missionary’? It means a person who is sent. Yes, brothers, ‘missionary’ means a person sent by God, and it’s to you Our Lord has said, *Euntes in mundum universum, praedicate Evangelium omni creaturae*.<sup>4</sup> For that purpose, He wants you to be able to understand the necessary languages. God never calls a man to a state of life without seeing that he has the requisite qualities for it, or at least without intending to

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**Conference 183.** - Archives of the Priests of the Mission, Provincial House, Krakow.

<sup>1</sup>*Subheading:* The Gift of Tongues.

<sup>2</sup>*Faith through hearing.* Cf. Rom 10:17. (NAB)

<sup>3</sup>Name given to the annual report (1632-72) of the mission of New France, addressed by the Jesuit Superior of Québec (Canada) to the Provincial of Paris, who had it printed for public circulation.

<sup>4</sup>*Go into the whole world and proclaim the good news to all creation.* Cf. Mk 16:15. (NAB)

give them to him. Therefore, my dear confreres, let's hope that if He's pleased to call you to distant lands, He'll give you the grace to learn the language. Put your trust in Him; He doesn't will the end without the means; and if He asks you for the one, He'll give you the other.

“At any moment now I expect word from Poland with instructions to send men there for an establishment that a good priest of that country is procuring for us in Krakow. We have M. Ozenne<sup>5</sup> there, and he speaks a little Polish; M. Desdames,<sup>6</sup> who speaks it well; and also M. Duperroy;<sup>7</sup> but the others we're about to send won't know a single word; should we on that account not send them? Oh no, no, no! But they must be determined to study the language carefully and patiently, and so should others who may be sent elsewhere.

“First of all, you learn the nouns and then the verbs, which are the actions. You begin with the principal things, the sky, the earth, etc., and gradually you become capable of serving God everywhere. How do you think the Jesuit Fathers have done so much work in Japan and other foreign countries, for they didn't know the language right away? They took the trouble to study it well, and you'll do well, brothers, to offer yourselves to God not only to go abroad, like those great men, to make Jesus Christ known and loved, but also to apply yourselves to learn the language well once you get there, without being put off by the difficulties, because that's the point at issue. There are some who imagine, when they're there, that they'll never succeed. They grow discouraged after a few attempts and, instead of praying and trusting in God to make progress, rather than waiting patiently for this favor from His Goodness, they lose their desire to continue, convince themselves that they're suitable only for their own country, and are tempted to go back.

“Let's ask the Holy Spirit, my dear confreres, through the intercession of that holy assembly, which today received the gift of tongues, to give that grace to the Company, since it's called to the

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<sup>5</sup>Charles Ozenne (cf. **XI**, 323, n. 3).

<sup>6</sup>Guillaume Desdames (cf. **XI**, 323, n. 4).

<sup>7</sup>Nicolas Duperroy (cf. **XI**, 323, n. 4).



same ministry. Let's all pray fervently for this, joining our intentions and prayers for that purpose; but let's entrust ourselves, my dear confreres, let's entrust ourselves to His infinite Goodness, which honors some by selecting them for foreign lands, that God will give them the grace of tongues. But let them rely on God's goodness and await God's hour in peace; and let them use their time well to acquire the knowledge and use of languages. Let our coadjutor Brothers pray for this also because, even though they're not called to preach to the peoples, they give the priests the means of instructing and saving them."

#### 184. - THE GOOD USE OF INFIRMITIES

June 28, 1658

Our Most Honored Father M. Vincent arrived for this conference a little late, namely, half an hour after it had begun. When one of the priests of the Company had finished speaking, he concluded it in this way: first of all, he greeted the Company in his usual manner, by raising his biretta, and then said, "I've missed a lot by not being present at the first conference on this subject, held a week ago, and also by not arriving at the beginning of this one. What has just been said seems very good to me, and I must try to profit by it.

"One motive that should induce us and the whole Company to make good use of, and to conduct ourselves well during, the infirmities occurring here on earth is that we should regard all that as coming to us from God—or which He allows to befall us: life, death, sickness, health—all these things happen according to the order of Divine Providence, regardless of how they come about, and are always for our good and our salvation. I've already said this many times, and I can't help repeating it once more now, namely, that we should be of the opinion that those suffering from illness in the Company are the blessing of the Company and the house, and that

we should consider this to be all the more true since Our Lord Jesus Christ loved that state of suffering, through which He himself willed to pass and became man in order to suffer. The saints passed through it, and the ones to whom God didn't send illness into their lives sought to afflict their own body by way of punishment. Witness Saint Paul: *Castigo corpus meum et in servitutem redigo*.<sup>1</sup> And that's what we who are in perfect health should do. *Castigo corpus meum*, chastise ourselves, afflict ourselves, in view of the sins we ourselves have committed, and of those committed in the world against His Divine Majesty. *Mais quoi!* We're so weak and miserable that not only do we not chastise ourselves, but very often are even quite impatient in bearing with the state of sickness and distress in which God is pleased to place us, even though it's for our own good. This is a fault committed by many of those whom God is pleased to afflict with illness and inconvenience.

“Another fault that's committed, or may be committed, in the Company, is the great desire some have of wanting a change of place or house; to go here or there, to this house, to that province, or to their native region, on the pretext that the air there is better—or they seem to think it is. And what's all that, my dear confreres? And what can we say of such persons except that they're men attached to themselves, men with the spirit of little girls, men unwilling to endure anything? Shall I tell you that there's a man like that in the Company, who's asked for a change, to come here from a place a hundred leagues away, because of some minor inconvenience he has to put up with? And if we had been willing to believe him, he'd have gone to another place, one hundred fifty leagues from here, that appeals to him, where he thinks the air is better! Isn't it strange to see persons like that, and so filled with self-love, in the Company! As if bodily infirmity was a state to be avoided, when it pleases Our Lord to place us in it! To run away from our own happiness! Yes, brothers, that's running away from our own happiness, for the state of suffering is a state of happiness because it sanctifies souls.

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<sup>1</sup>I chastise my body and bring it into subjection. Cf. 1 Cor 9:27. (D-RB)

“I remember that good M. Pillé,<sup>2</sup> now deceased, was sanctified in this state. Yes, he was a saint, and we’ve always considered him a saint.

“Not many members of the Company knew him, except M. Portail and a few other seniors. About two years after that holy man was admitted into the Company, God was pleased to afflict him with an infirmity—it was lung disease—and he died from it. This was a man who received many graces from God! In a word, he’s a saint; M. Pillé is a saint; he lived like a saint and died like a saint.

“Oh! how far removed from this changeable disposition was good M. Senaux.<sup>3</sup> I can tell you, brothers, that, although he was ill almost constantly from the time he entered the Company, nevertheless I don’t think he ever asked for a change of air because of it. No, M. Senaux never took up his pen to write a single word to ask for a change of house and air either in Normandy, where he was from, or anywhere else; yet, despite his condition, he never stopped working, doing as much as he was able, keeping and observing the Rules—yes, the Rules. I also have to say that, while he was in our little house in Troyes, it got on very well. After his death, the men who are still there were quick to acknowledge this, and wrote to me expressing their sorrow at the loss of this good servant of God, who, they said, had been an example of regularity when he was alive.

“Furthermore, there will perhaps be others who won’t openly ask for a change of place, but will do so covertly through the doctor, to whom they’ll give so many *ifs* and *buts*, so many reasons aimed at leading him to say it would be a good thing for them to have a change of air, or that they should go to their native place or somewhere else, that in the end he advises them to do it. And what do those men say then? ‘The doctor says I should have a change of air.’

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<sup>2</sup>Jean Pillé, a priest of the Sens diocese, was received into the Congregation of the Mission around October 1631. He was Superior of the Collège des Bons-Enfants (1635-38) and died in Paris on October 7, 1642. Saint Vincent related his life and praised his virtues in a long circular letter (cf. II, 363-89). There is a copy of his will in Arch. Nat. M 211, file 1.

<sup>3</sup>Note: He is speaking here of M. Senaux, who died in our Troyes house this year.

Nicolas Senaux, born in Auffay (Seine-Maritime) on May 9, 1619, entered the Congregation of the Mission on June 22, 1639, was ordained a priest on February 20, 1644, took his vows on March 23 of the same year, and died in Troyes on March 28, 1658. Saint Vincent also praised his regularity, resignation, and spirit of detachment in the letter of April 12, 1658 (cf. VII, 143).

“The remedies for this are to accept everything that happens as coming from the hand of God; and not to do so is a fault. One day a good Brother named Bro. Antoine<sup>4</sup>—his portrait is hanging in this room—was asked. . . . He was a man who could neither read nor write and yet he was filled with the Spirit of God. Not many members of the Company who are here have met him, except M. Portail, who may have; but I knew him. He’s already been dead a long time. That good man called everyone his brother; if he was speaking to a woman, he called her *my sister*; even when he was speaking to the Queen, he used to call her his sister. In those days everyone wanted to see him. One day someone asked him, ‘Brother, what do you do when you get sick? How do you act with regard to illness? What use do you make of it?’ ‘I accept sickness as coming from God,’ he said. Then, since they were pressing him a little more on this point, he added, ‘You see, when I have an attack of fever, for example, I accept it this way, saying to it, “*Or sus*, Sister Sickness—or Sister Fever—you come from God; *or sus*, since that’s the case, you’re welcome.” ’

“That, my dear confreres, is how that holy man acted. That’s also how the servants of Our Lord, lovers of His Cross, are accustomed to act. This, however, doesn’t prevent people from being free—or even obliged—to use the temporal remedies prescribed for the relief and cure of each illness. To do so is to honor God himself, who created plants and gave a specific virtue to each one of them. But to be too easy on ourselves, to coddle ourselves for the slightest pain we have, *Sauveur!* that’s something we have to stop doing. Yes, we should banish such a spirit and not be so soft on ourselves.

“O wretched man that I am! What poor use have I not made of the sickness and of the minor inconveniences God has been pleased to send me! How many acts of impatience have I committed, wretch that I am, and what scandal have I not given to those who have seen me acting like that! Help me, brothers, to ask God’s forgiveness for having made such poor use of my little discomforts as I’ve done in the past, and for the grace to make good use in the future of those it may please His Divine Majesty to send me in my old age and in the little time I have left to live on earth.”

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<sup>4</sup>Antoine Flandin-Maillet (cf. XI, 61, n. 1).

185. - MUTUAL SUPPORT

July 5, 1658

After several members of the Company had spoken, M. Vincent said in conclusion that he had been greatly edified by what was mentioned by those who had spoken on this topic. It was also very well said that mutual support is, in a Company, what nerves are in the human body. And, in fact, what's there to be seen but disorder in a house or Company in which mutual support doesn't prevail? "Our Lord," he said, "put up with Saint Peter, who committed that despicable sin of denying his Master. And didn't Our Lord also bear with Saint Paul? And where shall we find people so perfect and faultless as not to need to be borne with in some way? Furthermore, where shall we find any Superiors who are faultless and have no need of forbearance on certain occasions? Find me a single one. Let me go further and say that we are constituted in such a way that most often we have to bear with ourselves, so true it is that this virtue of support is necessary for everyone, even in order to practice it toward ourselves, whom we sometimes find hard to bear. Alas! What a wretched man I am to be talking about others! No one on earth has greater need of forbearance than I, wretched man! *O Sauveur!* How much I need the support of the Company!

"What is there in our brothers that requires our tolerance? We have to bear with them in everything, in all things, my dear confreres: putting up with their bad moods, their way of doing things and of acting, etc., which doesn't please us or may offend us. Some persons are so perverse that everything annoys them, and they can't stand the slightest thing that doesn't go along with their own opinion or mood. How our good deceased foundress,<sup>1</sup> the wife of the General of the Galleys, excelled in this practice of forbearance! She put up with everyone, no matter who it was. There was no one she wouldn't excuse, sometimes alleging human weakness, then, at

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Conference 185. - Repetitions of Prayer, MS, f° 73 v°.

<sup>1</sup>Mme de Gondi.

other times, the wiles of the devil, natural hastiness, a quick temper, and so on; people could rest assured—yes, everyone alive could be sure—that they had in this good lady someone who supported and defended them.

“The Blessed Bishop of Geneva<sup>2</sup> used to say that he’d much rather subject himself to the will of a hundred persons than to subject one single person to his will. Where will we find two persons who look alike and who behave the same way? I’d like you to find me two of them; you won’t find them, since God has willed that we should be that way, for the greater glory of His Divine Majesty; so, everyone, consequently, needs this virtue of mutual support, as much to bear with himself as to bear with others. Alas! wretched man that I am, talking about others, and yet there’s no one who needs this virtue more than I, who can’t tolerate anything and who, moreover, have such great need to be borne with in my faults! Sometimes, in the evening, when I reflect on what has occupied my mind throughout the day, I find that it has been a thousand useless things and I don’t know how many insignificant trifles, with the result that I have a hard time tolerating myself, and think I deserve to be hung at Montfaucon.<sup>3</sup>

“On this point, I’d also like to tell the Company something that was told to me yesterday, which shows me clearly how fragile we are, even to the extent that sometimes we can’t bear the slightest thing that happens, and we need forbearance, even with regard to our closest friends. So then, I was told that two abbés—I know both of them, and one of them is a little fastidious about his food and drink—had always been very good friends, and, until that time, even lived together and took their meals together. It happened, however, that, when the coachman, or somebody else, was pouring the wine, one of them spilled a little of it. That offended the second gentleman—the one who was fussier—with the result that he started shout-

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<sup>2</sup>Saint Francis de Sales.

<sup>3</sup>Montfaucon, situated at that time outside the walls of Paris, between La Villette and the Buttes-Chaumont, was the place where the corpses of executed criminals were hung on display as an example to others.

ing, saying, 'Was that done to annoy me?' Reflect for a moment on that man's disposition! He imagined that it was done to offend him. Shortly afterward, he cried out again, 'I won't stand for that.' The upshot was that, when the other abbé saw this, and that anything he might say to dissuade the other from thinking it had been done to annoy him was useless, he got up from the table and went to his room to weep. Now, my dear confreres, judge from this example what the human spirit is like, and to what it's subject, wanting one thing now; then, another; liking to do a certain thing now, then giving up doing it, unable to stand it any longer.

"Here's something else: for example, there are two people you've never met, yet, it happens often enough that you'll feel more inclined toward one than toward the other. How does that happen? It's because that's the way we're made. *Or sus*, my Savior, *or sus*, my Savior, please give us this virtue of mutual support!

"I think I should console the Company by saying that, by the mercy of God, the Company is very supportive, and all the members are very tolerant of one another. Things are going well, by the grace of Our Lord. I sometimes ask some of my fellow priests what they think of the Company. I asked one of them again not long ago, and he told me he thought things hadn't been this good for a long time. Why is that, do you think, if not that the men are very forbearing and respectful of one another? In short, things are going well, by the mercy of God, and we have to thank Him for that. You see, when I notice something good, I can't help mentioning it; just as, on the contrary, when I see something wrong, I can't refrain from mentioning that also, and from shouting at and reproving those who commit it and are the cause of it. But let's move on to the means.

"I think the first and only means, after that of asking God for this virtue of mutual support, is humility, brothers, humility, you see, humility, self-contempt, considering ourselves the most wretched of all, placing ourselves beneath everyone, never preferring ourselves to anyone, looking on everyone as superior to us, as Saint Paul says, being quite pleased to have others preferred to us, either on the missions, or elsewhere, in any ministry whatsoever; or that they succeed better than we do; and we accept that cheerfully for

love of Our Lord. Take my word for it, brothers, if you do, the Little Company will be a little paradise on earth; yes, the Saint-Lazare house will be a little paradise on earth. May God in His mercy grant us this grace!"

Then, M. Vincent went on his knees and said, "And because I, more than anyone else, need the Company's forbearance on account of the many miseries of which I am conscious within myself, and for the many causes for disedification that I give to my confreres, especially those who look after me in my little infirmities, I ask you, brothers, to be kind enough to continue this same charity toward me and to forgive me for the past. The elderly, as David says, have great need of being supported, so please bear with me, brothers, and pray that I'll improve." Then he kissed the floor as usual, and the whole Company did likewise.

After that, M. Vincent recommended to the prayers of the Company M. Hopille, a Canon of Agen, who had died a few days before. He said he was a man who had always been kind and charitable toward the Missioners there and, when he died, had even left them his library. He asked the priests to celebrate Mass for the repose of the soul of that good departed man, and the Brothers to offer their next Holy Communion for him, at least as a second intention, if they couldn't do otherwise.

#### 186. - REPETITION OF PRAYER<sup>1</sup>

August 4, 1658

When three or four members of the Company had finished their Repetition of Prayer, M. Vincent advised the Company to ask God for zeal for the salvation of souls and the spirit and virtues necessary

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Conference 186. - Repetitions of Prayer, MS, f° 75 v°.

<sup>1</sup>Subheading: Return of Francis White, Missioner in Scotland; illness of Bro. Christophe Delaunay; death of two Daughters of Charity in Calais; words of praise for the Daughters of Charity.



to work for this. He then recommended that they thank God for the return of M. Le Blanc,<sup>2</sup> and for having preserved him and those who were with him from so many dangers.

“Our Bro. Christophe Delaunay,<sup>3</sup> who remained in Saintes after his long journey, has fallen ill. I recommend to the prayers of the Company this good Brother, for whom the Captain of the ship from Ostend that captured them at sea showed such great affection; he loved and cherished him, delighted to have him with him during nearly the month they were at sea after the capture of the French ship by this man from Ostend.

“I also recommend the Daughters of Charity we sent to Calais to nurse the poor wounded soldiers. Of the four we sent there,<sup>4</sup> two of them, the strongest and healthiest among them, have died. One of these, Sister Manceau,<sup>5</sup> the niece of M. Manceau,<sup>6</sup> Priest of the Company, was the Sister Servant; that is, the one who had the charge and care of the others. She was one of the strongest Sisters in that Little Company of Charity, yet she was the first to succumb beneath the weight of this heavy duty. Just picture that, Messieurs. Four poor Sisters in the midst of five or six hundred poor sick and wounded soldiers! Please consider for a moment the guidance and goodness of God in raising up such a Company in these days. And to do what? To assist the poor corporally, and even spiritually, saying a few good words to them, especially to the dying, to help them to prepare to die well. *O Sauveur! O mon Sauveur!* History makes no mention to us of there ever being such a Company of virgins—true, there are a few widows among them—who have given themselves to God in the way those poor Sisters do to nurse the sick

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<sup>2</sup>Francis White [François Le Blanc] (cf. XI, 166, n. 1).

<sup>3</sup>Christophe Delaunay (cf. XI, 337, n. 5).

<sup>4</sup>Françoise Manceau, Marguerite Ménage, Marie Poulet, and Claude Muset. The hospitals in Calais were filled to overflowing with soldiers who were wounded at the battle of the Dunes or were victims of a serious epidemic. The disease the Sisters were coming to combat struck all four of them. The Queen had a memorial erected to the first two, who died of it.

<sup>5</sup>Françoise Manceau, a native of Laumesfeld (Moselle), entered the Company of the Daughters of Charity around 1643 and was in Chars in 1650. In June 1658 she was sent to Calais, where she died shortly after, a victim of her devotion.

<sup>6</sup>Nicolas Manceau, born on August 10, 1613, in Laumesfeld (Moselle), entered the Congregation of the Mission in Paris on November 30, 1646, took his vows in April 1651, and was ordained a priest in 1656.

and the wounded. For my part, I can't remember either having heard or read of any. God willed to wait until now to do this, at a time when He's allowing His Church to be greatly persecuted, afflicted, and almost eradicated in certain countries like England, Ireland, and Scotland; and God grant that this may not happen in Flanders! For, people say that Cromwell is beginning to take under his protection all those who are of an opinion contrary to the Catholic religion, making himself their advocate, etc.

"And who are the women who make up that Company? They're all poor village girls, poor servants, with the exception of one or two who are persons of a certain social condition. All the rest are of the class I just mentioned. Yet, we see how greatly God is blessing them, and how zealous they are for His glory and the assistance of their neighbor. And since the Company of the Mission—even though, if not totally imperfect, is at least lacking in many virtues—has a certain relationship with the Little Company of those poor Sisters, and Our Lord has willed to make use of the Mission to help to begin that of those poor Sisters, we have, therefore, a greater obligation to offer them to God, which I now ask the Company to do, and I thank Him for all the graces He's given them until now. We ask Him, in His infinite goodness, to continue the same graces and blessings on them in the future.

"The Queen has written to Mlle Le Gras and to me to send others to Calais to help those poor people, and we're going to do that. Four are leaving today for that purpose. One of those poor Sisters, who's about fifty years of age,<sup>7</sup> came to see me last Friday at the

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<sup>7</sup>Henriette Gesseume, a highly intelligent, resourceful, but very independent Daughter of Charity, was one of the first members of the Company, which she entered in 1634 at the age of twenty-six. Her early years in Community were spent in and around Paris: Saint-Germain-en-Laye (1638), Fontenay-aux-Roses (1643), and Saint-Germain parish (1644). A skilled pharmacist, she was of great assistance at the Nantes Hospital (1646-1655). Assigned once again to Paris, she served the poor in Saint-Séverin parish. As mentioned here, she left to nurse the wounded soldiers in Calais. Upon her return, she served the galley convicts. Two of her nieces, Françoise Gesseume and Perrette Chefdeville, also became Daughters of Charity. Claude, one of her brothers, and a nephew, Nicolas Chefdeville, were coadjutor Brothers in the Congregation of the Mission.

Of those being sent to Calais, Saint Vincent mentions only Sister Henriette here and in his conference of August 4, 1658, to the Daughters of Charity (cf. X, 440-47). We know from the *Spiritual Writings of Saint Louise de Marillac* (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1991, hereafter

Hôtel-Dieu, where I happened to be, to say she had heard that two of her Sisters had died in Calais, and she was coming to volunteer to be sent in their place, if I agreed. ‘Sister,’ I said, ‘I’ll think it over.’ And yesterday she came here to find out what answer I had for her. See the great zeal of those poor Sisters, in volunteering like that, my dear confreres! Isn’t it wonderful how they offer themselves to go to risk their lives as victims, for the love of Jesus Christ and the good of their neighbor? As for me, I don’t know what to say about it except that those poor Sisters will be our judges on Judgment Day. Yes, brothers, those Sisters will be our judges at the Judgment seat of God, if we aren’t prepared, like them, to risk our lives for God. And, believe me, the man who hasn’t yet reached that stage is still a long way from holiness.

“O miserable man that I am, I, who do not feel disposed—or feel so little disposed—and attracted to this very high degree of virtue, how must I not fear, my dear confreres, how must I not fear! And how should the members of the Company who are in this same state not fear along with me, if they’re not in that disposition, a disposition which, you see, is one of the most excellent interior degrees we can have—yes, the most excellent! That’s why those who don’t find themselves in this state must constantly ask God to put them in it, that is, in the disposition of being ready and willing to give their lives for Jesus Christ. As for those to whom God has already given this grace, and who experience it interiorly, believe me, they should thank God fervently for it, and ask Him not to allow them to make themselves unworthy of it by any action that may displease Him.”

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cited as *Spiritual Writings*), L. 595, p. 615, and from *La Compagnie des Filles de la Charité aux Origines. Documents* (Tours: Mame, 1989, hereafter cited as *Documents, D.C.*), Doc. 725, p. 831, that a Sister Françoise, a Sister Jeanne, and Sister Marie Cuny accompanied Sister Henriette.

187. - MODERATION IN EATING AND DRINKING

August 23, 1658

The conference held on Friday evening, August 23, on the subject of moderation in eating and drinking, was concluded by M. Vincent, who had begun it the previous Friday. "God be praised," he said, "and may He grant us the grace to profit well from all that has just been said! The subject of this conference is the moderation we must practice in eating and in drinking, the reasons prompting us to do this, and the means the Company must use in order to avoid falling into self-indulgence. For the present, we'll speak only about the moderation we must have with regard to wine; we'll content ourselves with that point for now, since it's the most dangerous step.

"Now, my dear confreres, one reason prompting us to practice this virtue of moderation very carefully concerns the great evils that result from the contrary, that is, from drinking to excess, for what disorders don't arise from that? Alas, well do you know! A person who begins to drink, and to drink wine beyond what's necessary, falls into an animal state—even worse than an animal and a creature lower than an animal. There's no vice such persons aren't capable of committing; furthermore, this vice of drunkenness is seldom or rarely a single vice but is always followed by another, greater one, especially that abominable and horrible vice of the flesh that the person commits either with himself or with others. O what a pitiable state! What is it, brothers, if not an animal state, living like a beast, following one's inclination like an animal, like a horse, like a pig—yes, like a pig—and worse than animals? Animals follow their natural inclinations; but a man—and a man who's drunk—doesn't know what he's doing. He's worse than an animal because he has to be carried, he has to be held up and carried by the armpits; otherwise, he'd fall to the ground like a stone. . . .<sup>1</sup>

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Conference 187. - Repetitions of Prayer, MS, f<sup>o</sup> 76 v<sup>o</sup>ff.

<sup>1</sup>The following text, as far as "Speaking of this," etc. was omitted by Coste, although he had included a typed copy of it in his own book, without giving its source. It is probably in the

“‘But, Monsieur,’ someone may say to me, ‘what you are saying is well and good to say to peasants and to people who fall into this vice; but what leads you to use that language for the Company of the Mission, which makes profession of virtue and of preaching against this vice?’

“Brothers, I’m telling you this because in the past God allowed there to be in the Company some men who slipped into this vice of drunkenness. And I’m telling you further that there’s still someone in the Company now, who has also fallen into this misfortune recently. That’s the second reason, and it should lead us to be on our guard against this same vice and to counteract its effect by the practice of the virtue that’s opposed to it: temperance and moderation in drinking.”

“*Quoi!* There were Missioners who fell into that state!”

“Yes, there were.”

“*Quoi!* You’re saying that even now in this same Company, there are some who have slipped into that fault!”

“Yes, that’s what I’m saying. And it happened just recently.”

“*Eh!* But, Monsieur, *eh quoi!* Are you going to put up with that? *Quoi!* Aren’t you expelling those men from the Company?”

“No, I’m not.”

“*Eh!* But, Monsieur, *quoi donc!* What scandal you’re allowing to happen! *Quoi!* Then what do you do to them?”

“I admonish them to correct themselves; I’m trying to get them to change their lives. If they don’t, God won’t allow them to stay any longer, and they’ll leave of their own accord.”

“But, Monsieur, do you have experience of what you’re saying, that they can’t remain in the Company and will be compelled to leave it of their own accord?”

“Yes, I do have experience of this, and it’s like those dead bodies that are in the sea, which don’t remain in it but are washed ashore. The same thing happens in the Company, which soon purges itself

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manuscript. but, as with certain other passages dealing with morality, which he inserted in his own copy. Coste would have hesitated to make such a passage public.

of such people when they're found in it, since God can't tolerate their being in it.

"Here are some of them: a certain priest of the Company left and went off to see a [Bishop] and said to him, 'I'm a Missioner.' 'Yes,' replied this [Prelate], you're a Missioner. Fine! I'm pleased about that. *Or sus*, we'll begin by giving you a certain parish to administer; then, after that, depending on how you succeed, we'll see about giving you something more important.'

"That man wasn't more than three weeks in that place when he began to let himself slip into that vice of drunkenness, and then got involved with women; for it usually leads to that. And yet, here we have a Missioner—or at least he calls himself a Missioner; and on that title alone he's given a ministry—and see how he ends up in that pitiful state I just mentioned to you.

"I remember a certain priest, who came here to make his retreat, and who was from another Institute. He controlled himself fairly well during his retreat and asked to be admitted into the Company. We accepted him, and once he was in it, he also behaved himself for a few days, but, since his stomach was ruined because he was used to drinking a lot of wine—yes indeed—he soon made it apparent what he was. He was able to mend his ways a little, but, in the end, being unable to overcome himself with regard to this vice, which, however is very easy to do, he left.

"Another man comes to mind, who fell into that misfortune of becoming inebriated, but so much so that they had to hold him up by his arms because he kept falling from one side to the other. And since he was in the country, [?Company]<sup>2</sup> people said, 'Who is that?' 'It's one of the Missioners.' The local Pastor was asked to be so kind as to take him into his residence. He did this with great sorrow at seeing what he was seeing. The next day, he came back here. In the end, he had to leave, for how can we allow such men to stay who are fit only to do harm and to give scandal; for, I ask you, what use is a man who lets himself become intoxicated? And how will he be able to help the poor country people rid themselves of this

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<sup>2</sup>This word is difficult to read. Since Saint Vincent goes on to speak about the Pastor preaching to the country people, the word "country" might fit more easily into this context.

vice, if he himself isn't free from it? *Quoi!* A Missioner goes and preaches to the poor people that they shouldn't drink and can't be cured, and that it's a great sin; yet, he allows himself to fall into the same sin! Come now! Come now! That's a mockery. He himself has to mend his ways, renounce that idolatry he has for his stomach, and correct himself; then, after he's well grounded in the virtue contrary to this vice, he can go to preach to others.<sup>3</sup>

“Speaking of this, there's a certain person in the Company who, when he presents his glass for wine, is dissatisfied if he's not given much. ‘Pour it in, pour it in,’ he says to the server. I've warned him to correct this fault, but he still hasn't done it. If he doesn't, and doesn't correct himself soon, we'll have to use some other remedy, for that's intolerable. So the Company of the Mission isn't exempt from this vice, and God has allowed Satan to tempt us.

“‘But, Monsieur, why are you saying this in public? You're really scandalizing the Company. Even if one or two confreres may be addicted to this vice, at least it would seem better to admonish them privately about it.’ My dear confreres, apart from the fact that Our Lord Jesus Christ himself acted in this way when He was on earth—as Saint Augustine also did, for he publicly admonished persons of the faults they had committed, so that those who had committed them might amend, and those who were listening might be on their guard against falling into them—it's also, brothers, my reason for acting in the same way and mentioning in public the faults God has permitted some members of the Company to commit.

“Shall I also tell you, my dear confreres, that some ordinands have been greatly scandalized by two priests of the Company—yes, two priests—who showed very bad manners in the refectory by the way they ate and drank, pouncing on their food as if they wanted to devour everything all at once? In a word, they scandalized some of those ordinands so much that the latter felt bound to mention the matter to me in order to remedy it. Two Priests of the Mission behaving in such a way that, instead of edifying their neighbor, were a scandal to him! O my dear confreres! To what have we been reduced? And what a subject of shame and distress for the Company,

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<sup>3</sup>*In the margin:* Note that he quoted in Latin a passage that mentions those whose gods are their stomachs: *Quorum deus venter est.* Cf. Phil 3:19 (NAB)

especially for those who have a high regard for moderation in eating and drinking!

“Of all the means to remedy this fault, so that it won’t happen again in the future, I think the first that seems appropriate to put into practice is that the Superior should sit at one end of the table and his Assistant or sub-Assistant at the other, so that the Superior can see what’s happening on one side of the refectory and the Assistant can also see what’s happening on the other. To do this, it will be necessary to divide the table in two at the lower end to provide a passageway.

“Another means we’ve considered is to reduce the quantity of wine; instead of the pint that’s given, to be satisfied with a half pint. Some Communities have only that much, and they manage quite well on it. Now, if other Communities are already doing this and get along fine with a half pint at each meal, couldn’t we do that, too? We’ll think about this means for a while longer before putting it into practice, for if, after trying other means, they’re found to be ineffective, we’ll really have to be reduced to that. So, we’ll have to think it over.

“‘But, Monsieur,’ someone may say to me, ‘there are persons and there are persons; some can get along with a little wine, but there are also others who need more. As for me, who have a cold stomach, I need some to warm it up a little; otherwise, I have a hard time digesting meat, salad, etc.’ Brothers, it’s a mistake to think that the stomach needs wine to help it digest food. I used to think so myself at one time, wretch that I am, but M. Portail set me straight and showed me that it was an error. And I’ve found out and learned by experience that what he said was really true.

“On that subject, I’m going to tell our Brothers here who work in the pantry not to serve plates piled up with salad, as they do. They give one man enough for three or four people. Salad! Alas, older Communities don’t eat any at all! And if they don’t, couldn’t we also get along without it? Look at the Oratory. True, they have salad there. But how much do you think is given to each man? Oh, very little! I’d like you to see what they’re given there. You’d see clearly the difference between them and us. Should we be surprised at see-



ing many of the Company often not feeling well? No; and why? It's because too often their discomfort arises from eating and drinking too frequently. Some of them, for instance, eat breakfast, have their dinner, have something to eat in the afternoon, and then have supper. In the morning, they go to the refectory for breakfast. It isn't long from breakfast to dinner, so the poor stomach hasn't time for digestion. They go to dinner before the first process of digestion is finished and then, soon after, they add a snack to this. All that gives rise to vapors, which circulate and mount to the brain, and that's the cause of most of the headaches some of us have.

“A third means, which we've already thought about several times, is to appoint a Visitor, as is a practice with the Jesuits; that is, someone assigned by the Superior, whose duty is to oversee all that's going on in the house and in the refectory, to see if moderation is being well observed there, and if the men dilute their wine well. When he notices a fault, he tells the Superior about it; the latter prescribes a suitable penance, and then he publicly admonishes the person who committed the fault: 'In a spirit of humility and charity, I admonish M. X or Bro. Y, for committing such or such a fault, and he shall do such and such as a penance.' The man who sees himself admonished in this way kneels down at once and performs the prescribed penance. Now, that's what the Jesuit Fathers do, and you can see from it the great modesty and decorum there is among them. I think we'll have to do the same. We'll see if it's advisable to add this duty to those of the table prefects, or whether it will be necessary to create and establish another officer for that purpose, whose duty it will be to walk from one side of the refectory to the other to see if everyone is behaving modestly, if anybody is wolfing down his food in an unmannerly way, if everyone is diluting his wine appropriately, and so on. When he notices any fault, let him give an admonition, for, as a matter of fact, we really have to try to find some means of remedying the evil when we see it. We see that this custom is observed in certain Chapters and Cathedral churches. A person walks about the Choir to see if modesty is being observed, and if the chant is being sung properly; and if he discovers any fault, he calls attention to it.

“Fourth: Lastly, not to waste time listening to nature or compromising with our temperament, but accustom ourselves to diluting our wine so that the water is barely reddened. And, speaking of this, I ask our Brothers who serve at table not to give more than two or three fingers of wine to any individual at dinner. Believe me, my dear confreres, we see clearly that those seminarians who dilute their wine the most (for, by the grace of God, there are some who do, and do so properly, leaving no fault to be found in it), believe me, I repeat, they advance rapidly in holiness. As for me, I notice that those I see diluting their wine the most, I repeat that I see them going from virtue to virtue; this is obvious. And tell me this: did most of us drink wine before entering the Company? Certainly not—or at least very seldom. Well, what then? A little beer and, perhaps most frequently, water.<sup>4</sup>

“*Or sus*, God be praised and glorified for ever! We can add another means to all this, namely, to make our meditation tomorrow morning on this subject and begin to adopt the habit of diluting our wine well. However, tomorrow’s meditation will be on Saint Bartholomew, for tomorrow is the feast of that great Apostle. Nevertheless, it will fit in fairly well with this topic, for Saint Bartholomew was flayed alive. We’ll also begin to flay our own will and our taste for drinking wine without water. May God be pleased to grant us the grace to set to work at this in earnest!”

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<sup>4</sup>*In the margin*: Note that most of the students and seminarians came from the Netherlands and from Picardy.

188. - AVAILABILITY FOR ANY MINISTRY ASSIGNMENT<sup>1</sup>

[August 30, 1658]<sup>2</sup>

“The first reason elderly people like myself, wretched man that I am, living with the discomforts of my old age, have for placing themselves in a state of availability with regard to ministry assignments—in the event that they’re not already in this state—is, my dear confreres, the glory given to God by the state of openness to God’s Will.

“The man who is not in this state of availability, but in the contrary one, is in a devilish state. In order to keep the vow of obedience we’ve taken, we must be in a state of openness to God’s Will regarding all things.

“Another motive is that anyone who isn’t in a state of availability regarding ministries, and isn’t ready to obey all sorts of Superiors who may be given him, is unfortunate.

“ ‘Oh, but I’m an old man!’ someone may say. You’re an old man! *Eh bien!* Should you on that account be less available, less virtuous?

“ ‘Oh, but I’m an educated man!’ Think about that a little. He’s an educated man! And because he’s educated, he doesn’t have to be available or ready and willing to do what the Superior or an Officer of the house will ask of him. Consider whether that objection is reasonable, and if it ought to come from the mouth of someone who professes to serve God.

“ ‘Oh, but he’s a holy man, Monsieur!’ I’m glad he’s a holy man. *Quoi!* Is that any reason why he should be exempt from doing what

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**Conference 188.** - Repetitions of Prayer, MS, f° 11.

<sup>1</sup>*Indifférence* is the French term used by Saint Vincent. The English translation *indifference* often has a negative connotation today, meaning “unconcern, apathy, lack of interest.” For this reason, in an effort to convey the meaning correctly, the editors have translated it sometimes as *availability*, sometimes as *openness to God’s Will* (cf. *Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation of the Mission*, Chap. II, Art. 10). In certain cases, the term *indifference* has been retained as such.

<sup>2</sup>This conference is undated. If we consult the list of conferences held at Saint-Lazare after the siege of Montmédy on August 6, 1657, mentioned in this text, we find only one on detachment regarding ministry assignments, that of August 30, 1658; therefore, this date is imperative.

will be asked of him, what he'll be ordered to do, from obeying this Superior, who is, if you like, less perfect than he is, less educated and, if you like again, whose faults and failings are obvious? Once again, is that a valid reason? Most assuredly not. And that shouldn't exempt him from availability regarding assignments: to go to the country, if he's sent there; to stay at home, if that's what's desired of him; to direct a seminary or go to give a mission; to remain in this house or another; to go to foreign lands or not; to obey this Superior or another, since God wills it and he's been found suitable to direct and govern.

“ ‘But, Monsieur, do you have some example to give us?’ Yes, indeed, here's one that lends itself rather well to this topic, and it's in Holy Scripture: When Judas had committed the abominable sin of betraying and selling his good Master, and then fell into a state of despair, the eleven Apostles met to elect someone else to take his place. For this purpose, they cast their eyes on two of Our Lord's disciples, one called Barsabas, surnamed *Justus*, and the other, Mathias. Then they proceeded to the election and the lot fell on Mathias rather than on Barsabas, who was called *the Just*, on account of his holy life.<sup>3</sup> He was, therefore, a righteous man, yet the lot fell on Mathias, of whom nothing was said. You see, my dear confreres, God saw that he was fit to govern and, because of that, it was His Will that the lot should fall on him. Some men are holy and lead a saintly life; however, they don't always have the gift of leadership. Holiness is a continual disposition and total conformity to God's Will, and leadership resides in the judgment. That is, a sound judgment is needed to guide and organize.

“Learning isn't absolutely necessary to govern well; but when learning, the gift of leadership, and sound judgment are found in the same person, *Dieu!* What a treasure!

“Old age isn't always to be considered for leadership because we see several young men who have a greater gift for leadership than many old men and senior confreres. We have an example of that in David, who was chosen by God to rule His people, although he was the youngest of all his brothers. You see, a man who has sound

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<sup>3</sup>Cf. Acts 1:21-26. (NAB)

judgment and great humility is capable of governing well, and I know from experience that those of a contrary disposition, who are ambitious for positions of authority, have never done anything worthwhile.

“I also know from experience that someone who has held office, and retains this spirit and the desire to be in charge, has never been a good subject or a good Superior.”

At this point M. Vincent humbled himself in his usual way. “As I was returning from the city,” he said, “I saw ten or twelve heavily-laden mules halted near the door of a tavern, waiting for the men in charge of them, who very probably were drinking inside this same tavern. I kept thinking about those poor beasts, with their burden on their back, standing there without moving, waiting for their master and leader.<sup>4</sup>

“It’s debatable whether it’s more excellent to volunteer for foreign lands in order to work there for the salvation of souls, or to be in a continual disposition to go there, without, however, requesting this, in line with the maxim of asking nothing and refusing nothing, and to remain in the place where obedience has put us, until it withdraws us from it. O Messieurs, how happy are those who feel this disposition in themselves and to whom God has given the grace of being ready and willing to go to far-off countries to spend their lives there for Jesus Christ! History tells us of the many martyrs who have sacrificed themselves for God. And if we see that so many men in the army risk their lives for a little honor, or perhaps in the hopes of a little earthly recompense, with what far greater reason shouldn’t we risk our lives to carry the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the most distant lands to which His Divine Providence may call us! Just think, of the approximately 30,000 men or so at the siege of Montmédy, people are insisting that there were only about 22,000 survivors. Now, if those men had the courage to risk their lives in this way for the capture of a town, why shouldn’t we risk ours for the glory of God and to win souls for Jesus Christ?”

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<sup>4</sup>*In the margin:* This example shows us that, even though those animals lack reason, they nevertheless allow themselves to be led and are indifferent to what their handler wants them to do, standing motionless where he puts them, although they carry a burden on their back.

“The first means of placing ourselves in this state of availability, in the event that we’re not in it already, is humility and self-abjection, looking upon ourselves as animals incapable of leadership or of any position of authority or office of Superior.

“Second, when we’re given any ministry and find that some obstacle prevents us from carrying it out, to go before Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament and there ask Him for the grace to let us know whether we should make this known to the Superior; and once He’s let us know that it’s His Will that we mention it, to do so, and then do whatever the Superior tells us.”

#### 189. - LOSS OF THE ORSIGNY<sup>1</sup> FARM

[September 1658]<sup>2</sup>

“For a certain time, I was dwelling on the fact, and even did so frequently, that the Company had nothing to endure, that everything was going well for it, and that it was enjoying a certain prosperity—or, to put it better—was being blessed by God in every way, experiencing no setbacks or adversities. I was beginning to be uneasy about this calm state of affairs, well aware that it’s characteristic of God to test those who serve Him and to chastise those He loves: *Quem enim diligit Dominus, castigat*.<sup>3</sup> I remembered what was said about Saint Ambrose,<sup>4</sup> that, one time when he was travel-

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**Conference 189.** - Abelly, *op.cit.*, bk. III, chap. XXII, p. 321; chap. XVIII, p. 281. The part taken from chap. XXII ends at the words “He had done all things well.”

<sup>1</sup>Orsigny was a hamlet near Saclay (Essonne), where Saint Vincent had accepted the gift of a farm from Jacques and Élisabeth Norais (cf. contract of December 22, 1644, Arch. Nat. S 6687). The farm provided the Congregation of the Mission with agricultural products and served as a place of rest and relaxation. According to IV. 334, the farms that supplied Saint-Lazare did not provide for one-sixth of the needs of the Motherhouse. As long as Jacques and Élisabeth Norais were alive, the Community possessed the farm in all tranquility; after their death, however, some cousins claimed it in a successful lawsuit (1658). It was purchased in 1684 by the Congregation at a court-ordered auction.

<sup>2</sup>The conference is undated, but we know that the lawsuit concerning the Orsigny farm was lost in September 1658.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Heb 12:6. (NAB)

<sup>4</sup>Bishop of Milan (339-97).

ing, he happened to be in a house where the master told him that he didn't know what affliction was. Whereupon this holy Prelate, enlightened by heaven, felt that this house, treated so favorably, was on the verge of destruction. 'Let's get out of here,' he said; 'the wrath of God is about to fall on this house.' As a matter of fact, no sooner was he outside when a thunderbolt dashed the house to the ground, enveloping in its wake everyone inside.

"On the other hand, I've seen several Companies unsettled from time to time, particularly one of the greatest and holiest in the Church, which sometimes finds itself, so to speak, in a state of consternation, and which right now is going through an atrocious persecution,<sup>5</sup> and I said, 'That's how God treats the saints and how He'd treat us if we were really strong in virtue; but, knowing our weakness, He brings us up, feeds us with milk, like little children, and causes everything to succeed with us almost without our being involved in it.' Because of all that, I was right then to fear we weren't pleasing to God or worthy to suffer anything for His love, since he was averting from us the afflictions and trials that test His servants. Granted, we had some shipwrecks in the departures for Madagascar, but there again God rescued us from them. In addition, in the year 1649 soldiers inflicted damage on us amounting to 42,000 livres.<sup>6</sup> But we weren't the only ones to sustain this loss; everyone suffered from the public disturbances; it was a common evil, and we were treated no differently from the others. But God be blessed, brothers, that it has now pleased His adorable Providence to deprive us of a property that has just been taken from us! This is a considerable loss for the Company, yes, a very considerable one. Let's adopt the sentiments of Job, when he said, 'God had given me these goods; He has taken them away; may His holy Name be blessed!'<sup>7</sup> Let's not consider this deprivation as resulting from a human decision, but let's say that it's God who has judged us, and

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<sup>5</sup>He is speaking of the Society of Jesus, being attacked furiously at the time for the moral precepts taught by some of its members.

<sup>6</sup>In January 1649, six hundred soldiers, billeted at Saint-Lazare, pillaged and plundered the house, unhinged the doors, sold part of the wheat, and set fire to the wood pile (cf. III, 394, n. 4).

<sup>7</sup>Cf. Jb 1:21. (NAB)

humble ourselves beneath the hand that strikes us, like David who said, *Obmutui, et non aperui os meum, quoniam tu fecisti*: 'I've kept silent, Lord, because You've done this.'<sup>8</sup> Let's adore His justice and consider that He's been merciful to us in treating us this way: He's done it for our own good. *Bene omnia fecit*, says Saint Mark: 'He has done all things well.'<sup>9</sup>

M. Vincent then added that, when urged by one of the judges to appeal the case, he replied, "*O mon Dieu!* far be it from us to do that."

Then he went on to say, "O Lord, You yourself have handed down the decision; if it pleases You, it will be irrevocable; and, so as not to defer its execution, here and now we make the sacrifice of this property to Your Divine Majesty. And I ask, my dear confreres, that we accompany it with a sacrifice of praise; let's bless this Sovereign Judge of the living and the dead for having visited us on the day of trial and tribulation. Let's give Him infinite thanks for having not only withdrawn our attachment to worldly goods, but also for having actually deprived us of those we possessed, and let's ask Him to grant us the grace to love this deprivation. I'd like to think that we're all rejoicing at the loss of this revenue; for, since Our Lord says in the Apocalypse, *Ego quos amo castigo*,<sup>10</sup> must we not love chastisements as marks of His love? Still, it's not enough to love them; we must rejoice in them. O my God, who will grant us this grace? You are the source of all joy, and apart from You, there's no true joy, so we ask it of You. Yes, Messieurs, let's rejoice that it seems as if God has found us worthy to suffer. But how can we rejoice in sufferings, since they're disagreeable to nature and we avoid them? We can do it in the same way we accept remedies; we're well aware that medicines are bitter and that the mildest make our hearts palpitate, even before we take them; nevertheless, we cheerfully swallow them; and why? Because we like to be healthy and hope to preserve our health or to recover it by purging. Thus,

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<sup>8</sup>Cf. Ps 39:10. (NAB)

<sup>9</sup>Cf. Mk 7:37. (NAB)

<sup>10</sup>*Those whom I love, I chastise.* Cf. Rv 3:19. (NAB)



afflictions, disagreeable in themselves, nevertheless contribute to the healthy state of a soul and of a Company; through them God purifies us, as gold in the fire. In the Garden of Olives, Our Lord experienced nothing but anguish and, on the Cross, nothing but pain, which was so excessive that it seemed that, abandoned as He was by all human assistance, He was also abandoned by His Father; however, amid the terrors of death and the outrages of His Passion, He rejoiced in doing the Will of His Father and, harsh as it was, He preferred it to all earthly joys; it was His food and His delight. It should also be our delight, my dear confreres, to see His good pleasure fulfilled in us by the humiliations, losses, and pains we encounter. *Aspicientes*, says Saint Paul, *in auctorem fidei, et consummatorem Jesum, qui, proposito sibi gaudio, sustinuit crucem, confusione contempta*.<sup>11</sup> The first Christians were of this opinion, according to the testimony of the same Apostle: *Rapinam bonorum vestrorum cum gaudio suscepistis*.<sup>12</sup> Why shouldn't we also rejoice with them today at the loss of our property? O brothers, what great pleasure God takes in seeing us gathered here for that purpose, conversing about it, and encouraging one another to rejoice! On the one hand, we're made a spectacle to the world by the shame and disgrace of this decision, which makes us known, so it would seem, as unjust holders of the property of others: *Spectaculum facti sumus mundo et Angelis et hominibus*.<sup>13</sup> *Opprobriis et tribulationibus spectaculum facti*.<sup>14</sup> But, on the other hand, *Omne gaudium existimate, fratres mei, cum in tentationes varias incideritis*;<sup>15</sup> consider, brothers, that all joy has come to you when you experience various temptations and tribulations.

“So, let's reckon that we've gained a great deal by our loss; for, together with this farm, God has taken from us the satisfaction we

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<sup>11</sup>*Looking on Jesus, the author and finisher of faith, who, having joy set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame.* Cf. Heb 12:2. (NAB) Scripture scholars question the Pauline authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

<sup>12</sup>*You joyfully accepted the confiscation of your own property.* Cf. Heb 10:34. (NAB)

<sup>13</sup>*We have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to human beings alike.* Cf. 1 Cor 4:9. (NAB)

<sup>14</sup>*By reproaches and tribulations you were made a spectacle.* Cf. Heb 10:33. (D-RB)

<sup>15</sup>Cf. Jas 1:2. (NAB)

had in possessing it and the pleasure we might have had in going there from time to time. As this recreation was pleasing to the senses, it might have been for us like a sweet venom that kills, a knife that wounds, and a fire that burns and destroys. Now, by the mercy of God, we're delivered from that danger and, since we're more exposed to temporal needs, His Divine Goodness will also to raise us to greater confidence in His Providence, and to oblige us to abandon ourselves to it entirely for the necessities of this life as well as for the graces of salvation. Oh, if God were pleased to recompense this temporal loss by an increase of trust in His Providence, abandonment to His guidance, greater detachment from earthly things and self-renunciation, *O mon Dieu!* Brothers, how happy we'd be! I dare to hope that His fatherly kindness, which does all for the best, will grant us this grace.

“So then, what consequences should we draw from all this? The first is to offer God all that remains to us of the goods and consolations of body and mind; to offer ourselves to Him in general and in particular, but earnestly, so that He may dispose absolutely of our persons and of all that we have according to His most holy Will, and so that we'll always be ready to abandon everything to embrace the inconveniences, ignominies, and afflictions that may come to us and, by this means, to follow Jesus Christ in His poverty, humility, and patience.

“The second is never to go to court, whatever our rights may be; or, if we're obliged to do so, that it be only after we've attempted every way imaginable to reach an agreement, unless the right is absolutely clear and evident; for, the person who relies on human judgment is often deceived. We'll carry out the advice of Our Lord, who said, 'If someone wants to take your coat, hand him your tunic as well.'<sup>16</sup> May God grant the Company the grace to put this into practice! We have to hope that, if it's faithful in making this maxim its own, and determined never to depart from it, His Divine Goodness will bless it and, if He takes something from it on the one hand, He'll give it something on the other.”

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<sup>16</sup>Cf. Mt 5:40. (NAB)

190. - SILENCE

September 20, 1658

“The first reason the Company of the Mission has for observing the virtue of silence carefully is that God is glorified by silence. *Te decet hymnus, Deus, in Sion.*<sup>1</sup> There’s another version,<sup>2</sup> which states, *Tibi silentium laus Deus, in Sion.*<sup>3</sup> God is as glorified by silence as He is by hymns sung in His honor.

“The second reason is the great advantage and the great benefits accruing to the Company by keeping silence, either for the soul or for study and the other duties we have to do; for, since the spirit of man can’t remain without acting, if he’s obliged to keep silence, that will cause him to devote himself more to study if he’s a priest or scholastic; if it’s someone else, to his work and duties. The person who doesn’t possess this virtue of silence will never do anything but waste time, if he doesn’t strive with all his might to practice it; for, to pass the time, he goes there, comes here, talks to this one, chats with that one, is in and out of his room, talking to this man then to that one about the news of the day, the war, and so on; in short, he wastes time chatting and talking about useless matters that are very often harmful to our soul.

“Some time ago I never—or rarely—went to see the Papal Nuncio, who was residing in the house of a Religious Order, that I didn’t see the religious in the cloister or in the garden, busy chatting with one another, laughing, looking about, or strolling around. What did that come from? From the failure to observe silence; for, if those persons really loved holy silence, they’d never be seen behaving like that.

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Conference 190. - Repetitions of Prayer, MS, f° 80.

<sup>1</sup>A hymn to you, O God on Zion, is proper. Cf. Ps 65:2. (NAB)

<sup>2</sup>The translation of Saint Jerome (c.340-420), popularly known as the Vulgate.

<sup>3</sup>Silence is praise to you, O God on Zion.

“What happened a short time ago in the house of a religious Order in this city?<sup>4</sup> Shall I tell you, brothers? Alas! It’s a strange thing and only too public. Two monks were killed. And why did that happen? For want of keeping silence and by getting involved in matters that were none of their business. The Parlement,<sup>5</sup> which had learned that there was a certain disorder among them and some division, tried to remedy it, and some of the Councillors were even deputed to go into the house. At first the monks tried to resist. They shut themselves up and tried to defend themselves with arms. Yes, indeed! As soon as the Parlement saw that, they sent an armed band to the house a second time, and, as I just told you, some of the monks were wounded and then died. So those, brothers, are the evils that follow from not keeping silence, or from discussing the news, etc. And the evil was so great that the official reporter told me that some of them deserved nothing less than the galleys. Just think, brothers, just think about that.<sup>6</sup>

“But, on the other hand, shall I tell you what occurred here at Saint-Lazare—yes, at Saint-Lazare? Something almost similar happened, but it didn’t reach that point or become known to outsiders, thank God. Oh no! So far things haven’t reached that stage; but they were well on the way to getting there soon. Yes, God allowed something almost similar to happen a few days ago at Saint-Lazare. It’s strange to see such a thing occurring in the Company, which has only just been born and is still in its cradle. *‘Mais quoi donc! What happened, Monsieur?’* It was as follows.

“What I’m about to tell you took place among our students. The students were going for a walk in our enclosure here. Two of them, who went ahead of the others, found a set of ninepins and began to play. The others came up and said they wanted to join in the game. One of them knocked down the ninepins; one of the two who had

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<sup>4</sup>The house of the Canons Regular of Saint Augustine.

<sup>5</sup>Parlement refers to the French judicial system (cf. XI, 5, n. 1).

<sup>6</sup>*La Gazette de France*, 1658, p. 265, gives an account somewhat different from the incident that put the Augustinians (*les Grands Augustins*) in opposition to the Parlement on August 23, 1658. Two monks were killed and two wounded. For the sake of opposition to the Parlement, Mazarin set free and escorted in triumph the monks who had been arrested.

begun to play set them up again; the other knocked them down again. And then they began to get angry. On seeing this, one of those who had begun the game grabbed one of the ninepins and gave the boy who had knocked them down a punch in the stomach. Not satisfied with that, he did it again and then gave him another blow on his shoulder, but he hit him so hard that he still feels the pain of it even now. Please consider a little to what an excess of rage that student let himself go. Just consider if that's not a very sensitive source of distress for the Company. Alas! If such a thing occurs in the Company at its beginning, what will it be in several years, when perhaps it has begun to slacken from its first fervor and exactness to the Rules! Well, we've had that student confined to his room.<sup>7</sup>

“Another motive is that, according to a maxim of the saints, everything goes well in the house or Community in which silence is well observed; whereas, on the contrary, in a Community that doesn't observe silence, it can be said that everything goes badly.

“Now, for the second point, which is to see in what places stricter silence should be more especially observed, these are: (1) the church; (2) the refectory; (3) the dormitory; (4) the cloister. No one should be conversing in twos at that time in the rooms, and whoever does so should know that he's doing something that may give scandal and will be the cause of others committing the same fault, of which he'll, consequently, be the most guilty.

“As for time, silence should be observed from one recreation to another. The Sisters of Sainte-Marie<sup>8</sup> have two sorts of silence among them: one, which they call the grand silence, and the other, the little silence. During the grand silence, that is, from after night prayers until after morning prayers the next day, one Sister isn't free to talk to another, and that, mark you, is exactly and faithfully

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<sup>7</sup>*In the margin:* Note: He was confined to a room for eight days, during which he lived on bread and water. To substantiate this, I must ask Bro. Pascal if it is true that he subsisted only on bread and water.

The Brother here is probably Jean-Pascal Goret, born in Angers in 1613, and entered the Congregation of the Mission as a coadjutor Brother on November 21, 1641. Saint Vincent sent him to Picardy for the relief of the poor, as he had sent Bro. Mathieu Régnard to Lorraine.

<sup>8</sup>Visitation Nuns.

observed. The other, which they call the little silence, to distinguish it from the one I just mentioned, is the one they observe from morning prayer until the end of evening recreation, during which they may speak to one another, but in a very low tone and for necessary matters. I except the two times of recreation after dinner and after supper. But, apart from that, they speak only on necessary matters, and do so in a very low tone of voice. What is remarkable with them, however, is that no Sister speaks to another in her room without the permission of the Superioress. And that, brothers, is how silence is observed among them.

“I’m well aware that the Officers need certain times to discuss and get advice concerning the affairs of the house. We take the time immediately after the general examination of conscience as the most suitable and least inconvenient for being able to talk over such matters more easily and without interruptions. I asked other Communities what they do, and was told that this can’t be avoided; it’s a necessity. We’ll have to see if we can’t find some other moment during the day; nevertheless, I can see that it’s hard to find another time that’s so easy and suitable for this purpose.

“A good means to adopt so that each one may observe silence well is for each individual to make a firm resolution to adopt the practice of this virtue and to begin it tomorrow; mark you, from tomorrow, and let each of us give ourselves earnestly to God for that purpose.

“Another means I think we’ll have to adopt is that, just as someone has been appointed to go from room to room every morning to see that each individual has arisen and not exempted himself from the four-thirty meditation, some member of the Company will likewise have to go through the house, acting as monitor for the entire Community to observe all that’s going on, and to tell the Superior what he noticed. The Jesuits have one of their priests who goes about everywhere; and, if he finds that something isn’t right, he informs the Superior, who imposes a penance. This penance, written on a piece of paper, is handed to the reader; when the community has entered the refectory for dinner or supper, he reads it aloud.

“It should be up to the sub-Assistant to do that. I ask you, M. Alméras, to consult your sub-Assistant and to see to it that someone is appointed for that purpose. For, you see, what occurred with the students is a warning given us by God; and, if the Mission fails to maintain the virtue of silence, it will fall into the same unfortunate situation as the monks I just mentioned; have no doubt about it.

“A few days ago I was in our room with the Pastor of Saint-Nicolas,<sup>9</sup> and I heard the noise that was being made with the ordinands here in this hall. People were talking so loudly that, I assure you, I had a hard time hearing. In the old days, when we first began our direction of the ordinands at the Bons-Enfants, you could have heard a pin drop. Why isn't it like that any more at present? It's because we've failed to maintain the virtue of silence. O my God! O my Savior! Restore this holy virtue to the Little Company of the Mission, Lord. Let's ask for it, Brothers, let's earnestly ask His Divine Majesty for it!”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Hippolyte Féret, born in Pontoise (Val-d' Oise), was a Doctor of Theology and later became Pastor of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet, Vicar-General of Alet, and then of Paris. Saint Vincent thought so highly of Féret that he proposed him as Coadjutor Bishop of Babylon.

<sup>10</sup>*In the margin:* He gave yet another means, which has slipped my mind; I hope someone else in the Company recorded it.

191. - ADVICE TO SOME YOUNG PHILOSOPHY STUDENTS

October 23, 1658

When the students were ready to begin their philosophy course, they, led by their professor, M. Guillot,<sup>1</sup> priest of the Company, went first to see M. Vincent. Kneeling down, they asked for his blessing, which he gave them, going on his knees also, in his usual manner. He recommended strongly that they study hard in the spirit Our Lord desires in order to serve God better and to be of greater assistance to their neighbor. He told them to be very careful that pride didn't take hold of their heart by the desire to show off, to be esteemed, or to be highly successful. He said that many young men who leave the novitiate and seminary are often ruined by that and lose the spirit of their seminary. "Now, to avoid this misfortune happening to you, brothers, don't desire to be a great success, to walk off with the prize, or to make a show either by supporting by argument, or by defending, or by maintaining, but rather wish, desire, and ask Our Lord to give you the grace to love and practice humility in everything and everywhere, to love your own abjection, and to seek and desire nothing but that; and, above all, to consider that if there's anything in you that makes you ever so little commendable, you get it from God, and it's God who has given it to you. Live in that spirit, brothers; strive to preserve it, if you already have it, brothers; and, if you don't, ask Our Lord earnestly for it. May the philosophy you're going to learn teach you to love and serve God better, to raise you up to Him by love, and, at the same

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**Conference 191.** - MS. Repetitions of Prayer, f° 82.

<sup>1</sup>Nicolas Guillot, born in Auxerre (Yonne) on January 6, 1627, entered the Congregation of the Mission on June 12, 1648, took his vows on June 11, 1651, and was ordained a priest on December 24, 1651. While still a subdeacon, he was sent with the first group of Missioners to Poland. There he devoted himself to the ministries of his vocation, but, after the death of Lambert aux Couteaux (January 31, 1653), he became discouraged and returned to France in May 1654. Saint Vincent gently reproved him for his fault, inspired him with regret, and persuaded him to go back in July. It was not for long, however: the misfortunes of Poland, which was invaded by the Swedes, obliged four of the seven Missioners, including Guillot, to leave the country in November 1655. The saint named him Superior of the Montmirail house, then in 1658 recalled him to Saint-Lazare to occupy the chair of philosophy. René Alméras later appointed him Superior in Amiens (1662-67); he filled the same duty in Le Mans (1667-70).



time you're studying the science and philosophy of Aristotle and learning all its divisions, that you may learn the philosophy of Our Lord and His maxims and put them into practice, in such a way that what you'll learn won't make your heart swell, but rather help you to serve God and His Church better. Philosophy is of great service to a man when he makes use of it as he should and in the spirit Our Lord desires; when people act otherwise, philosophy serves only to destroy them and to make their heart swell.

*"Benedictio Domini Nostri. . ."*

#### 192. - REPETITION OF PRAYER<sup>1</sup>

November 1658

At Repetition of Prayer, M. Vincent reproved a cleric who, during his Repetition of Prayer, had used the phrase *the holy Company* in speaking of the Company. He told him he should say plainly and simply *the Company* or *this Company*.

"We'll have to see," he added, "if the Assistant or the Sub-Assistant shouldn't read the points of the meditation, for it seems to me that we're not going about making mental prayer the right way. We don't enter deeply enough into the subject proposed for each day's meditation. Perhaps, this comes from the fact that we don't understand well enough the points of the topic on which we're meditating. Now, they could do something like this and say, 'Brothers, the meditation is aimed at such and such. We'll meditate on this in the first point; in the second, we'll meditate on this, and in the third, on this.' That's so by this means, my dear confreres, you may have an easier introduction into the topic of the meditation that's to be made.

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Conference 192. - MS. Repetitions of Prayer, f<sup>o</sup> 83.

<sup>1</sup>*Subheading*: Reproof of a cleric who had called the Company *the holy Company*; how meditation should be made; the sad state of religion in certain countries; the Company must ask God for the gift of tongues; how to learn languages.

“Today, for example, we had the choice Our Lord made of His Apostles. *Eh bien!* On this topic there were many, many beautiful things on which to meditate! Twelve poor workingmen, poor fishermen, whom He chooses in order to convert and change the whole world radically and to destroy all idolatry, etc. He chose only twelve, no more. In this meditation we could consider the Church’s great need of good priests, good workers. True, there are plenty of them; but many among them aren’t as good as they should be in order to work usefully in Our Lord’s vineyard; many of them are given over to vice. Therefore, let’s ask God, my dear confreres, to be pleased to send good workers, good priests to His Church, and good Missioners to the Company; but let them be good and well chosen. That’s what we should have done in this meditation, which lent itself very well to that.

“M. Jolly<sup>2</sup> sends me word from Rome that he’s given a retreat to thirty students maintained by the Propagation of the Faith in a college in Rome, where it’s having them study; one of them is from Moldavia, a neighboring province of Hungary. This young man told M. Jolly that in his whole province, which is very large, there are only seven or eight priests all told. What has caused that? Heresy. Shouldn’t this encourage us, brothers, to give ourselves wholeheartedly to God to become as useful as we can, serving Him in our vocation in order to be able to help those poor people, if God in His Providence calls us there?

“When the Bishop of La Rochelle<sup>3</sup> was still Bishop of Saintes, he told me one day that he found very few persons in that diocese who wanted to serve the Church and become priests, and that this was due to heresy, with which that diocese is strongly tainted in many places. Heretics, he said, have made the priesthood so dishonorable that it would be hard to find a single young man in his whole diocese who’d like to be a priest, and, even if the young person were

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<sup>2</sup>Edme Jolly (cf. XI, 329, n. 9).

<sup>3</sup>Jacques-Raoul de la Guibourgère, born in 1589, was the widower of Yvonne de Charette and father of several children when he was ordained. In 1631 he succeeded his uncle as Bishop of Saintes, then went on to Maillezais, and finally to La Rochelle when the Episcopal See was transferred there. Very few other Bishops were so closely associated with Saint Vincent. He died in 1661.

willing, the father and mother would prevent him from doing so. As a matter of fact, even today there are only four or five seminarians in the Saintes Seminary.

“The Company has to take pains to ask God to give it the gift of tongues; He gave it to the Apostles, after choosing them to be His Apostles, with the result that they understood all who spoke to them, even though they were from different regions and nations; and the Apostles likewise made themselves understood by speaking and replying to them in their own language. Let’s ask God, my dear confreres, to give us at least the desire to learn languages; each individual should have some skill in that and should ask God for it. That great, holy Company of the Jesuit Fathers devotes itself assiduously to this, and one of the first things done by those sent to a country where they don’t know the language is to apply themselves to learning it; they make it their chief study; they get someone from the area, or someone who understands the language, to help them. And that’s what members of the Company who’ll be destined for foreign lands should do, when God calls them there.

“That’s what our poor but blessed M. Nacquart<sup>4</sup> did; for, as soon as he arrived in Madagascar, he found a Frenchman who understood the language of that island, and began to study it, learning the nouns, then the pronouns, the verbs, how to conjugate them, and so on. Consequently, by the end of four months, he understood it and was able to begin to teach the catechism.

“So then, I’d like the Company to be devoted to acting in this way when the occasion arises, and when members are sent to a place where they don’t understand the language. Let’s ask God to give us this facility in learning languages, since He’s been pleased to call us to the same ministries as His Apostles.”

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<sup>4</sup>Charles Nacquart.(cf. XI. 263, n. 7).

193. - REPETITION OF PRAYER<sup>1</sup>

November 11, 1658

“I recommend to the prayers of the Company our men who are sick; I also recommend to you those confreres<sup>2</sup> who traveled by sea, not without danger. Some of them went on a large, well-built ship, and they were safer; the others were on another, smaller vessel and were in great danger because of the raids of the Turks who are on the waters from Marseilles to Genoa and Rome.

“I also recommend our dear Messrs. Desdames and Duperroy, from whom I received letters yesterday or the day before. They tell me that there’s still plague in Warsaw, and that about twenty persons in their Holy Cross Parish die of it every week. They write in such a way that you’d say they were above those dangers and, as far as I can see from their letters, they’re not the least bit afraid.

“I likewise recommend to your prayers one of our Brothers because of the great danger he’s in, the result of an incident that just occurred; I’m referring to our dear Bro. Barreau<sup>3</sup> in Algiers. This is what happened:

“About fifty leagues from Algiers, between Algiers and Tunis, that is, about halfway between those two cities, there’s a fort<sup>4</sup> held by the French, in which there was a Governor, and it even had a garrison. This was granted to the King of France by the Grand Turk in a treaty they made, with the proviso, however, that a certain sum of money be paid annually to the city of Algiers. This fort had been secured by the King of France to promote commerce by the Christians with the Arabs and the people of those countries. For a few years

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Conference 193. - MS, Repetitions of Prayer, f° 84.

<sup>1</sup>*Subheading*: News of Missioners in Poland; dangers encountered by Bro. Barreau in Algiers; need to pray for Toussaint Bourdaise; Saint Martin’s great act of charity.

<sup>2</sup>In the margin: *Note*: The men of whom he is speaking here are M. Berthe [cf. XI, 165, n. 2] and the members of the Company whom Berthe had taken with him to Genoa and Rome.

<sup>3</sup>Jean Barreau (cf. XI, 192, n. 5).

<sup>4</sup>To protect their coral fishing grounds, merchants from Marseilles established around 1650 a fort on the North African coast, near El Kalá. This fort, known as the Bastion de France, became an important commercial center but during the seventeenth century it was sacked repeatedly by the Turks. Abandoned in 1827, its ruins can be seen at Mers-el-Kerraz.

now, that tribute hasn't been paid. Seeing this, the people of Algiers sent four Sheikhs and about fifty Moors there. When the Governor saw those people coming to ask him for the money, he wasn't at all disturbed. Those Sheikhs threatened him and said that, if he didn't pay up, an army would be coming; it wasn't very far away and would certainly force him to pay. When the Governor heard this, he put his garrison under arms, seized the Sheikhs, those forty or fifty Moors, and the other men they had with them. He bound them, boarded them on a ship, and loaded it with all the furniture he could that was in the bastion. He had them all loaded, I repeat, on a ship. This done, he left the bastion with all his men, set fire to it inside, and sailed straight to Italy.

"Now, brothers, I ask you to imagine the present danger of our poor Brother, the Consul of Algiers, along with so many poor French Christian slaves, of whom there are nearly 10,000 in that city of Algiers and the environs. *O Sauveur! O mon Sauveur!* What will become of those poor people? What will they do? But what will our poor Brother do, this man who left his home, his country, his parents, and his birthplace, where he could have lived peacefully? And yet he left all that for God, to serve God and to help his neighbor, that is, those poor slaves.

"M. Bourdaise,<sup>5</sup> brothers, M. Bourdaise, who is so far away and all alone, and who, as you've heard, has begotten in Jesus Christ, with so much pain and care, a large number of those poor people of the country where he now is, let's pray for him, too. M. Bourdaise, are you still alive or not? If you are, may God be pleased to preserve your life! If you're in heaven, pray for us!

"O brothers, what happiness for the Company to have such fine members such as all those good servants of His I just mentioned! As far as possible, brothers, we should all be in this state, that is, ready and willing to leave everything to serve God and our neighbor—and our neighbor, you see, and our neighbor—for the love of God.

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<sup>5</sup>Toussaint Bourdaise (cf. XI, xvi, n. 7). He died in Madagascar on June 25, 1657.

“Look at Saint Martin;<sup>6</sup> we’ve just been told what he did. This great saint, even though he was a catechumen, seeing a poor man asking him for alms, took his sword and cut his cloak in two in order to give him half of it. It was an act of charity that pleased Our Lord so much that He himself appeared to him the following night, wearing that same half of the cloak. And the Church had such esteem and veneration for this act of charity on the part of Saint Martin that it represents him to us, not as a Bishop or an Archbishop—even though those are lofty titles—but shows him to us on horseback, dressed as a soldier, cutting his cloak in half.”

With that, M. Vincent stood up, ending this little talk.

#### 194. - REPETITION OF PRAYER<sup>1</sup>

November 17, 1658

M. Vincent had called on one of the priests, who had already been a long time in the Company, that is, twelve or thirteen years, to make Repetition of Prayer. When this priest excused himself from doing so, M. Vincent said he was admonishing him because this wasn't the first time he had excused himself and refused to make Repetition of Prayer. He added that this was what he usually did, and that it was really very strange to want to be exempt and to excuse oneself from doing something like Repetition of Prayer, which gave so much edification and from which everyone gathered so much fruit for virtue; he also stated that others do it well. “You see,” he said, “that all our poor coadjutor Brothers also make it, with few exceptions, telling quite simply what God gave them, some more, some less, according to the lights His Divine Majesty shared with them. The students do it and so do the novices. If a man sometimes excuses himself for having done nothing at meditation, *eh bien*,

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<sup>6</sup>Saint Martin of Tours (316-97). This conference was given on November 11, his feast day.

Conference 194. - MS, Repetitions of Prayer, f<sup>o</sup> 85.

<sup>1</sup>*Subheading*: Reproof given to a priest who had refused to make Repetition of Prayer; other reproaches; a strict penance.

God will give him something to say on another occasion when he's asked to make it. But you, Monsieur, you excuse yourself every time you're asked." And because the priest remained standing and didn't kneel down, he said to him, "Monsieur, are you ready to accept the admonition that's about to be given you?" At that, the priest knelt down.

M. Vincent also admonished this priest because, on the preceding Friday evening, he had absented himself from the conference, despite the fact that he had been told to go. M. Vincent called this formal disobedience. And because, when this priest saw himself publicly admonished in this way, he tried to point out that he had understood he had been dispensed from being there that evening, M. Vincent stated that this wasn't true, but, on the contrary, he had said to him, "Come on, Monsieur, come on!" and that he was greatly surprised when the Brother who checks the rooms during the conference told him he was in his room instead of being at the conference. He also said to this priest, who was trying to excuse himself in that way, "We shouldn't speak or make excuses when we're being admonished for something, Monsieur; we shouldn't say a word, but should humble ourselves, accept the penance that's given, and carry it out."

Another thing for which he admonished him was that he often slept late, on the pretext of not feeling well, and was frequently absent from meditation.

He said furthermore that, in the third place, when he was in the yard with two others from this house, he had behaved very impolitely for a priest, and that, if any outsiders had witnessed that, they'd have had good reason to be very disedified. He wouldn't mention the names of the two others who were with him.

He told him, moreover, that, since he was already a fairly senior member of the house, he should be giving good example, that he had formerly seen him so devout—even when he was a young boy—that he had done very well in Le Mans, where he had been sent, and here as well. Yet, for about two years now people were remarking that he had grown lax and had gone so far as to allow laziness to get the better of him.

“Perhaps it’s painful,” said M. Vincent, “to see that you, as a priest, have to be reproved for such faults in this way. *Mais quoi!* People have to be reminded of their faults. When Our Lord admonished the Apostles—even though they were Apostles—how did He do it? What words did He use? ‘Depart, Satan, get behind me.’<sup>2</sup> That’s how Our Lord gave an admonition. Those are the words He used for that purpose. And He reproves him for something that didn’t seem to be very serious. When Our Lord was speaking of His Passion and of all that He’d have to endure, Saint Peter thought he was acting rightly by trying to divert Our Lord from speaking of such things to them. Yet, when Our Lord wanted to correct him for this, He used the word *Satan*; that’s how He addressed him.

“The admonitions set down in Civil and Canon Law are made and established only for the edification of Christians, and so that individuals will not fall so easily into faults; or, if they do, that they correct themselves, and others who hear these admonitions given will take care not to fall into such faults or, if they have, to make amends and ask God’s pardon.

“And so that each member of the Company may know that he must be ready to give an account of his meditation when asked to do so, without making any excuses, you, Monsieur, because you’ve fallen into this fault many times, and so that you’ll remember not to fall into it again in the future, and the same for the other faults of which you’ve been admonished, shall refrain from saying Mass today and tomorrow. That’s the penance I’m giving you.”

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<sup>2</sup>Cf. Mk 8:33. (NAB)



195. - PURPOSE OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION  
(Common Rules, Chap. I, Art. 1)

December 6, 1658

“My dear confreres, this evening we’re not going to proceed in the usual manner, which is by way of a conference, where each individual shares his thoughts on the topic proposed. We thought it appropriate to explain the Rules of the Company; and because I, wretched man that I am, don’t keep them myself, I’m really afraid I don’t understand as I should the importance of keeping them and, consequently, am incapable of saying anything that may give glory to God and can explain the spirit of the Rule so as to make it understood. Nevertheless, we’ll make an attempt at it, and see if we—myself or some others—should go on, and if we should continue in the way we’re now beginning.

“If we’re going to discuss the Rules, we have to read them,” he stated, and, when he had the lamp brought closer to him and opened the book, he said, “Here’s the first Rule, which is the logical place for us to start. I’ll read it in French for the sake of our Brothers who don’t understand Latin.

*We read in Sacred Scripture that Our Lord Jesus Christ, sent on earth for the salvation of the human race, began first by doing, and then by teaching. He carried out the former by practicing perfectly every type of virtue, and the latter by preaching the Good News of the Gospel to poor persons, and giving His Apostles and disciples the knowledge needed to guide the people. And since the little Congregation of the Mission desires, with God’s grace, to imitate Jesus Christ Our Lord, as far as this is possible in view of its limitations, both with regard to His virtues as well as in the works He did for the salvation of the neighbor, it is only right that it should use similar*

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**Conference 195.** - Manuscript of Conferences. With some notable variants, Abelly reprinted a part of this conference (*op. cit.*, bk. II, chap. V, pp. 295ff.).

In the present volume, the editors have made use of the translation of the *Common Rules or Constitutions* in *Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation of the Mission*, published in 1989 and reprinted in vol. XIIIa, *Documents* (Cf. XIIIa, 431-71.). A few minor changes in translation and style have been made.

*means to carry out this devout plan in a worthy manner. That is why its purpose is: (1) to strive to grow in holiness, by doing its utmost to practice the virtues this Sovereign Master was pleased to teach us by word and example; (2) to preach the Good News to persons who are poor, especially to those in rural areas; (3) to help those in the priestly state to acquire the knowledge and virtue necessary for their state.*

“Those, my dear confreres, are the first words of our Rules, showing us God’s plan for the Company and how from all eternity He had the spirit and the services of this Company in mind. Now, the Rule contained in the words we just heard—if it can be called a Rule—states, at the end of the article, that the Little Congregation should use the same means Our Lord used to correspond with His vocation, namely, (1) to strive to grow in holiness; (2) to preach the Good News of the Gospel to poor persons, especially those in the rural areas; and (3) to be of service to the clergy. That’s the Rule; and in that we’ve done as has been done at the Councils, where, before formulating the Canon, the Cardinals and Prelates state the doctrine and put forward not only the material from which they are to draw up the Canon, but also their reasons for doing so. The preamble to our Rule states that, when Our Lord came on earth to save us, He began to do and then to teach. He did the former by practicing all the virtues. Now, all His actions were so many virtues appropriate to a God who became a man to be the example to other human beings; and He practiced the second by teaching the divine truths to poor persons and giving the Apostles the knowledge necessary for the salvation of the world and the guidance of nations, and to make people truly happy.

“The intention of the Company is to imitate Our Lord to the extent that poor, insignificant persons can do. What does that mean? It means that the Company aspires to take Him as a model in the way He acted, what He did, His ministries, and His aims. How can one person represent another, if he doesn’t have the same characteristics, features, manners, and looks? That can’t be. So, if we’re determined to make ourselves like this divine model, and feel in our hearts this desire and holy affection, it’s necessary, I repeat, it’s necessary to

strive to model our thoughts, works, and intentions on His. He's not only *Deus virtutum*, but He came to practice all the virtues, and since what He did and did not do were so many virtues, we, too, must conform ourselves to them by striving to be men of virtue, not only with regard to the interior, but by acting virtuously exteriorly so that what we do or don't do is based on this principle. That's how the preamble to our Rule should be understood.

"It was appropriate, my dear confreres, to begin these Rules by stating the purpose of the Company, and in what and how it will render service to God; that's what Saint Augustine, Saint Benedict, and all those who have founded Companies did. They first stated what they had to do and began by defining their Institute. Thus, it was appropriate for us to put at the very beginning of our Rules the goal or target at which we're aiming. If someone were to ask us, 'Why are you in the Mission?' we should acknowledge that God established it so that we can work: (1) at our own growth in holiness; (2) for the salvation of the poor; and (3) to be of service to the clergy, and say, 'That's why I'm in it.' O my dear confreres, what do you think of this goal? Could Our Lord give us a more holy and more sanctifying one, or one more in conformity with His Infinite Goodness and more in line with Providence in the care it takes to guide people to their salvation? Our purpose, therefore, is to strive for our own holiness, to preach the Good News of the Gospel to those who are poor, and to instruct the clergy in the knowledge and virtues proper to their state.

"As for the first, we're invited to it by the Gospel, in which priests and all Christians have a rule of holiness—not just any sort of holiness but one like that of the Eternal Father. O wonderful decree of the Son of God! 'Be perfect,' He says, 'as your Heavenly Father is perfect.'<sup>1</sup> That's aiming high; who can reach it? To be perfect as the Eternal Father is perfect! Yet, that's the standard. But, because all Christians don't work at it, God, by certain ways we have to admire, seeing that most people neglect to do this, raises up some who offer themselves to His Divine Majesty to undertake, with His

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Mt 5:48. (NAB)

grace, to become holy themselves and to guide others to holiness. To what does this holiness lead? To make us pleasing in God's eyes, to obtain sanctifying grace, and to have it constantly. That's what makes all our thoughts, words, and actions pleasing to God—even what we leave undone—it's all pleasing to Him. Oh, what happiness! Oh, what happiness for a Missioner whose principal concern is to make himself pleasing to God, who works to rid himself of all deterrents to this and to acquire what he lacks! Working like that makes us pleasing to God. *Or sus*, Messieurs, this presupposes that working to acquire virtue is working to make ourselves pleasing to God. So then, we have to work constantly at it and to obtain the grace for it; always moving forward—*plus ultra*. If, in the morning, we're at six degrees, let's be at seven by afternoon, by doing all our actions as perfectly as possible. What does a priest or Brother do who raises his heart to God in the morning to offer Him all his actions of the day, in union with the actions and intentions of Our Lord, renouncing vanity, self-complacency, and all self-interest? He performs an act of holiness, making him more pleasing to God than he was the preceding evening. What does he do who considers at meditation his evil inclinations and takes means to overcome them, exciting himself to sorrow for his sins and to a love of humiliation, suffering, and zeal? He performs an act of holiness, making him more pleasing to God today than he was yesterday. That being the case, Messieurs, the more perfectly we practice virtue, the more pleasing we are to God. That's what our Rule prompts us to do. Let's thank God for this happy circumstance. *O Sauveur!* O my brothers! How fortunate we are to be on the path to holiness! O Savior, grant us the grace to walk straight on it without growing lax.

“In a word, then, in what does our holiness consist? In doing all our actions well (1) as rational men, getting along well with our neighbor and respecting his rights; (2) as Christians, practicing the virtues of which Our Lord has given us the example; and finally, (3) as Missioners, doing well the works He did, and in the same spirit—as far as our human weakness, of which God is well aware, allows; that must be our aim. In line with that, my dear confreres, a

Missioner who would think only of learning, of preaching well, of saying marvelous things in a province, of moving the entire population to compunction, and of all the other good accomplished by missions—or, to speak more correctly, by the grace of God—is such a man who neglects his meditation and the other exercises of his Rule a Missioner? No, he's not; he lacks the main ingredient—his own growth in holiness. It's only right that persons called to a state as important as that of serving God in the way we do, and who have received from His Goodness the grace of having responded to that call, should make themselves acceptable in His sight and devote themselves in a special way to pleasing Him. Shouldn't a wife please her husband in such a way that there's nothing displeasing in her?

“Moreover, we're the mediators who are to reconcile people with God. Now, to succeed in this, the first thing we have to do is to strive to please God, just as, when someone wants to negotiate with a nobleman, a Prince, or a King, he chooses a person who's pleasing to him, who'll be listened to, with nothing about him that could be a hindrance to the favor desired.

“So then, Messieurs, it's important for us to work constantly at our growth in holiness and to do our actions well so that they'll be done according to the good pleasure of God and so that, by this means, we may become worthy of helping others. In line with that, a Superior who would neglect the spiritual exercises and good order during a mission, who would allow each individual to do things his own way, and who wouldn't make his own spiritual growth his main concern, would be failing in the first point of his Rule, which states that he should work at his own holiness. So, one of the resolutions we should take is to give ourselves to God, making it a priority to do our ordinary actions well in circumstances that will make them pleasing to God; our holiness consists in that; otherwise, *quid prodest homini si mundum universum lucretur, animae vero suae detrimentum patiatur?*<sup>2</sup> What good will it be to us to have done wonders for others and to have neglected our own souls? Our Lord

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<sup>2</sup>What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his own soul? Cf. Mt 16:26. (NAB)

went off to pray, after withdrawing from the people, and He wanted His Apostles, after having taken care of external affairs, to go apart like Him so as not to omit their spiritual exercises; their holiness consisted in doing both these duties well.

“The second thing the Rule sets down for us to do is to instruct people in the rural areas; that’s where we’re called. Yes, Our Lord asks us to evangelize the poor; that’s what He did, and what He wants to continue to do through us. We have great reason to humble ourselves here, seeing that the Eternal Father is using us for the plans of His Son, who came to preach the Gospel to poor persons, giving this as a sign that He was the Son of God and that the long-awaited Messiah had come. So then, what a great obligation we have to His Infinite Goodness for having associated us with Him in this divine ministry, chosen by God from so many, many others, more worthy of this honor and more capable of succeeding in it than we are.

“‘But, Monsieur, we aren’t the only ones who instruct poor people; do Pastors do anything else? What about preachers in towns and villages? What do they do in Advent and Lent? They preach to the poor, and they do it better than we do.’ True, but there isn’t a single Company in the Church of God that has for its portion persons who are poor, devoting itself totally to the poor and never preaching in large towns. That’s what Missioners profess to do; it’s their special characteristic to be, like Jesus Christ, committed to the poor. So, our vocation is a continuation of His, or, at least, it’s similar to it in its circumstances. Oh, what happiness, brothers, but what an obligation we have to be attached to it.

“One important reason we have for this, then, is the dignity of the matter: to make God known to poor persons; to announce Jesus Christ to them; to tell them that the kingdom of heaven is at hand and that it’s for persons who are poor. Oh, what a great thing that is! But it goes beyond our understanding that we should be called to be associates and sharers in the plans of the Son of God. *Quoi!* to become . . . I wouldn’t dare to say it . . . Be that as it may, it’s such a lofty ministry to evangelize poor persons, which is, par excellence, the work of the Son of God, and we’ve been included in it as instru-

ments by which the Son of God continues to do from heaven what He did on earth. What great reason we have to praise God, my dear confreres, and to thank Him continually for this grace!

“Another reason we have to be totally committed to it is its necessity. You know, Messieurs, how great it is, you’re aware of the ignorance of the poor people, which is almost unbelievable, and you know also that there’s no salvation for persons who are ignorant of the necessary Christian truths, according to the opinion of Saint Augustine, Saint Thomas, and others, who hold that anyone who doesn’t know about the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Incarnation, and the other Mysteries, can’t be saved. And how, indeed, can a soul who doesn’t know God or what God has done for love of it, believe, hope, and love? And how will it be saved without faith, hope, and love? Now, when God saw this need and the disasters that have occurred with the passage of time through the negligence of Pastors and the rise of heresies, causing such great losses to the Church, He willed, in His great mercy, to remedy this through missionaries, sending them to put those poor people in a fit state to save themselves.

“There are other theologians who find this opinion too strict, even though it’s based on these words of Our Lord, *Haec est vita aeterna ut cognoscant te solum Deum verum et quem misisti Jesum Christum*;<sup>3</sup> ‘This is eternal life that they may know You the one true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent.’ From this we can infer that those who don’t know the unity of God, or the Trinity, or Jesus Christ, will not have eternal life.

“So then, we have some who say that people can’t be saved without this knowledge, and others who hold the contrary. Given this doubt, isn’t it better to follow the safer opinion? *In dubiis tutior pars est tenenda*.<sup>4</sup> Then, too, is there anything in the world more worthwhile than to teach these truths to those who are ignorant of them, since they’re truths necessary for salvation? Doesn’t it seem to have come from God’s goodness to remedy this need? O Savior!

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<sup>3</sup>Cf. Jn 17:3. (NAB)

<sup>4</sup>*In doubtful matters, the safer position is preferable.*

O my Lord and my God! You've raised up a Company for this purpose; You've sent it to persons who are poor, and You will that it should make You known to them as the one, true God, and Jesus Christ whom You sent into the world, so that, by this means, they may have eternal life. This is what should cause us to prefer this to all other states and works on earth and to consider ourselves happier for it. *O Dieu!* Who could understand this?

"There's another necessary reason why we should help the people; it's concerned with those who don't make good confessions and who knowingly keep back mortal sins; for those persons don't receive absolution from them and, dying in this state, are damned forever. Nevertheless, how many do we find who conceal them through shame! They still go to confession and Communion, but they turn all those good actions into so many sacrileges.

"I once met a man like that who was guilty of a horrible sin, of which he never had the courage to accuse himself. It so happened that, during an illness in which he was in danger of death, he made his confession to his Pastor but didn't tell this serious sin, knowing quite well that, by not mentioning it, he was committing a sacrilege and would be damned if he died in that state; nevertheless, he was never willing to tell it. When he recovered, and a mission was being given near the place where he lived, he came to it, made his confession, and admitted to us everything I just told you.

"Now, assuming that to be true, please see what cause we have to praise God for having sent us as a remedy for this evil, and how much our hearts should be on fire with love for this ministry of assisting poor people and for devoting ourselves earnestly to it because the need is so great and God expects this of us.

"Since this is so, those who are unwilling to go on missions are acting contrary to the Rule, or who, having gone on them and encountered some difficulty, don't want to go back, or who, having a taste for seminary work, refuse to give it up, or prefer some other ministry and are reluctant to leave it for the work of missions, which is so necessary. Surely it's worthy of a Missioner to have and to preserve this desire to go on missions, to press on in assisting poor people in the way Our Lord himself would assist them, if He were still



on earth, and, lastly, to direct his intention to live and die in this holy ministry. That's what we have to do; difficulties shouldn't daunt us; this is God's work, and it merits our overcoming repugnance and resisting temptation. These things happen to everyone who wants to follow Our Lord. *Mais quoi?* Wasn't the Son of God subject to them? He rose above them, and He'll undoubtedly give us the same grace if we're willing to fight as He did. Something that will be a great help to us in this is our detachment with regard to ministries.

“The third aim of our little Institute is to instruct the clergy, not only in knowledge for the sake of knowing, but also in the virtues they should practice. What good do you do by teaching them one without the other? None—or almost none. They need both competency and a good life; without the latter, the other is useless and dangerous. We have to spur them on equally to both, and this is what God asks of us. In the beginning, nothing was further from our mind than to be at the service of the clergy; we were thinking only of ourselves and of the poor. How did the Son of God begin? He hid himself, and He seemed to be thinking only of himself; He prayed and acted only as a private individual; that's all that was apparent, and then He began to announce the Good News to the poor. But, in the course of time, He chose Apostles, took the trouble to instruct, warn, and form them and, finally, animated them with His Spirit, not for themselves alone but for all the peoples of the earth. In addition, He taught them all the maxims for forming priests, for administering the Sacraments, and for carrying out their ministry. It would take me too long to go into detail about all that. So, in the beginning, the Company was concerned only with itself and the poor; at certain times it withdrew in private; at others it went out to teach the country people. God allowed that this was all we seemed to be doing, but, in the fullness of time, He called us to assist in the formation of good priests, in providing good Pastors to parishes and teaching them what they should know and practice. Oh, what a lofty, sublime ministry! Oh, how far above us! Who had ever thought about retreats for ordinands and about seminaries? This undertaking had never entered our minds until God indicated to us that it was His pleasure for us to be engaged in it. So then, He's led the

Company to these ministries without our choosing them, and yet He asks us to commit ourselves to them earnestly, humbly, devoutly, constantly, and in a manner that corresponds with the excellence of the work.

“That, Messieurs, is just about what I had to say to you in explanation of this Rule. Now let’s look at the difficulties that may be found in it. First, the Son of God could have been asked, ‘Why have You come? It’s to evangelize the poor. That’s Your Father’s order; so why do You create priests? Why do You give them power to consecrate, to bind, and to loose, etc.?’ We can say that coming to evangelize the poor doesn’t simply mean to teach them the Mysteries necessary for their salvation, but also to do what was foretold and prefigured by the prophets to make the Gospel effective. You know that, in the old days, God rejected the corrupt priests who had profaned holy things; He considered their sacrifices an abomination and said that He’d raise up others who, from East to West, from North to South, would make their voices and words heard: *In omnem terram exivit sonus eorum*.<sup>5</sup> And by whom did He fulfill this promise? By His Son Our Lord, who created priests, taught and trained them, and gave them power to ordain others: *Sicut misit me Pater et ego mitto vos*.<sup>6</sup> And He did so in order that, through them, He might do for all ages what He himself had done during His lifetime, to save all nations by teaching them and administering the Sacraments.

“Someone in the Company may say, ‘Monsieur, I’m in the world to evangelize the poor, and you want me to work in seminaries; I want to do what I came to do, namely, to give missions in the country and not to be confined in a town for the service of the clergy.’ It would be a mistake—a big mistake—for a man to be unwilling to form good priests, especially since there’s nothing greater than a priest, to whom Christ gives all power over His natural and His mystical Body, the power to forgive sins, etc. *O Dieu!*

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<sup>5</sup>*Their sound has gone out through all the earth.* Cf. Ps 19:5. (NAB)

<sup>6</sup>*As the Father has sent me, I also send you.* Cf. Jn 20:21. (NAB)

What power! What dignity! This consideration, therefore, obliges us to be of service in such a holy, lofty state.

“But there’s something else: the Church’s need for good priests to make up for all the ignorance and vice that cover the earth and to rescue the poor Church from that deplorable state, for which good souls should weep tears of blood.

“People wonder whether all the disorders we see in the world should not be imputed to priests. This could scandalize some, but the topic demands that I show, from the extent of the evil, the importance of the remedy. We’ve had several conferences on this question, which we treated in depth, to discover the sources of so many misfortunes; the result, however, was that the Church has no worse enemies than priests. It’s from them that heresies have come; take those two heresiarchs Luther and Calvin, who were priests;<sup>7</sup> and it’s through priests that heretics have prevailed, vice has reigned, and ignorance has set up its throne among the poor people. All that is due to their own dissoluteness and failure to oppose with all their might, in accord with their obligations, those three torrents that have inundated the world.

“What a sacrifice do you not make to God, Messieurs, by working for their reform so they may live in conformity with the eminence and dignity of their state and that, by this means, the Church may recover from its present shame and distress.

“ ‘It’s fine for us to do that, Monsieur, but why should we be serving the Daughters of Charity?’ Didn’t the Son of God come to announce the Good News to the poor and to create priests, etc.? Yes, He did. Didn’t He accept having ladies in His company? Yes, He did. Didn’t He guide them to holiness and to the assistance of the poor? Yes, He did. If, then, Our Lord did that, He who did everything for our instruction, shouldn’t we think it’s right to follow Him? Does taking care of those Sisters who assist the sick poor seem something contrary to His way of acting? Didn’t the Apostles also have women to guide? You’re aware that, from then on,

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<sup>7</sup>John Calvin was not a priest. At one time in his youth, with financial aid from two ecclesiastical benefices, he studied theology; then, at his father’s behest, he studied law. He did not complete either discipline.

Deaconesses were appointed, who did wonders in the Church of God. Their duty was to seat the women at meetings and to teach them the ceremonies, and in this way God was served equally by both sexes; and are we to think it's not fitting for the Congregation of the Mission to see that Our Lord is honored and served by both! Aren't we imitators of that Divine Master who seemed to come into the world only for poor persons and who, nevertheless, guided a group of women? See, my dear confreres, what a blessing from God it is to be in the state in which the Son of the Eternal Father was, and, like Him, to guide women who render service to God and to the people in the best way poor Sisters are capable of doing.

“ ‘But,’ someone will say to me, ‘why burden ourselves with a hospital? Look at the poor people in the Nom-de-Jésus<sup>8</sup> who are diverting us from our ministry; we have to go to say Mass for them, to instruct them, to administer the Sacraments, and to supervise the overall care of their lives. Why go to the border towns to distribute alms, to run the risk of many dangers, and to be diverted from our ministries?’ *Eh, Messieurs!* Can we find fault with these good works without failing in our duty? If priests devote themselves to the care of the poor, wasn't that what Our Lord and many great saints did, and they not only recommended poor persons to others, but they themselves consoled, comforted, and healed them? Aren't those who are poor the afflicted members of Our Lord? Aren't they our brothers and sisters? And if priests abandon them, who do you think is going to help them? So then, if there are any among us who think they're in the Mission to evangelize poor people but not to alleviate their sufferings, to take care of their spiritual needs but not their temporal ones, I reply that we have to help them and have them assisted in every way, by us and by others, if we want to hear those pleasing words of the Sovereign Judge of the living and the dead, ‘Come, beloved of my Father; possess the kingdom that has been prepared for you, because I was hungry and you gave me to eat; I was naked and you clothed me; sick and you assisted me.’<sup>9</sup> To do

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<sup>8</sup>The Nom-de-Jésus [Name of Jesus] hospice (cf. XI, 184, n. 4).

<sup>9</sup>Cf. Mt 25:34-36. (NAB)

that is to preach the Gospel by words and by works, and that's the most perfect way; it's also what Our Lord did, and what those should do who represent Him on earth, officially and by nature, as priests do; and I've heard it said that what helped Bishops to become saints was almsgiving.

“ ‘But Monsieur,’ someone else may say to me, ‘is it our Rule to admit madmen to Saint-Lazare and those troublesome persons who are little devils?’ I'll answer him that Our Lord willed to surround himself with lunatics, demoniacs, madmen, and persons who were tempted and possessed. People brought them to Him from everywhere to set them free and cure them, and He tried to remedy those things. Why find fault with us for that, when we're striving to imitate Our Lord in something He showed to be pleasing to Him? If He welcomed the mentally ill and fanatics, why shouldn't we? We don't go out looking for them, people bring them to us; and how do we know whether His Providence, which ordains things in that way, doesn't want to make use of us to remedy the infirmity of those poor people, an illness He loved so much in them that He seems to have taken it upon himself, having willed to appear in a frenzy, as it were, and out of His mind, to sanctify this condition in His own sacred person: *Et tenuerunt eum, dicentes quoniam in furorem versus est?*<sup>10</sup> O my Savior and my God, grant us the grace to see these things with the same eye as You do!

“ ‘But the Foundlings, why burden ourselves with that? Don't we have enough other things to do?’ Let's remember, brothers, what Our Lord said to His disciples: ‘Let the children come to me,’<sup>11</sup> and be very much on our guard against preventing them from coming to us; otherwise, we'll be opposed to Him. How friendly He was with children, even taking them into His arms and blessing them with His hands! Isn't it on their account that He gave us a rule for our salvation, commanding us to become like them if we want to enter the kingdom of heaven? To take care of children is, in a certain sense, to become a child; and to take care of the

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<sup>10</sup>*And they seized him for they said that he was out of his mind. Cf. Mk 3:21. (NAB)*

<sup>11</sup>*Cf. Mk 10:14. (NAB)*

foundlings is to take the place of their fathers, or, rather, that of God, who has said that, even if a mother should forget her child, He himself wouldn't forget it. If Our Lord were still living among us and saw children abandoned by their fathers and mothers, as these are, do you think, Messieurs, do you think, Brothers, that He'd also be willing to abandon them? It would be an insult to His Infinite Goodness to entertain such a thought, and we'd be unfaithful to His grace, which has chosen us to run this hospital, if we were to refuse to accept the trouble we have with it.<sup>12</sup>

"I'm bringing up these problems, my dear confreres, before they occur because it may happen that they'll arise. I can't go on much longer; I'll be passing on soon; my age, my poor health, and the abominations of my life don't permit that God will let me remain long on earth. So then, it could happen that, after my death, trouble-makers and cowardly men may come along and say, 'Why should we be weighed down with the care of these hospitals? How can we help so many people ruined by wars, and go to see them in their homes? What's the use of taking on so many things and so many poor persons? Why guide these Sisters who nurse the sick, and why waste our time on persons who are mentally ill?' There will be some who oppose those ministries—have no doubt about that—and others will say that it's too much to attempt to send men to distant countries, to the Indies, or to Barbary. But, my God, but, my Lord, didn't You send Saint Thomas to the Indies and the other Apostles throughout the world? Didn't You make them responsible for the care and guidance of all peoples in general and many persons and families in particular? No matter; our vocation is: *Evangelizare pauperibus*.<sup>13</sup>

"'We're willing to give a mission here in this country; there's enough to do here without going any farther; I'm willing to do that, but don't talk to me about the foundlings, the old folks at the Nom-de-Jésus, and those people who are locked up here!' Someday we'll see men like that, so perverse that they'll disparage the

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<sup>12</sup>The passage quoted in Abelly (*op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XI, sect. II, p. 127) seems to be a different rendering of this passage.

<sup>13</sup>To bring the Good News to the poor. Cf. Lk 4:18. (NAB)

good works God has led us to take on and maintain with His blessing; have no doubt about that. I'm warning the Company of this so that it may see things as they are, as works of God, which God has entrusted to us, without our having intruded ourselves into a single one of them, or doing anything whatsoever to have them entrusted to us. They were given to us either by those who have authority to do so, or from sheer necessity; that's how God involved us in these plans. Thus, everyone thinks that this Company is from God because people see that it hastens to the relief of the most pressing and neglected needs.

"Despite all that, however, people will still have something to complain about; I'm warning you of this, my dear confreres, before I leave you, in the spirit in which Moses warned the children of Israel, as is said in Deuteronomy. I am going away; you shall never see me again;<sup>14</sup> I know that several of you will rise up to lead the others astray;<sup>15</sup> they'll do what I forbid you to do and will ignore what I recommend to you on God's behalf. Be very careful not to allow yourselves to be caught off guard because, if you act like them, evils will come upon you that will destroy you; but, on the contrary, if you do the works of the Lord without cutting back anything in them, you'll be blessed with all sorts of blessings. *Post discessionem meam*, said Saint Paul, *venient lupi rapaces*.<sup>16</sup> After I've gone away, ravenous wolves will appear and false brothers will rise up among you, proclaiming perverse things and teaching you the opposite of what I've told you. But don't listen to them; they're false prophets. There will likewise be found, brothers, carcasses of Missioners who will strive to insinuate false maxims in order to undermine these foundations of the Company, if they can; you must resist them.

"I don't know if I'll be going too far by saying what Saint Benedict said before he died. Even then, in the houses he had founded, there were disgruntled religious who were saying, 'Why this and why that?' murmuring against the leadership, and con-

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<sup>14</sup>Cf. Jn 16:16. (NAB)

<sup>15</sup>Cf. Mt 24:11. (NAB)

<sup>16</sup>*After my departure, savage wolves will come.* Cf. Acts 20:29. (NAB)

demning holy practices that had been established. When this came to the knowledge of that holy Abbot, he feared that after him everything would change course. So, what does he do? That's an Order in which there's no Superior General; each house is autonomous; it doesn't receive a visitation or correction from any other; so, he implores the neighboring Bishops who will see any of them in a state of disorder, to come down on it with reprimands and suspensions, to restrain those troublesome, recalcitrant monks, and even to appeal to the nobles in the environs to pursue them and recall them to their duties by force of arms. I really don't want to say all that but only that, if at some future time, some in the Company might suggest doing away with this practice, giving up that hospital, recalling the men ministering in Barbary, remaining here, not going there, giving up this ministry, and not hastening to respond to needs in far-off places, those false confreres should be told fearlessly, 'Messieurs, let us keep the laws of our fathers in our present state; God has put us there and wants us to stay in it.' Stand firm in that.

"'But,' they'll say, 'the Company is bogged down by such or such a ministry.' Ah! If, in its infancy, the Company sustained it and carried all the other burdens, why won't it be able to manage this when it's stronger? Those men have to be told, 'Leave us alone, leave us in the state in which Our Lord was when He was on earth; we're doing what He did; don't hinder us from imitating Him.' Warn them, you see, warn them and don't listen to them.

"But what sort of men will turn us away from those good works already begun? They'll be undisciplined, undisciplined, undisciplined men who seek only to enjoy themselves and, provided they have enough to eat, don't bother about anything else. And who else? They'll be. . . I'd rather not say. They'll be men who coddle themselves (as he said this, he folded his arms, mimicking lazy men), people who have only a narrow outlook, confining their perspective and plans to a certain circumference within which they shut themselves away, so to speak, in one spot; they don't want to leave it, and if they're shown something outside it and go near to have a look, they immediately go back to their center, like snails into their shells."



*Note:* In saying this, he made certain gestures with his hands, moving his head around and speaking in a certain contemptuous tone of voice, which conveyed even better what he was trying to express than what he was actually saying.

Then, recollecting himself, he reflected, “O you wretch! You’re an old man like those people; small things seem big to you, and difficulties frighten you. Yes, Messieurs, just getting up in the morning seems a great affair to me, and the slightest inconveniences appear insurmountable. So then, there’ll be small-minded men, people like myself, who’ll try to cut back the practices and ministries of the Company. Let’s give ourselves to God, Messieurs, so that He’ll grant us the grace to stand fast. Let’s stand fast, Brothers, let’s stand fast, for the love of God; He’ll be faithful to His promises and will never abandon us as long as we’re truly submissive to Him in carrying out His plans. Let’s stay within the bounds of our vocation and strive to become interior men, forming a strong, holy attachment to the service of God; let’s do the good that presents itself, and do it in the ways we’ve mentioned. I’m not saying that we have to go to extremes and undertake everything indiscriminately, but to do the things God shows us that He wants us to do. We belong to Him and not to ourselves; if He increases our work, He’ll also increase our strength. O Savior! What a happiness! O Savior! If there were several paradises, to whom would You give them if not to a Missioner who will persevere respectfully in all the ministries You’ve marked out for him, and who has never failed to carry out any of the duties of his state! That’s what we’re hoping for, brothers, and what we ask of His Divine Majesty. At this time, let’s all thank Him for the infinite grace of having called and chosen us for such holy ministries, sanctified by Our Lord himself who practiced them first. Oh, what graces do we not have reason to hope for if we do them in His Spirit, for the glory of His Father and the salvation of souls! Amen.”

196. - MEMBERS OF THE CONGREGATION AND THEIR MINISTRIES  
(Common Rules, Chap. I, Art. 2 and 3)

December 13, 1658

“My dear confreres, this evening we’re going to continue the conference on our Rules and will finish the first chapter, which contains three articles. We talked about the first one last Friday, and this evening we’ll speak about the second and third. This is what they contain:

*There are both clerical and lay members in the Congregation. The work of the former is to travel around through towns and villages, as Christ himself and His disciples did, breaking the bread of the Divine Word for the neglected by preaching and catechizing. They should also urge people to make general confessions of their entire life and hear these confessions. Their ministry also includes settling quarrels and disputes, establishing the Confraternity of Charity, staffing seminaries which have been set up in our houses for diocesan clergy, giving retreats, and organizing meetings of priests in our houses. Their work also includes any other ministry which is supportive to those mentioned. The lay members help in these ministries like Martha in whatever way the Superior wants them to. This help includes “prayers and tears,” mortification, and good example.*

*If the Congregation, with the help of God’s grace, is to achieve what it sees as its purpose, a genuine effort to put on the spirit of Christ will be needed. How to do this is learned mainly from what is taught in the Gospels: Christ’s poverty, His chastity, and obedience; His love for the sick; His decorum; the sort of life style and behavior which He inspired in His disciples; His way of getting along with people; His daily spiritual exercises; preaching missions; and other ministries which He undertook on behalf of the people. There is something on each of these in the chapters which follow.*

“On the first of these two last articles, we’ll speak about the persons of whom the Company is composed, and the ministries it has in order to achieve the purpose it has proposed for itself—this Company which God has raised up on earth in our day, to strive for its

own holiness, the salvation of people in the rural areas, and to assist those in the ecclesiastical state to grow in knowledge and virtue.

“On the second, we’ll discuss the best means to practice all that, which is none other than to *clothe ourselves with the Spirit of Jesus Christ*, as the article states. The poor Company! The poor Company that, without this Spirit, is only a body without a soul!

“So then, the Rule states that the Company should be composed of two kinds of men; first, of ecclesiastics, such as priests, clerics *in sacris*, and others who are in Minor Orders, or who, because they’re still in the seminary, are waiting to receive them; and second, of laymen, who have no Orders, nor do they aspire to them; and that both one and the other will work, although in different ways, for the salvation of poor country people and the advancement of those in the ecclesiastical state in piety and knowledge.

“People ask, then, how clergy and laymen can devote themselves to the end proposed with regard to the poor people and the clergy, which is done through the exercises of missions, staffing seminaries, guiding retreatants, etc., for there seems to be some problem with saying that Brothers can be referred to as persons working for the salvation of poor country people and the formation of the clergy, since they neither catechize nor preach, and have no aptitude or ability for such ministries; so, what contribution can they make to this? Nevertheless, Messieurs, in a certain sense, they do just that. They help in these ministries, although they neither preach, teach, nor direct anyone; and the Rule is stating the truth when it says that they contribute to these ministries, not, however, in the way the clergy does, publicly and directly, but in their own way, by helping those who actually do teach, exhort, and administer the Sacraments, etc. They cooperate in these ministries by filling the role of Martha, for this saint took care of preparing food for Our Lord and providing for His lodging. They go on missions to look after the priests, who are working to win souls to God, so that the latter may be free to work in this holy ministry without being taken away from it by their own physical needs. So, in this sense, it’s true to say that our Brothers help to instruct the people, to see that they can get to confession, that disputes are settled, and that the Confraternity of Charity is established directly, but they do all that in the

way the lower members of the body cooperate with the superior ones, so that it may carry out its functions.

“The operations of the mind aren’t carried out by the mind alone; it’s aided by the stomach, liver, and lungs, which are at the service of the understanding, judgment, and other intellectual faculties. A corpse can’t perform the functions of a living man, because it lacks those constituents that make blood and the respiratory system, the principles of life, whereas, in a living body, in a person endowed with reason, there’s a certain space in the head in which the vital spirits circulate, images are formed, and the reason operates by means of its inferior parts, which send vapors to the brain to serve that purpose.

“In like manner, the Brothers, who are the inferior members of the body of the Company, contribute, by their manual labor, to the spiritual ministries of the priests and to the conversion of the world; they do their part to give men faith and the knowledge of God, to stir them up to penance, to have the Sacraments administered to them, and to make them capable of eternal life, which the priests wouldn’t be free to do without the help they receive from the Brothers. This shows the communion that exists in the Church and in Communities, where everyone has the same goal, each individual does his part to achieve it—although in different ways—and they all work for one another. This is what led the holy royal Prophet to say: *Particeps ego sum omnium timentium te et custodientium mandata tua*: I share in all the good works done by those who fear You and keep Your commandments.<sup>1</sup> How is that? It’s the same as, in an association of merchants in the world, each of the associates profits according to the amount of money he’s invested in it.

“All of us have made in the Company the resolution to live and die in it; we’ve brought to it all that we have—body, soul, will, ability, industry, and the rest. Why? To do what Jesus Christ did, to save the world. And how? By means of the connection there is among us and the offering we’ve made to live and die in this Company, and to give to this all that we are and all that we do. It follows, therefore, that this communion among Missioners gives each of them the profits of the entire body because everyone works together for its

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Ps 119:63. (NAB)

success; thus, the priests don't make conversions on their own, but the Brothers, in accord with the Rule, contribute to that by their prayers, work, tears, mortifications, and good example. A man who plays the organ doesn't play it on his own; he's helped by another who works the bellows; true, the second person doesn't actually play; it's the master who does the playing; nevertheless, by blowing the bellows, he contributes to the harmony; without that, the musician would move his fingers in vain and would do nothing.

“And so, Messieurs, whether the Brothers serve those who work at preaching the Gospel, or pray for the conversion of sinners, or do penance, or weep, or behave in an edifying manner for the sanctification of the clergy and the people, it can be said that they participate in, and cooperate with, the good that's done in the missions, seminaries, ordinations, retreats, and the rest.

“*Oh bien*, Brothers! You're not direct workers like the priests, who have received a sacramental character to reconcile souls to God and to celebrate the holy Mysteries; God doesn't want to receive hosts from your hands; and if someone had attempted to offer sacrifice, as Saul did, *O Jésus!* what a sacrilege! Or if someone else tried to offer incense, like Uzziah, what a crime! Saul and Uzziah were Kings; they were anointed, yet one was stricken with leprosy for having touched the censer, and the other was condemned for having acted as a sacrificer. Both lost their kingdoms, and when Samuel reproved Saul for his rashness, he announced to him the tragedies that were to befall him—and they were great because God, having cursed him, permitted that he kill himself in despair.

“Now, if the Holy Spirit attributes all those chastisements to the venture of those Kings, who thought they were acting rightly, judge, Brothers, how lofty is the role of the clergy above all other earthly dignities, even of royalty, and what a high opinion you should have of priests, whose sacred character is a participation in the eternal priesthood of the Son of God, who has given them power to offer in sacrifice His own Body and to distribute it as food, so that those who eat it may live forever.

“Surely, after that honor which they've received from the Divine Majesty, you should hold them in great honor, although you've been called to contribute with them to the sanctification of souls,

not by doing what they do, but as the Rule points out and in the way prescribed by the Superior. Note that, in the way prescribed by the Superior. You're to go that far and not beyond. You must thank God for being in that state of being able to do your part in carrying out the plans Jesus Christ has for the Company. Happy are you to be in a situation which, to say the least, is the surest one! Praise God for that, for being able to assist your neighbor in the way obedience will indicate to you, with no danger of vanity, because you don't see the good you do, which, ordinarily, is attributed to the priests, even though you may perhaps have done more for the success of their public actions by your secret, private ones.

"Here's another reason you have for thanking God, Brothers, namely, for calling you to a Company where each individual has his own holiness as a goal. So then, you're here to work at your own growth in holiness. Oh, what a grace! Oh, what a reason to humble yourselves! That's how you can help to advance virtue as much as the priests do. And if you work faithfully at acquiring virtue, it will be true to say that you'll be in a state of holiness. And if there's a priest who's doing a miserable job at this—like myself, abominable sinner that I am—it must be acknowledged that you'll also be holier than he, even though he's a priest, or a senior member, or even a Superior. How is that? Because it's neither high positions nor age that give merit to a person, but the works that make him more like Our Lord. It's through them that he grows in holiness; it's through the practice of the virtues that he's saved. That's clear in the Gospel of the Last Judgment, where it's stated that Our Lord will place at His right those who worked at acquiring virtue, especially the virtue of charity, and they're the only ones who will enter the kingdom of heaven. So then, it's the practice of the virtues that binds us to His love, and it's His love that prompts you to perform more acts of virtue.

"If you really love God, you'll act in the same way. Now, you can love God as much as the priests; and a poor weakling as much as those who are learned. One day, good M. Duval<sup>2</sup> said to me, 'Monsieur, some day the poor people will vie with us for paradise and

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<sup>2</sup>André Duval (cf. XI, 21, n. 1).

will carry it off because there's a great difference between their manner of loving God and ours.' Their love, like that of Our Lord, is practiced in suffering, humiliations, work, and conformity to God's good pleasure. And how is ours shown—if we have any? What do we do that's anywhere near those signs of true love?

"You know the story of Bro. Gilles;<sup>3</sup> it's rather unremarkable. He expressed to Saint Bonaventure a great desire to love God. 'Oh, if I were a learned man,' he said, 'if I were a priest like you, I'd really love God!' And when that holy Doctor told him that, even though he was a Brother, without diplomas or Holy Orders, he could love God as much as the most learned persons in high positions, and that a poor weakling could do likewise, he said, '*Quoi*, a poor ignoramus like me can love God as much as Bonaventure!' 'Yes, you can.' Then, enraptured, that Brother went off crying out, 'Courage, you who hear me, courage! You can love our great God as much as our Fr. Bonaventure!'

"So, Brothers, you can equal the priests in that; but it's always understood that you work deliberately at virtue and your own holiness; for, if you don't, and, instead of growing in holiness according to the Rule, you wallow in your faults, you'll be a scandal in the house and outside; consequently, instead of contributing to the salvation of souls, you'll place some obstacle to it in a certain sense, and, what's more, you'll lose your own in the end. So be very careful about this, Brothers.

"'But,' you may say, 'what do we have to do to grow in holiness like that?' I just told you: keep your Rules faithfully, especially the one that recommends to you holy union and mutual charity among us, but particularly among the priests and you Brothers, in such a way that we may always get along well together and live in perfect union, since we're all members composing one same body, although some may be of more noble birth than others. The example I gave above of Saint Paul illustrates that beautiful union by the union between the human body and its members, in as much as they get along so well together, each according to its function and in no competition with the

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<sup>3</sup>A Franciscan Brother.

others. Now, that's how we should be united together; that, Brothers, is the way you should live with the priests in order to be able to advance in the holiness your vocation requires of you.

“‘But,’ someone will say, ‘how can we obtain and preserve this holy union among all of us, particularly between priests and Brothers?’ By mutual esteem and respect between the priests and the Brothers. We mustn't think of ourselves according to the flesh or in a human way, but look upon one another as God's creatures, who have given themselves to God and renounced everything that's not of God, and, with this in view, to anticipate one another in honor and kindness, according to the advice of Saint Paul, *Honore invicem praevenientes*.<sup>4</sup> It's understood that this be with the requisite consideration and preparation; for we're well aware that the coadjutor Brothers owe greater honor to the priests than the priests do to them. Now, you'll ask me, Brothers, how you should honor the priests; my answer is that you should consider them your fathers; and, in fact, fathers are the ones who engender; that's what priests do when they forgive sins and put us in the grace of God.

“Consequently, Brothers, far from you be any attempt to be on a par with the priests; don't ever measure yourselves against them, and, even less, evaluate your state with theirs. The difference is like the difference between heaven and earth. They've received a very sacred and incomparable character, a power over the Body of Jesus Christ that the angels admire, and the authority to forgive people's sins—a great subject of amazement and gratitude for them. Is there anything greater, Brothers? Is there any dignity similar to that? They are your fathers and guides in the spiritual life. You have to keep yourselves lowly, and humble yourselves greatly in their regard; you owe all priests, and notably the Superior and the Officers, special respect and great obedience. I'm saying ‘the Officers,’ Brothers, who have the right to give you orders, even to give you a penance—by order, however, of the Superior—for, if they can do this with regard to the clerics and even the priests, how much more can they do it with regard to you! You have fathers in the Company; treat them as such, with reverence and submission, and remove

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<sup>4</sup>*Anticipate one another in showing honor.* Cf. Rom 12:10. (NAB)



your hats in their presence. It doesn't matter that they may have imperfections, just as I do, wretched man that I am, covered with iniquities; they're incorporated into a holy, lofty state and, consequently, are worthy not only of respect and honor but also of obedience, especially the Superior and the Officers.

"Brothers, as long as you maintain the submission of true children and carry out your duties with regard to the priests, God will bless you; if, however, you have the rashness to put yourselves on a par with them, they who are your fathers, you'll be like Satan, who said, *In caelum conscendam et similis ero Altissimo*; I will ascend to heaven and will be like the Almighty.<sup>5</sup> When a layman tries to put himself on a par with a priest, that's like trying to raise himself up as the devil did. The Brother who tries to put himself on the same level as a priest, whom God has fashioned according to His Heart, is a devil.

"Be on your guard against that, Brothers; remember that, as soon as you try to pass judgment on everything, minding someone else's business and acting on your own whim, you'll lose the Spirit of God; and if someone falls into this misfortune, he won't be a Brother of the Mission but a disgusting carcass. That's what the Brothers owe the priests.

"Now, what do the priests owe the Brothers? They owe them love as if they were their own children, even though they treat them as brothers; they also owe them mutual support, gracious condescension, and compassion in their infirmities. Yes, Messieurs, you should love the Brothers unreservedly and sincerely; you should condescend and sympathize with their infirmities. Here's the means of maintaining the Company in this holy union: let our Brothers be respectful and obedient, and the priests have everywhere a genuine love and mutual support for our Brothers.

"But how can we preserve this union among priests, seminarians, and Brothers, a union among all of us; how can we do it? By the grace of God, we have it now. What else will we do in order never to break this loving and desirable bond of charity? For the time being, I'll speak briefly about it and will tell the Company that we adopted a good means for it the other day. The right way for

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<sup>5</sup>*I will scale heaven and I will be like the Most High.* Cf. Is 14:13-14. (NAB)

each man to contribute to this is to adopt the practice of the means that unite hearts, like the ones we just mentioned, namely, esteem, respect, and deference toward one another and, for this purpose, to fight constantly against the contrary vices, especially detraction, and, from time to time in our conferences, to discuss—as we did recently—this same detraction, the vice that’s the source of division and the poison of Communities. Consequently, if we want to preserve this union, that accursed vice must, of necessity, be banished from the Company. It’s very true that, by the grace of God, you’ve given chase to it, with the result that we see nothing of it any more—or almost nothing—but we have to be on our guard that it doesn’t return and, in order to do this, to be faithful to practicing the means we’ve determined to take. You see, Messieurs, if we’re firmly established in this, you can rest assured that we’re on the way, not only to preserving firmly this union, but also of growing in our own holiness. God will bless this Company, even though it may be composed of all kinds of persons, poor men for the most part. Let’s hope that it will serve God for the love of God himself, like that lute player mentioned in yesterday’s reading, who, deaf though he was, took no other pleasure in his beautiful music than to please his Prince, who was listening to him. So then, let’s hope that, if His Divine Goodness doesn’t find any gossiping or disrespect among us, He will establish, through imperceptible ways, this means of maintaining the Company on the road of its holiness, and that priests and Brothers will make progress in it.

“O blessed Rules, which rid the Company of this fault so opposed to our advancement in virtue! If, sometimes, through human frailty, we fail in this, the remedy is to go down on our knees at once and ask pardon of God and of the Company for it. By the grace of God, some men have this holy practice, and it contributes in no small way to making amends for these two vices. It also seems to me that I’m seeing this improvement. That’s the second means that will preserve the Company in the spirit of the Rule.

“Lastly, to put it in a nutshell, a sovereign means of maintaining ourselves in this union is humility. If we do an analysis of antipathies and disagreements, we’ll see that all this stems from competi-

tion. If someone succeeds in preaching or in his ministry, he becomes complacent about it, brags a little, and becomes full of himself. Then what happens? People think less of him because of this and they humiliate him—we can't stand a man who blows his own horn—and this becomes a bone of contention. The contrary, then, is a source of peace and union, namely to humble ourselves, to want people to know that we're the worst of men, and, if we think we've been successful, to acknowledge immediately, from the experience of our own faults, our inability to do good and our inclination to evil. We'll find only too many of them to convince ourselves that we're deceiving ourselves and are capable only of spoiling everything, to make ourselves the most miserable of men in our own eyes, and, in fact, to love to be despised. If we have a good opinion and good sentiments about anyone, let it be about our neighbor and not about ourselves. Let the senior priests refer respect and success to others; let the clerics submit to one another, and let the Brothers subject themselves to the least among them, in line with the advice of the Prince of the Apostles, 'Be subject to every human creature for the love of God.'<sup>6</sup> Nothing will be apparent any longer but what is loveable and well ordered.

"I could say other things on this topic, but that's quite enough to make you see how important it is for priests and Brothers to be closely united by true charity, in the way we just mentioned, if they want to cooperate with the priests in a useful and meritorious manner in the salvation of souls, by the means the Rule ordains. I've spent a long time on this point because it has seemed very important to me.

"Let's move on now to the second one mentioned, which won't take long, and see what means the Rule indicates to us to achieve the end it proposes to us; let's read the very words of this article: *And if this Congregation, with the help of God's grace, is to achieve what it sees as its purpose, a genuine effort to put on the spirit of Jesus Christ will be needed*, etc. We've said that the Brothers as well as the priests are equally obliged to work at their own growth in holiness; but, it's not the same for what concerns the salvation of poor persons and the formation of those in the ecclesiastical state be-

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<sup>6</sup>Cf. 1 Pt 2:13. (NAB)

cause it's the distinctive feature of priests to preach, catechize, and work at reconciliations, setting up the Confraternity of Charity, staffing seminaries, giving ordination retreats, and the rest of the ministries on behalf of the neighbor. That speaks for itself. The role of Brothers, however, is only to give them the means of doing that by carrying out the office of Martha and contributing by the other means we've specified.

“So the Rule states that, in order to do this, as well as to tend to our own perfection, we must be clothed with the Spirit of Jesus Christ. *O Sauveur!* O Messieurs! What an important matter it is to clothe ourselves with the Spirit of Jesus Christ! This means that to grow in holiness, to be useful in helping people, and to serve the clergy well, we have to work at imitating the perfection of Jesus Christ and to strive to attain it. It also means that, of ourselves, we can do nothing in this matter. We must be filled and animated with this spirit of Jesus Christ. To understand this clearly, we have to know that His Spirit is poured out on all Christians who live according to the rules of Christianity; their words and actions are diffused with the Spirit of God, with the result that God has raised up the Company—and you see this clearly—in order to act in like manner. It has always had a love for Christian teachings and has desired to be clothed with the spirit of the Gospel in order to live and act as Our Lord did so that His Spirit may be apparent in the entire Company and in each Missioner, in all its ministries in general and in each one in particular.

“But what is that spirit diffused in such a way? How is it to be understood when someone says, ‘The Spirit of Our Lord is in a certain person or in certain actions’? Is it that the Holy Spirit is diffused in them? Yes, the Holy Spirit personally is poured out on the righteous and dwells personally in them. When we say that the Holy Spirit is at work in someone, it means that this Spirit, residing in that person, gives him or her the same inclinations and dispositions Jesus Christ had on earth, and they cause the person to act in the same way—I'm not saying with equal perfection, but according to the measure of the gifts of that Divine Spirit.

“But what is the Spirit of Our Lord? It's a spirit of perfect charity, filled with a marvelous esteem of the Divinity and an infinite desire to honor it in a worthy manner, together with a knowledge of

the greatness of His Father, in order to admire and extol them unceasingly. He has such a high esteem of this that He paid homage to Him for all the things that were in His Sacred Person and that passed out from it; He attributed everything to Him; He was unwilling to say that His teaching was His own, but referred it to His Father: *Doctrina mea non est mea, sed ejus qui misit me Patris* [sic].<sup>7</sup> Is there any greater esteem than that of the Son, who is equal to the Father, and yet who acknowledges the Father as the author and sole principle of all the good that's in Him? And what was His love? Oh, what love! O my Savior, what love did You not show for Your Father! Could there have been any greater love, my dear confreres, than to annihilate himself for Him? For when Saint Paul speaks of the birth of the Son of God on earth, he says that He annihilated himself. Could He show any greater love in that than by dying through love in the way He died? O love of my Savior! O love! You were incomparably greater than the angels were able to understand and will never understand!

“His humiliations were nothing but love, His work only love, His sufferings only love, His meditations only love, and all His interior and exterior actions were nothing but repeated acts of His love. His love gave Him great contempt for the world, for the spirit of the world, for wealth, for pleasures, and for honors.

“That's a description of the Spirit of Our Lord, with which we must be clothed, namely, in a word, to always have great esteem and love for God. He was so filled with these that He did nothing of himself or to satisfy himself, *Que placita sunt ei facio semper*:<sup>8</sup> I always do the Will of my Father; I always do the actions and works that are pleasing to Him. And since it's by the Will of the Father that the Eternal Son disdained the world, its goods, pleasures, and honors, it's by disdaining them as He did that we'll share in His Spirit.

“In line with that, brothers, we have to work toward esteem of God and try to conceive a great—a very great—respect for Him. Oh, if we only had a vision incisive enough to penetrate a little into the infinity of His excellence, O my God, what lofty sentiments we'd

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<sup>7</sup>*My teaching is not my own, but from the Father who sent me.* Cf. Jn 7:16. (NAB)

<sup>8</sup>*I do always the things that please Him.* Cf. Jn 8:29. (NAB)

take away from it, brothers! Like Saint Paul, we'd say that eyes have never seen, nor ears heard, nor the mind understood anything like it. God is an abyss of gentleness, a sovereign, eternally glorious being, an infinite good that embraces all good; everything in Him is incomprehensible. Now, the knowledge we have, that God is above all understanding, should suffice for us to have Him infinitely esteemed. And that esteem should cause us to annihilate ourselves in His presence and to speak of His Supreme Majesty with a great sentiment of humility, reverence, and submission; and we'll love Him in proportion to our esteem for Him. This esteem and love will give us a constant desire to do always His holy Will, to apply ourselves earnestly to do nothing against it, to distance ourselves far from worldly things, and will cause us to disdain earthly goods.

“Preserve in our hearts, my God, a holy aversion to those things and to perishable pleasures; may we never seek out any of them and carefully avoid the self-gratifications to which our nature imperceptibly inclines us, such as wanting others to adapt themselves to us, wanting to be successful in all we do and have everything smile on us. O Savior, teach us to seek our pleasure in You, to love what You loved and to be pleased with what pleases You.

“O my God, necessity obliges us to have these perishable goods and to preserve for the Company what Our Lord has placed in it; but we have to apply ourselves to this in the way God himself applies himself to produce and preserve temporal goods to adorn the world and feed its creatures, so that He takes care to provide for even the tiniest insect. This doesn't hinder His interior operations, by which He engenders His Son and brings forth the Holy Spirit. He does those things without omitting the others. So, just as it's God's pleasure to provide food for plants, animals, and human beings, those who are in charge in this little universe of the Company must likewise provide for the needs of the individuals who compose it. This really has to be done, my God; otherwise, all that Your Providence has given for their maintenance would be lost, Your service would come to a halt, and we'd be unable to go to evangelize poor persons gratuitously.

“So then, my God, allow us, in order to continue our ministries for Your glory, to work at the preservation of temporal things, but to do it in such a way that our spirit may not be contaminated by them, nor

justice wounded, nor our hearts encumbered. O Savior, remove the spirit of avarice from the Company and give it only that of providing for the necessities of life, providing for them, O Lord, as You provide for those of all peoples of the earth and even for the smallest animals, with a general and a particular attention, not allowing those external works to distract You for one instant from the eternal and admirably fruitful applications within You. May the Superiors and Officers of the Company do likewise, devoting themselves diligently to the care of business matters and providing the entire body and each of its members with what's right for them, without neglecting the interior life and the cordial union they should have with You.

“As for honors, O God, deliver us from those hellish, idle dreams, distance us from that damnable envy that drove the angels from paradise and turns men into devils, that insatiable desire for honor that causes us to have a good opinion of ourselves and of all we do, makes us disrespectful of others, and leads the proud man to raise himself up like a dragon. It's an insidious, venomous monster that insinuates itself everywhere and infects with its stinking breath the most withdrawn souls. This demon is always prowling around the Communities and persons who come closest to holiness, seeking to devour them. It's with them in particular that the devil is concerned, in order to fill them with self-esteem and satisfaction, and, little by little, to make it hard for them to be submissive, relegating them, in the end, to follow only their own false lights, causing them to fall later on into some precipice. And what a disaster that is! O disaster, how great you are!

“*Oh bien*, brothers, that's what we have to say to you in general regarding the Spirit of Jesus Christ! All that would remain now is to speak to you in detail on what this Rule points out concerning this, but, since we've gone overtime, we'll content ourselves with telling you for the present that this esteem and love of God, conformity to His holy Will, and disdain of the world and of self that we have to imitate in Jesus Christ in order to be clothed with His Spirit couldn't be seen better in us than by the practice of the virtues that were particularly evident in Our Lord when He was living on earth, namely, those that are contained in His teachings, in His poverty, chastity, and obedience, in His charity toward the sick, etc., so that, if we begin to imitate Our Lord in

practicing all that, and in accord with what the other Rules state, we should hope that we'll be clothed with His Spirit.

“May God be pleased to give us the grace of always conforming our behavior to His way of acting and our sentiments to His. May He keep our lamps lit in His presence and our hearts always tending to His love and always devoted to clothing ourselves ever more with Jesus Christ in the way we've just indicated! All the baptized are clothed with His Spirit, but all don't do its works. Each individual, then, has to strive to be conformed to Our Lord, to distance himself from the teachings of the world, and to be bound in affection and practice to the examples of the Son of God, who became man like us in order that we might not only be saved, but, like Him, saviors; which means, by cooperating with Him in the salvation of souls.

“Let's remember, my dear confreres, that this happiness and honor will never be ours if we don't work to preserve the holy union we've so strongly recommended to you, using, for this purpose, the means we've pointed out, particularly mutual esteem and respect among ourselves, and, above all, holy humility and flight from malicious gossip and contumely. But it will be useless for us to work to enjoy that benefit, if God himself doesn't help us to do it. Aren't you most willing, brothers, for us to ask Him right now to grant us this grace and for all of us to make tomorrow's meditation in order to be animated with this desire of resembling Him in our thoughts, words, and actions, and, in a word, to put into practice the rest of what I just recommended to you? I have no doubt that all of you are determined to do this, but this resolution has to be strengthened by frequent prayers and renewed acts of affection. Oh, since it has pleased God to propose that for us, He won't fail to be faithful to His promise, for He said that we'll do the works that He did, and even greater ones! So that's what I can tell you just now on the explanation of this Rule and the preceding one.”



197. - GOSPEL TEACHINGS  
(Common Rules, Chap. II, Art. 1)

February 14, 1659

“My dear confreres, you were told that the subject of this conference would be the daily schedule. When M. Gicquel<sup>1</sup> and I were discussing this last night, I was doubtful that I’d be able to try your patience this evening, but, since I was feeling a little better, I thought, *in nomine Domine*, I’ll speak to you on the second chapter of our Rules and postpone the daily schedule for another day.

“Up to the present, brothers, we’ve spoken to you about the purpose of the Company, namely, to work first and foremost at our own holiness—at our own holiness. (He repeated these words in a calm, serious tone of voice to instill zeal for this into the Company.) This is to be done by imitating the virtues Our Lord taught us by His words and example. We must, then, keep this divine portrait before our eyes. Second, it’s to assist poor country people, to instruct them in the Christian virtues, to exhort them to a good life, and to help them make a good general confession, etc. Third, to be of service to the clergy according to our poverty and the little knowledge and virtue we have; and, even though those priests may have more of these than we do, we still have to speak to them about them.

“Next, the Rule states that the Company is composed of priests and laymen; that the role of the first-mentioned is to go from village to village to evangelize poor persons, to organize seminaries and conferences, and to work in the other ministries the Company is accustomed to carry out for the neighbor.

“As for the Brothers, their role is that of Martha, and consists in doing manual work at the side of the priests and contributing to their spiritual ministry by their prayers, tears, mortifications, and good example. We’ve said that the Spirit of Jesus Christ is necessary for both groups in order to carry out their obligations profitably. For

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Conference 197. - Manuscript of Conferences.

<sup>1</sup>Jean Gicquel, the sub-Assistant at St-Lazare (1655-60).

what else is the human spirit but misery and vanity? So then, we have to be animated by His Spirit in order to do what's indicated by our Rules. Now, to know and to have this Spirit, we've said that the following articles will show in what it consists and the means of acquiring it:

“Let's read the chapter, which is the second one in the little booklet of our Rules; here's what it says: *Before all else, let each of us strive to be well convinced of the truth of the following statement and try to make it our most fundamental principle: Jesus Christ's teaching will never let us down, while worldly wisdom always will. Jesus Christ himself said that this sort of wisdom was like a house with nothing but sand as its foundation,<sup>2</sup> while His own was like a building with solid rock as its foundation. And that is why the Congregation should always try to follow the teaching of Jesus Christ and never that of the worldly-wise. To be sure of doing this we should pay particular attention to what follows.*

“It must therefore be laid down as a basis that the teaching of Jesus Christ does what it says and that the world never delivers what it promises; that those who do what Jesus Christ teaches build on rock, which neither floods nor raging winds can shake; and that those who don't do what He ordains are like the man who built his house on quicksand, and it was demolished by the first storm. So, whoever speaks of the teaching of Jesus Christ speaks of solid rock and of eternal truths that are followed infallibly by their effects, so much so that the sky would sooner fall than the teaching of Jesus Christ fail. That's why the Rule concludes that the Company must make profession of always embracing and practicing the teaching of Jesus Christ and never that of the world. In so doing, it will be filled and clothed with Jesus Christ.

“To explain this Rule clearly and, by the same means, to help us to derive good results from it, we'll follow the method used to treat the things we've already explained in some of the preceding articles and will perhaps use with regard to a few others that follow, if the subject obliges us to do, as today's does. So, we'll tell you in what

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<sup>2</sup>In *Bulletin des Lazaristes de France*, Hiver - Décembre 2008, no. 205, pp. 9-31, Bernard Koch, C.M. presents a study on the biblical references used by Saint Vincent in Chapters II and XI.

the teaching of Jesus Christ consists and what's understood by the maxims of the world; (2) we'll give a few reasons why we should love it; and (3) we'll suggest some means of putting it into practice.

“As to the first point, the teaching of Jesus Christ is defined as follows: a divine positive law, given to all by Jesus Christ the law-giver, the teacher of morality, and the institutor of the Holy Sacrifice and the new Sacraments. That's the definition. Now, strictly speaking, a law obliges people to keep it. We have to realize, however, that this teaching of Jesus Christ consists in Commandments and counsels, which we call the Gospel. The Commandments place an obligation on the understanding and the will, such as, *Hoc est praeceptum meum, ut diligatis invicem*: ‘This is my commandment, that you love one another.’<sup>3</sup> This part is a coercive law, which gives a command; but the other part isn't compulsory, it's directive, proposing the evangelical counsels to us for growth in holiness, as, for example, ‘Sell what you have and give away the money in alms.’<sup>4</sup> That's definitely a divine positive law, which is explained and proposed to everyone to be embraced by each of us according to our state in life and our dispositions and attraction to it, but its practice doesn't oblige under pain of sin, even though everyone is bound to respect it, so that they'd sin if they held it in contempt. Now, this teaching or law of Jesus Christ is contained in the New Testament both with regard to what He taught us through the Apostles by way of inspiration, or taught us himself in the Gospel, where He speaks to us personally.

“In order to understand this better, we should know that the New Testament contains first the explanation of Holy Scripture and its elaboration for the people's instruction and good living; and second, the institution of the Holy Sacrifice, the Sacraments, and the orders Jesus Christ established. Third, it contains preceptive teaching, which gives a command, and directive teaching or teaching of direction, which advises us—what we call the *evangelical counsels*. Now, what we intend to speak about in this conference and

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<sup>3</sup>Cf. Jn 15:12. (NAB)

<sup>4</sup>Cf. Mt 19:21. (NAB)

what the Rule mentions is mainly this third type of evangelical teaching, both preceptive and directive. It's also what we call the *Gospel maxims*.

"I'm well aware that, strictly speaking, maxims or axioms are certain principles that have no proofs from which conclusive consequences are drawn; however, generally speaking, we take them not only as basic principles but also for the conclusions inferred from them, either mediately or immediately, and even as noteworthy adages and sayings that tend, either directly or indirectly, toward the practice of some virtue or the avoidance of some vice. Now, it's in all these senses that we take the word *maxim* and have entitled this chapter of our Rules: 'Gospel Teachings.'

"But what are those teachings? There are a large number of them in the New Testament, but the principal and fundamental ones are those spelled out in Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, which begins, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit.'<sup>5</sup> That Sermon is contained in the fifth, sixth, and seventh chapters of Saint Matthew. Let's take, for example, one of the fundamental ones, 'Go, and do to your neighbor whatever you would have him do to you.' That teaching is the basis of the moral code, and we can regulate all the actions of secular justice on this principle. Justinian<sup>6</sup> established his laws on it, as have jurists in formulating civil and canon law. And since every conclusion drawn from one or several principles must show with certainty what they ordain for the practice of virtue or forbid for the avoidance of vice, in the same way certain consequences are drawn from these Gospel teachings, which, in accord with the plan of Our Lord, prompt us not only to avoid evil and do good but also to procure the greatest glory of God His Father and to acquire Christian perfection.

"To give a better understanding of these teachings and to distinguish more clearly those that are obligatory from those that are not, it's appropriate to add here that there are some we're obliged to ob-

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<sup>5</sup>Cf. Mt 5:3. (NAB) Unless otherwise noted, the Scripture quotes in this conference are all from the fifth, sixth, or seventh chapters of Saint Matthew's Gospel.

<sup>6</sup>Justinian I (482-565), Byzantine Emperor and restorer of the Roman Empire.

serve, such as the following: ‘Take care to guard against all greed,’<sup>7</sup> ‘Do penance,’<sup>8</sup> because these are absolute Commandments. Others are not of obligation, according to Saint Thomas, only: *quoad praeparationem animi*, that is, to be disposed to accept them when necessary, when they’re proposed to us and we have the power to do it, like the following one: ‘Do good to those who hate you.’ There are others that are purely counsels, such as, ‘Sell all that you have and give it away in alms;’ for Our Lord doesn’t oblige anyone to sell all his property in order to give it to persons who are poor; that’s only for greater perfection. Lastly, there are others that are also purely evangelical counsels and which, nevertheless, we’re sometimes obliged to observe because they have become precepts. That happens when a person has vowed to keep them by taking vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, because the evangelical counsels have reference to and are summarized in those three virtues, since all of them are concerned with either poverty, or chastity, or obedience.

“According to that, my dear confreres, we who have vowed to follow these three evangelical counsels are obliged to observe them; and by observing them we’re assured of building on rock and of constructing a permanent edifice. And those are the counsels and teachings with which our Rule is concerned, and which it states that our Company must adopt. This obligation commits us at the same time to avoid the maxims of the world because they’re opposed to those of the Gospel; and in order to be able to avoid them, we have to know what they are. That’s why I promised you that I’d tell you what’s understood by those maxims of the world. Now, I couldn’t describe them to you any better than by showing you how they’re opposed to those of Jesus Christ and in what they’re contradictory; and here’s how:

“First, the teachings of Our Lord state, ‘Blessed are the poor,’ and those of the world say, ‘Blessed are the rich.’ The former tell us to be gentle and good-natured; the latter tell us to stand fast and

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<sup>7</sup>Cf. Lk 12:15. (NAB)

<sup>8</sup>Cf. Mt 4:17. (NAB)

make people fear us. Our Lord says that suffering is good, 'Blessed are they who mourn,' and worldly people say just the opposite: 'Blessed are those who enjoy themselves and have a good time.' 'Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for justice,' but the world laughs at that. It says, 'Blessed are those who look out for their temporal advancement and to become important.' 'Blessed are they who curse you,' says the Savior; and the world says that we should not put up with insults: 'The person who makes himself a sheep will be eaten by the wolf,' that we have to preserve our reputation at all costs, and that it's better to lose life than honor.

"That's enough to know what the teaching of the world is and to what it tends. Our Rule, then, by committing us to follow the teaching of Jesus Christ, which is infallible, obliges us at the same time, as we've said, to act contrary to the teaching of the world, which is an abuse. Not that there aren't some good adages in the world, but they're not opposed to Christian teachings. Take this one, 'Whoever does good will find good.' That's true; pagans and Turks declare it, and there's no one who doesn't agree with it.

"One day I was traveling with a member of the Great Council; he was telling me that the good teachings of the world are like evangelical counsels. For example, 'Grasp all, lose all.' That's a constant, proven truth; everyone has seen that. So, there are good and bad maxims in the world; the good ones are those that everyone agrees on and which don't contradict the Gospel; the bad ones are the ones that are opposed to those of Jesus Christ and are approved only by wicked, worldly persons.

"There is, however, a difference between the good teachings of the world and those of the Gospel, for we acknowledge the former through experience because we've had proof of them in their effects, but we know the infallibility of those of Our Lord through His Spirit, which gives knowledge and perception of them and shows where those divine consequences lead, and that, since they have been given by the Eternal Truth, they're very genuine and always effective.

"Good country people know that the moon changes, and eclipses of the sun and other stars occur; they speak about them of-

ten and can witness these events when they take place. But an astronomer, who knows the principles of art or science, not only sees them along with them but foresees them ahead of time and will say, 'We're going to have an eclipse on a certain day, at a certain hour, at a certain minute.' Now, if the astronomers, through their knowledge, have this infallible perception, not only in Europe but among the Chinese, and, by the rules they have, see so clearly into the darkness of the future as to know for certain the strange effects that are bound to occur by the movement of the heavens a hundred years, a thousand years, or four thousand years from now and even to the end of the world; if, I repeat, men have this knowledge, how much more has this Eternal Light, which penetrates the most hidden things, even to the slightest details, seen the truth of these teachings!

"Ah, Messieurs, would that we were convinced that, since these same teachings have been proposed to us by the infinite charity of Jesus Christ, they can't deceive us! Nevertheless, our malady is that we don't trust Him but look to human prudence. Don't you see that we're guilty of putting greater trust in human reasoning than in the promises of Eternal Wisdom, and in the deceptive appearances of the world rather than in the paternal love of the Savior, who came down from heaven to free us from illusion? O Savior, You were well aware of the value of this teaching when You gave it, and yet few people can understand it. 'If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn the other.' Your Providence often allows us to see the importance of this, and yet we go so far as to do the opposite. So, I ask you, brothers, what's the better teaching: that of turning the left cheek when someone strikes us on the right one, or the worldly one that would have us resent it? Who, I ask you, has known the nature of these teachings better: the world, that would have us avenge ourselves, or the Son of God, who would deter us from this? Let's take a gentleman who has been slapped. Resentment causes him to take his sword in hand; everyone comes to encourage him to avenge this insult; blows are exchanged, but he finds himself in danger of losing his property by confiscation, his life by this duel, his soul by this crime, and his wife and children by this misfortune. Wouldn't this wretched man have done better to hold fast to the teaching of Our Lord, which would have

maintained his person and his home in their prosperity and drawn down on him great graces from God, than to follow those of the world, which cast him into this strange reversal of fortune and with the very great danger of eternal damnation?

“Don’t you see that the maxims of the world are built on false premises, whereas those of Our Lord are always advantageous in practice, even though they may seem difficult? We must, then, hold fast to these truths, my dear confreres; we must be guided by heavenly wisdom.

“There’s a teaching that forbids us to initiate lawsuits. ‘If someone asks you for your coat,’ it says ‘give him your cloak as well.’ So what advice do you think should be followed: to sue someone when he tries to take something from us that was acquired honestly, or to hand it over without putting up an argument? Alas, we’ve had only too much experience of the unfortunate consequences of our loss of Orsigny, which will be a basis and a warning to the Company to have it avoid lawsuits! Wouldn’t it have been better for us to give up that farm, even though it came to us without our doing anything to get it? You know, my God, that it was nothing we did; You know this, my God, You know it. Wouldn’t we have done better to have given it up first, seeing that we’ve lost everything, despite the great expense to which we went, rather than going to court, as we did, thinking we’d preserve that property that was acquired so legitimately? And God has allowed this to teach us at our own expense how deceptive human prudence is and how worthy of credence and love is His divine word.

“*Quoi!*” someone will say, ‘Do we have to allow ourselves to be skinned alive and not say a word against the injustice? Isn’t it permissible to defend ourselves to preserve our possessions?’ I reply that people are sometimes obliged to go to court. Our Lord did, and Saint Paul was engaged in a lawsuit and he himself defended his rights. We’re summoned to court, and we’re obliged to appear; but first it’s advisable that, to honor Our Lord’s advice and to have devotion to this teaching, the Company should be ready to prefer losing to entering a plea, and strive to settle all sorts of disputes, whatever the cost, rather than stubbornly upholding its right, never



responding to the summons without having made an effort to reach a settlement. Let's give this glory to God, Messieurs, and this example to the public. Our Rule, then, obliges us to stand firm for the teachings of Our Lord; consequently, my dear confreres, we should give ourselves to God to have great respect and love for them and to observe each of them at the proper time. Ask this grace of Him by prayer and sacrifice; let's use all the means with which God has inspired His Church to adopt these divine truths, and let's direct our life, our conduct, and our affections to this. Here are a few reasons to urge us on to do this:

“The first is that Jesus Christ, Eternal Wisdom, has said that those who listen to His word and put it into practice are like wise men who built on solid rock, which lasts forever; and, on the contrary, those who hear it and do not act on it, are like those fools who constructed their buildings on sand and are close to being ruined. If we abide by the holy teachings of Our Lord, we'll build on an immoveable rock and, in a short time, will advance from virtue to virtue. If the Superiors of the Company are zealous about preventing it from falling back, but keep moving forward in this holy observance, if God is pleased that all of us should be well grounded and very firm in this resolution, the Company will make great progress in its growth in holiness and in the service of the Church and of the people; however, we have to enter into this and be convinced of its necessity, if we want to avoid our general and individual downfall and enjoy the great benefits promised to those who are steadfast.

“The second reason is drawn from Chapter 5 of Saint Matthew, where Our Lord tells the Apostles and other disciples, ‘This is what I have to say to you; if anyone breaks the least of these [Commandments] and teaches others to do so, he will be a weak man and the least before God; but whoever does and teaches what I order you to do will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.’ Our Lord saw some of these among them. ‘We have the Commandments of the Law,’ they'll say, ‘isn't that enough?’ He wants to confine us to certain difficult precepts and says that only those who keep them will be blessed. That's why, in Chapter 7 of the same Saint Matthew, He

gives them this response: 'Know that the gate of paradise is narrow and the wide road leads to destruction, and great is the number of those who enter by the broad gate that leads to hell.'

"Messieurs, let's not deceive ourselves; the Son of God has said it; He knows the unfortunate tendency people have to live as they please and, seeing that there would be few who would do violence to themselves in order to follow the Gospel, He warns us about that. Let's be on the watch for it, and see what the saints have said about it and how strongly they felt that few people would be saved. Let's reflect that there were only seven or eight in Noah's Ark, and all the rest died, and that of the ten virgins, five were condemned, and of the ten lepers cleansed, only one returned to Jesus Christ.

"These examples are signs of the small number of the elect. 'By their fruits you will know them,' says Our Lord; and they're the ones who, having been baptized, renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil and, with lively faith, animated with the Spirit of Jesus Christ, do the works of the Gospel. They're the ones who reach the throne of Jesus Christ. Oh, how few they are! You speak to us of this small number, and yet we see that those who observed the law of Moses performed miracles, as they themselves will tell the Savior of the world on the last day. But He replies to them in advance, 'Not everyone who says to me "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father. Many will say to me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not drive out the devil, prophesy, and work many miracles in your name?" And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you evildoers; I abandon you.' Oh, how great will be the number of those unfortunate people! Do we want to expose ourselves to their misfortune, Messieurs, and walk with them along the broad road, we who are called to the narrow way to be among the small number of those who are saved? Do we want to be like those workers of iniquity who build on sand and who perish miserably? O Jesus my Savior, we belong to You and, with the help of Your grace, we want to embrace Your teachings.

"Here, Messieurs, is a third reason obliging us to do this, namely, that Our Lord, who has given these divine counsels, ob-

served them first. Show me one teaching that this Divine Lawgiver didn't practice. Actually, He didn't pluck out His eyes or cut off one of His hands, but commanded this only for eyes that covet and hands that give scandal. And again, this shouldn't be taken literally; it means that we simply have to close our eyes so as not to see the wretched occasions that lure us into sin, and that all dangerous friendships and conversations should be cut off. Apart from that, were there question of losing everything, of having nothing, of enduring insults, of loving His enemies, of praying for those who persecuted Him, of renouncing himself and carrying His Cross, He did that even to death in order to carry out His Father's Will. Now, if we are His children, we must follow Him; like Him, we must embrace poverty, humiliations, and sufferings, detaching ourselves from all that's not God, and being united with our neighbor through charity in order to be united with God himself through Jesus Christ. That's what all these teachings prompt us to do; then we'll be building on rock, with the result that the temptations of our passions will not cause our downfall, as they usually do to those who base their conduct on the maxims of the world.

"The means of establishing ourselves firmly in the teachings of the Gospel are for each individual to read with attention and devotion the New Testament, but mainly the chapters in Saint Matthew that contain them, namely the fifth, sixth, seventh, and tenth. Let's begin to read them from tomorrow on, while raising our mind to God to ask Him for a respect and understanding of them, exciting within ourselves the desire to observe them without fail and to strive, from the very first day, to put them into practice.

"But that won't be enough; it's advisable to make meditation on this matter. I haven't given enough thought to whether we'll assign one of the teachings as the subject of meditation, or whether each individual will meditate privately on the one he thinks he needs the most. We shall see. Meanwhile let each man follow the attraction God will give him after reading those four chapters, taking, as matter for the first meditation he'll make afterward, the teachings that suit him best.

“(2) Another good means to lead us to the practice of these teachings is to consider often that, from the beginning, the Company had the desire of being united to Our Lord to do what He did by the practice of His teachings, in order to become, like Him, pleasing to His Eternal Father and useful to His Church, and that it has really tried to make progress in this and to grow in holiness, if not to the degree we should have done, at least as best we could. This reflection should encourage both the newcomers and the older members, reminding them that it’s the spirit with which Missioners must be animated in a special way.

“Lord, pardon our failings in this matter, renew in us the heart that led us to undertake them, and increase in us the grace of living them as they are in our little Rules. In this way, my dear confreres, we’ll find in them the Spirit of Our Lord, the spirit of His teachings and everything He points out to us in them to make us worthy workers of His Gospel. We’ve always had this devotion, but, through my fault, the Company hasn’t borne the fruits of it to the point it should have. We have to hope in God’s goodness, brothers, in your present dispositions, and in the grace of the Company, which has made these Rules, as a *précis* of the Gospel, adapted to the use that’s most fitting for us in order to unite ourselves to Jesus Christ and to correspond with His plans. He’ll grant us the grace to carry each teaching and each Rule to the highest degree of perfection. We have to form a Company animated with the Spirit of God and preserved by the operations of this Spirit. Blessed be God who has laid its foundations and chosen you for this purpose! Blessed be His Holy Name for having disposed you to do so! That’s obvious, because you’ve left the world and made vows to devote yourselves more closely to the holy imitation of Our Lord. So then, by His mercy we’re quite ready and strictly obligated to practice these teachings, if they aren’t contrary to the Institute.<sup>9</sup> Let’s fill our minds with them, fill our hearts with their love, and live according to all that. Let’s ask the Apostles, who loved them so much and kept

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<sup>9</sup>There is no reason to be surprised at this reservation; all the evangelical counsels are not for everyone.

them so exactly; let's ask the Blessed Virgin, who, better than anyone else, fathomed their essence and showed how to practice them; lastly, let's ask Our Lord, who laid them down, to grant us the grace to be faithful to practicing them, stirring ourselves up to this by being attentive to their virtue and example. There's reason to hope that, seeing us here in the process of living according to these teachings, they'll be favorable to us in time and in eternity. Amen."

**198. - SEEKING THE KINGDOM OF GOD**  
(Common Rules, Chap. II, Art. 2)

February 21, 1659

"Messieurs, since I'm feeling well enough to speak to you this evening, we're going to continue the explanation of the second chapter of our Rules. The last conference—the first one on this chapter—was on Gospel teachings in general, of which this Company should make a special profession, as of a divine teaching, given mainly for souls that aspire to holiness, for righteous souls chosen by God to be lights on earth, as Our Lord states, and to win heaven. We said something of this to you last Friday; I'd only bore you by saying more on it, except to remind you in passing that these teachings are addressed especially to us because they're means of achieving the primary purpose we've proposed to ourselves, which is our own growth in holiness, and because we have a special obligation to practice them since we've made them our own Rules.

"Let's move on now to the second article, in which the Rule states with Jesus Christ, 'Seek first the kingdom of God and His justice, and all these things you need will be given you besides.'<sup>1</sup> Since Our Lord has recommended this to us, we have to apply ourselves to it; He wills it; He's the Rule of the Mission; He's the one speaking, and it's our job to be attentive to His words and to give ourselves to His Majesty in order to put them into practice. It's

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**Conference 198.** - Manuscript of Conferences.

<sup>1</sup>Cf. Mt 6:33. (NAB)

appropriate to explain to you word for word the ones we've just mentioned, at least the first and principal ones.

“So then, we've said that we're seeking the kingdom of God. “Seeking” is just a word, but it seems to me that it says many things. It means putting ourselves in the state of always aspiring to what is recommended to us, working constantly for the kingdom of God, and not remaining in a cowardly state, with set ideas, and being attentive to our interior life and to keeping it well regulated, but not giving attention to the exterior for our own enjoyment. ‘Seek, seek,’ implies care and action. Seek God in yourselves, for Saint Augustine acknowledges that, as long as he sought Him outside of himself, he didn't find Him; seek Him in your own soul, as in a dwelling place that's pleasing to Him. That's the foundation on which His servants who strive to put all the virtues into practice build them. The interior life is essential; it has to be our aim; if we lack that, we lack everything. Those who have already failed in this should be troubled, ask God's forgiveness, and set things right. If there's anyone who needs this, it's the wretched man who's speaking to you now; I fall, I relapse, I often let my mind wander, and I rarely enter into myself again. I pile up fault upon fault; that's the miserable life I lead and the bad example I give.”

Then, recollecting himself, M. Vincent added, “O you pitiful man! You have such an obligation to lead an interior life, and here you are, in the state of falling and relapsing! May God forgive me for this!

“Messieurs, let's strive to make ourselves interior men so that Jesus Christ may reign in us; let's strive after this and not remain in a languishing, dissipated state, a worldly, profane state that causes us to busy ourselves with things the senses present, without reflecting on the Creator who made them, not making our meditation in order to extricate ourselves from worldly things, or not seeking the Sovereign Good. So let's seek, Messieurs, and what? Let's seek the glory of God, the reign of Jesus Christ.

“After that word ‘seek’ comes ‘first,’ that is, seek the kingdom of God before all else. ‘But, Monsieur, there are so many things to do, so many house duties, so many ministries in town and country;

there's work everywhere; must we, then, leave all that to think only of God?' No, but we have to sanctify those activities by seeking God in them, and do them in order to find Him in them rather than to see that they get done. Our Lord wills that we seek above all His glory, His kingdom, and His justice, and, to do this, that we make our primary concern the interior life, faith, trust, love, our spiritual exercises, meditation, shame, humiliations, our work and troubles, in the sight of God our Sovereign Lord. We must present to Him continual offerings of service and a desire to obtain kingdoms for His Goodness, graces for His Church, and virtues for the Company. Once we're grounded in seeking God's glory in this way, we can be assured that the rest will follow.

"We have Our Lord's promise that He'll take care of all our needs, without our worrying about them; still, we have to be prepared in temporal affairs and tend to them in the way God desires, but not make them our main concern. God expects this care of us, and the Company will do well to be watchful about it; if, however, it makes the mistake of seeking exterior and perishable things, neglecting those that are interior and divine, it will no longer be the Mission; it will be a body without a soul; and this place will be, as it was formerly, a cause of distress for upright persons and of divine aversion. That, Messieurs, is how, first and foremost, we must seek the kingdom of God. But what is the kingdom of God?

"Various explanations are given for this expression:

"(1) It's understood to mean God's reign over all creatures, angelic and human, animate and inanimate, over the damned and the devils. He is Master, Lord, and Sovereign of all and of all things.

"(2) In the government of His Church, composed of the elect and of reprobates, God is King; He has given laws to this Church; He inspires those who govern it with the good leadership they exercise; He reigns over the canonical Councils and holy assemblies held for the good organization of Christianity, and, therefore, the Holy Spirit presides at them. He's the one who has given the insights, spread throughout the world, that have enlightened saints, confounded the wicked, dissipated doubts, manifested the truth, unmasked errors, and shown the ways by which the Church

in general and each of the faithful in particular are able to proceed securely.

“(3) He reigns in a special way over the righteous, who honor and serve Him; over good souls, who give themselves to God and live only for God; and over the elect, who are to glorify Him eternally. It’s over persons such as these that He reigns in a particular way by the virtues they practice and which they have received from Him. He’s the God of virtues, and there’s none that doesn’t come from Him. They all proceed from this Infinite Source, who gives them to chosen souls, who, because they’re always ready to welcome them, are always faithful in practicing them. That’s how they gain the kingdom of God; and that’s how God reigns in them.

“Ah, Messieurs! Are we in that state? Do we have the happiness of having God as our Master, with the result that His virtues find no resistance in us? Let’s ask ourselves, my dear confreres, ‘Am I doing what those souls are doing? Am I prompt in responding to God’s calls, faithful to His Will, exact in my practices and always ready to do His Divine Will?’ If so, say confidently what Our Lord said, ‘Just as the living Father has sent me, so I have life because of my Father.’<sup>2</sup> Reflect that, since the God of virtues has chosen you to practice them, you live by Him and His kingdom is in you. But, if that isn’t the case, what must we do? We should give ourselves to Him without delay and unreservedly from this very moment, so that He may be pleased to dispose us to this life of the elect, and to divest us of so much self-will and from seeking our own satisfaction, which hinder God from residing peacefully and absolutely in us. What is there to prevent us from making now, all together, this act of abandonment to His Divine Goodness? Let’s say to Him, then, ‘O King of our hearts and souls, here we are, humbly prostrate at Your feet, totally committed to Your obedience and love. We consecrate ourselves anew, entirely and forever, to the glory of Your Majesty, and we entreat You with all our might to establish Your reign over the Company, to grant it the grace of referring its government to You, and to see that no one deviates from it, so that, in this

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<sup>2</sup>Cf. Jn 6:57. (NAB)



way, we'll all be guided by the conduct of Your Son and of Your subjects.'

“That, Messieurs, is how those words, ‘Seek the kingdom of God,’ are to be understood. But there’s more: ‘and His justice.’ Note that He adds *justice*. I’m well aware that there are some who make little distinction between seeking the kingdom of God and seeking His justice, and, even though I shouldn’t have to dwell any longer on the explanation of these words, nevertheless, because others do make this distinction and because there’s not a single word in Sacred Scripture from which we can’t draw some benefit if it’s explained clearly and meditated, it won’t be out of place to tell you here what may be understood by those words, ‘Seek the justice of God.’ To do this, we must, first of all, have a clear knowledge of what this justice of God is. You, Messieurs, have studied theology and I’m an ignorant man, a fourth form student; you know that there are two sorts of justice: commutative and distributive, and both are found in God: *justus Dominus et justitias dilexit*.<sup>3</sup> It’s also found in human beings, but with this imperfection: it’s dependent, whereas God’s justice is sovereign. Still, our kinds of justice have their own properties, by which they’re related to and resemble divine justice, on which they depend. So, God’s justice is both commutative and distributive at the same time.

“(1) It’s commutative because God changes people’s works into virtues and their merits into rewards, and, since bodies become corrupt, the soul takes possession of the glory they’ve merited. This change of merits into rewards is done by measure and number—what the theologians call *with arithmetic proportion*. Yes, God grants virtues in proportion to the effort we make to acquire them and gives glory according to the number and value of good acts. That should impress us, Messieurs; God will reward us, based on justice and accounting of works. So, let’s get to work, my dear confreres, let’s strive for virtue, quicken our pace, seek the honor and good pleasure of our good and sovereign Savior, become spiritual men, and make the kingdom of God grow within us. There’s a

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<sup>3</sup>*The Lord is just, and he loves just deeds.* Cf. Ps 11:7. (NAB)

passage from Saint Paul to the Corinthians that states, *opera illorum sequuntur illos*;<sup>4</sup> the good works of the righteous man will accompany him, and God will reward him for them, just as He'll punish the wicked in proportion to their iniquities, in the pains of hell; but He'll do it strictly and with that arithmetic proportion we've just mentioned. Let's lessen the miseries of our soul and make progress in virtue; God will be exact in rewarding us for our good works and in punishing us for the bad ones. That's true; I read it again just recently. If, then, God acts this way, Messieurs, shouldn't we keep His justice in view by seeking His glory, and His glory in view by seeking His justice? Shouldn't we do all the good we can in view of this so that our works may be worthy of this commutation of glory and that the glory may correspond to the works? We mustn't hope that God will give us a good, overflowing measure, if we're stingy with Him; we have to sow abundantly with good actions in order to harvest a big reward, and in this way we're seeking God's justice, as commutative and proper to Him alone.

“(2) It's also distributive because it keeps a certain proportion called geometric, since God gives paradise to the good and hell to wicked persons like myself, who can't expect anything but a severe punishment. Paradise is an assemblage of infinite benefits that God distributes to righteous souls. And what is hell? A place where all sorts of endless disorders abound, distributed to those who have prostituted themselves to sin; and that justice is called distributive. Why? Because paradise is the reward or salary with which God recompenses His servants, and hell is the punishment with which He chastises the wicked. God has the right to give to each person according to his works. Let's not deceive ourselves, Messieurs, we will be punished; we should fear this.

“Recently I was reading—or else someone told me—that a religious said that the fear of God seemed to be present in his Order; fear prevailed in it but not for everyone, for he made exception of a few men who hardly think about God's punishment and in whom there's no fear of God; they're negligent persons with no regard or

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<sup>4</sup>*Their works accompany them.* Cf. Rv 14:13. (NAB) What Saint Vincent quotes here comes from the Book of Revelation rather than from one of Saint Paul's Epistles to the Corinthians.

concern for the last ends. 'As for me,' he said, 'I make meditation, say the Office, and perform all my spiritual exercises, but with the fear of doing them badly or at least of not doing them well enough.'

"Messieurs, let's think about how we carry out ours; we'll find only too great reason for worry that, instead of our meriting a reward for them, God will find us worthy of punishment. But what's the point of all this talk of commutative and distributive justice? In a word, it's to help us to understand that, to seek properly, and even to happily find, this divine justice, we must consider it as commutative and distributive at the same time, that is, to look on it as ready to reward us abundantly, if we strive to merit it by the practice of the virtues suited to our state; this, in a certain sense, is to imitate divine justice.

"That's a long explanation of this teaching, Messieurs; and yet, it's not all; we have to realize that, by these words, 'Seek first the kingdom of God and His justice,' Our Lord is asking us not only to seek first of all the kingdom of God and His justice in the way we've just explained; I mean it doesn't suffice to act in such a way that God may reign in us, seeking His kingdom and His justice in this way, but, in addition, we should desire and see that the kingdom of God is brought and extended everywhere, that God reigns in all souls, that there's only one true religion on earth, and that the world may live other than it's doing, by the strength and power of God and the means established in His Church, and, lastly, that His justice may be sought and imitated so well by everyone through their holy lives, that He may be perfectly glorified by them in time and in eternity.

"So that's what we have to do: desire and work for the spreading of God's glory. I say 'His glory' and 'His kingdom,' and I use the terms interchangeably because they're one and the same: God's glory is in paradise and His kingdom is in souls. So then, let's have this constant desire that the kingdom of God may be extended, and the zeal to work with all our might at it so that, having obtained the kingdom of God on earth, we may go to enjoy it in heaven. Let's keep this lamp always lit in our hearts.

"O Messieurs, how fortunate we are to be in a Company whose purpose is not only to make us worthy of His reign in us, but that He

may be loved and served by everyone and that the whole world may be saved! When we read the Rule, we'll find that it recommends, first of all, that we strive for our own holiness, that is, to have God reign in you and in me, and, second, to cooperate with Him in the extension of His kingdom. Isn't that something great? It's acting like the angels, appointed by God to show us His Will so that we may act in accord with it. Is there any state on earth more desirable than ours?

“That, Messieurs, is a rough explanation of the words, ‘Seek first the kingdom of God and His justice.’ Let's go on to the reasons we have to give ourselves to God for that purpose. The first is that, not only does our Rule oblige us to do it, but Jesus Christ orders us to do it. Aspiring to make God known, served, and loved, and that His kingdom and His justice may be sought above all else is the first of His teachings and His chief practice. Now, if Our Lord urges us to do this and commands it, He also gives the grace to do it to those who ask Him for it and increases it for those who are faithful to Him. What can prevent us, my dear confreres, from responding to something so holy, so advantageous and so much in tune with our vocation? My Rule tells me that I should act in such a way that God may reign. Oh, nothing will prevent me, with the help of God, from devoting myself entirely to such a just duty!

“The second reason for that is Our Lord's promise. And what is it? If we see to His affairs, He'll see to ours. Let's seek His glory, concern ourselves with that, and not worry about anything else; *et haec omnia adjicientur vobis*: and all those other things you need will be given you besides. Let's take care to seek God's reign in us and in others by means of all the virtues, and let's leave the care of all other temporal affairs to Him; that's the way He wants it. Yes, He'll provide us with food, clothing, and even with knowledge. How unfortunate for us if we don't have these! How unfortunate for Missioners who don't strive to acquire them! First of all, however, we have to aim to acquire the virtues, work at our interior life, and prefer spiritual things to temporal ones; then all the rest will follow.

“And, on this topic, remember Abraham, to whom God had promised to populate the whole earth through his son. Yet, God

commands him to sacrifice him.<sup>5</sup> If Abraham puts his son to death, how will God fulfill His promise? Nevertheless, Abraham, who had accustomed himself to do God's Will, makes it his duty to carry out that order, without worrying about the rest. 'It's up to God to think about that,' he could have said. 'If I carry out His command, He'll fulfill His promise; but how? I have no idea. It's enough that He's omnipotent. I'm going to offer Him what's most dear to me in this world, since that's what He wills. But he's my only son! No matter! But by taking this child's life, I'll deprive God of the means to keep His word. It's all the same! He wants it that way so it must be done. But if I preserve my son's life, my posterity will be blessed; God said so. Yes, He did, but He also said that I should put him to death; He made that very clear; I will obey, come what may; and I'll trust His words.' Just admire that trust; he doesn't worry about what will happen; yet, it touches him deeply; he hopes, however, that everything will turn out well, since God has a hand in it. Why shouldn't we have the same hope, if we leave to God the care of all that concerns us and prefer what He commands us?

"On this topic again, shouldn't we admire the fidelity of the children of Rechab?<sup>6</sup> He was a good man, inspired by God to live differently from other men. He had to live only in tents and shelters, and not in houses, so he left the one he had. There he was, in the country, where the thought came to him not to plant any vines so as not to drink wine. In fact, he didn't plant them and never drank any. He forbade his children to sow wheat and other grain, to plant trees or have a garden, with the result that all of them lacked wheat, bread, and fruit. 'So then, poor Rechab, how are you going to manage? Do you think your family can get along without food, any more than you can?' 'We'll eat what God sends us.' That's hard to bear, Messieurs. Whatever the poorest religious may say, they don't carry their renunciation that far. But the fact remains that the trust of this man was so great that he deprived himself of all the conveniences of life to depend absolutely on the care of Providence,

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<sup>5</sup>Cf. Gn 22:1-19. (NAB)

<sup>6</sup>Cf. Jer 35:1-19. (NAB)

and he remained in that state for 350 years. This was so pleasing to God that, reproaching Jeremiah for the callousness of his people who had abandoned themselves to their pleasures, He said to him, 'Go to those hardened people; tell them there's a man who does this, and this, and this.' So Jeremiah sends for one of Rechab's sons to prove the great abstinence of the father and the children; he has bread, wine, glasses, etc. placed on the table. When the boy arrives, Jeremiah says to him, 'I have an order from God to tell you to drink some wine.' 'And I,' said the boy, 'have orders not to drink it; we haven't drunk any for a long time, since our father has forbidden us to do so.'

"Now, if that father was so confident that God would provide for his family's subsistence, without his worrying about it, and if the children are so faithful as to respect the father's intention, how confident we should be, Messieurs, that no matter in what situation God may place us, He will also provide us with what we need! What is our fidelity to the Rules, in comparison with the fidelity of those children, who weren't obliged to abstain from those things to maintain life, and lived nevertheless in that poverty? *O mon Dieu*, my dear confreres! Let's ask His Divine Goodness for great trust concerning the outcome of all that concerns us; provided that we're faithful to Him, we'll lack nothing; He himself will live in us, guide, defend and love us. Whatever we say or do, all will be pleasing to Him.

"The third reason we have is that, in St. Matthew,<sup>7</sup> Our Lord speaks of that confidence we should have in God, when He says, 'Look at the birds, who neither sow nor reap; yet God feeds them everywhere. He clothes and nourishes them, even the grass of the field and the lily, which is so magnificently clothed that even Solomon in all his glory had nothing like it.' Now, if God provides in this way for the birds and the plants, why wouldn't you, you of little faith, trust such a good and provident God? *Quoi!* To have greater confidence in yourselves than in Him! He can do everything, and you can do nothing; yet, you dare to rely on your own diligence

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<sup>7</sup>Cf. Mt 6:26-29. (NAB)

rather than on His goodness, and on your own poverty than on His wealth! O human misery! Let me say here that Superiors are bound to see to the needs of each individual and to furnish whatever is needed. Just as God is obliged to furnish life to all His creatures—even to the smallest insect—He wills also that Superiors and Officers, as instruments of His Providence, should see that neither the priests, nor the clerics, nor the Brothers are in need of anything, nor one hundred, two hundred, three hundred persons or more, if they were here in this house, neither the most insignificant nor the greatest. Consequently, you, too, brothers, should count on the loving care of the same Providence for your maintenance, and be content with what it gives you, without asking whether the Community has or doesn't have enough for this, nor should you worry about anything other than seeking the kingdom of God, because His infinite wisdom will provide for all the rest.

“Recently, I asked a Carthusian, who is a local Superior, if he called the monks to Council for the management of their temporal affairs. ‘We call the Officers,’ he replied, ‘that is, the Sub-prior, the Procurator, and myself. We leave the others in peace; their only concern is to chant the praises of God and to do what the Rule and obedience prescribe.’ We have the same practice here in this house, thank God; let’s keep to it. We’re also obliged to have some property and to use it to good advantage in order to meet all our needs. There was a time when the Son of God sent His disciples off without money or provisions; then He found it proper to have some of those things, to accept alms, and to gather something together to provide for His group and to assist persons who were poor. The Apostles continued that, and Saint Paul says of himself that he worked with his hands and earned enough to help the needy Christians. So then, it’s up to Superiors to make sure that we live economically; they also try to ensure that this attention to temporal matters doesn’t lessen attention to virtue; they must see that this practice is in force in the Company and that God reigns over everything in it; that has to be their primary goal.

“And so that all of us will have this, the Rule gives us a fourth reason: *Consequently*, it says, *the Missioner should not worry too*

*much about temporal affairs, but cast all his cares on the Providence of the Lord, confident that, as long as we're well-grounded in that sort of love and trust, we will be always under the protection of God, unaffected by evil, and never lack what we need, etc.* This doesn't come from us, but from Holy Scripture, where it's said, '*Qui habitat in adjutorio Altissimi, in protectione Dei caeli commorabitur.*'<sup>8</sup> No evil will befall those persons because everything will work out well for them; and they'll lack nothing because God won't fail to give them whatever they need both for soul and body. In the end, all will turn out well for them, although it may seem that every evil is threatening them. Therefore, my dear confreres, we have good reason to hope that, as long as you're firm in this confidence, not only will you be preserved from any unfortunate accidents, but all sorts of good things will happen to you. Yes, you have good reason to hope for this, even when everything seems to be lost.

“By this detachment from created things and from their own convenience, the saints, Messieurs, the saints, tried to witness to heaven and earth their perfect trust in the Lord; for that purpose they made to Him the sacrifice of their property, pleasures, and honors, their life, and their soul. Why? So that He might be their Master, that He might reign absolutely over them and that all of them might depend on Him alone for all things, for time and for eternity. Oh, what great surrender! Oh, what great trust! But how far did not the Saint of saints, who cleared the way for them, carry the practice of those things I just mentioned to you! (I have to cut this short; time is running out.) So then, the Son of God declared of himself that He didn't seek His own glory but that of His Father. Everything He did and said was in order to glorify Him, reserving for himself only desolation, suffering, and ignominy. What a beautiful example, my dear confreres, by which Jesus Christ gently impels us to adopt His inclinations, affections, practices, and counsels! He never sought

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<sup>8</sup>*You who dwell in the shelter of the Most High will remain under the protection of the God of heaven. Cf. Ps 91:1. (NAB)*



His own glory. But if we're willing to imitate Him, if we're willing to renounce all aspiration to honor, if we're willing to seek only His and to act only to establish His glory in souls, to make His kingdom come and His Will be done on earth as in heaven; if we are, we'll have everything. These seem to me to be very compelling reasons to motivate us to the practice of that holy teaching. But what are the means to do that?

“The means are:

“(1) to ask God constantly for it. We're beggars; let's make ourselves such toward God; we're poor and weak, we need God everywhere, especially in the observance of this teaching, which obliges us to seek God before anything else—which we can do only by His Spirit. Asking Him for it is still not enough; we have to adopt the practice of this Rule and begin to do it tomorrow. To do what? To practice the virtues it presupposes: zeal for His glory, detachment from created things, and confidence in the Creator; to make interior and exterior acts of it; to think often about it and, if we fall, to get up again.

“(2) In the same Rule it's stated: that each individual will prefer spiritual things to temporal ones, the soul to the body, God to the world, and lastly that he'll choose a shortage of food, infamy, torments, and death itself rather than be separated from Jesus Christ. When we find ourselves in these circumstances, where there's question of something spiritual or something material, we have to embrace the former and set aside the latter; that's what God asks of us. Making Him reign in us means tending to His affairs rather than to our own, and preferring the life of the soul to that of the body, brothers, the life of the soul to that of the body. You see, if the occasion arises for the sick to give God something during their illness, they should do it. To prefer the soul to the body, to prefer the honor of God to that of the world, Messieurs, is part of the kingdom of God. Let's drink the chalice, let's accept shame, confident that it will turn to our advantage. Lastly, we must make up our minds, together with the Apostle, to choose torments and death itself rather than be separated from the love of God. It may happen that the occasion will arise, where we have to choose between losing Jesus

Christ or suffering prison, torture, fire, or martyrdom. O blessed occasions which provide the opportunity for the Son of God to reign supreme! Let's give ourselves to Him, Messieurs; I ask you to do this by His Holy Name, that He may grant us the grace of preferring sorrows and even death to the wretched danger of losing His love; that's what we must be determined to do from this very hour. Yes, my God, yes, Messieurs, if the opportunity presents itself of losing honor or the pleasures of life in order that Jesus Christ may be known and served, living and reigning everywhere, here we are, disposed to do this, here we are, by His mercy, disposed to do this. So then, let's make this offering to Him in advance, even though nature may find it repugnant; let's be confident that God will strengthen us in our need. 'I will send you as lambs among wolves,' Our Lord said to his Apostles.<sup>9</sup> He didn't want them to think only of what they had to say before Princes and tyrants; 'for at that time,' He said, 'what you'll have to say will be given to you.' Have no doubt, Messieurs, that He'll also be with you in similar circumstances, to help you to speak and suffer like perfect Christians. Let Him act, and let's have in view only His loving, unparalleled good pleasure. Oh, who will give us the zeal of Saint Teresa, who made a vow to choose always the glory of her Lord—not just His glory, but His greater glory! An opportunity would arise to do a good work for His honor; but should another, of greater importance, present itself she would do that one and put off the other; and she committed herself by word and in conscience to act always in that way. That was also the good custom of Saint Ignatius: *Ad majorem Dei gloriam*. A great Prelate of the present time has the same practice of animating his actions and conduct with this intention of choosing the greater good. I'm speaking of the Bishop of Cahors,<sup>10</sup> who always tends toward what is the most perfect; and he's successful in this.

"If there are any among us who feel a similar desire, fine, my dear confreres, open your hearts to that divine inspiration and

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<sup>9</sup>Cf. Mt 10:16-20. (NAB)

<sup>10</sup>Alain de Solminihac (cf. XI, 327, n. 5).

follow that noble impulse, which always aims high. Let the others, who, like my wretched self, are crawling around here below, please get up. Let's give ourselves to God to desire and act so that the kingdom of God may be extended in us, in the priestly state, and in the people. By so doing, we'll put into practice what Our Lord and our zeal require of us in this article.

“O my Savior Jesus Christ, who became holy so that we also might become holy, and who spurned earthly kingdoms with their wealth and glory, having only at heart the reign of Your Father in souls, *non quaero gloriam meam*, etc., *sed honorifico Patrem meum*;<sup>11</sup> if You lived like that, even though with another self, since You are God in relation to Your Father, what should we not do to imitate You, who have raised us from dust and called us to observe Your counsels and to aspire to holiness! Ah, Lord! Draw us after You, grant us the grace of adopting the practice of Your example and of our Rule, which leads us to seek the kingdom of God and His justice and to abandon ourselves to Him for everything else; grant that Your Father may reign in us, and reign in us yourself, causing us to reign in You by faith, hope, and love, by humility, obedience, and union with Your Divine Majesty. By so doing, we have reason to hope that we will reign one day in Your glory, which has been merited for us by Your Precious Blood. That, my dear confreres, is what we should ask Him at meditation; and say to ourselves all day long, beginning on waking, ‘What shall I do to make God reign supreme in my heart? What shall I also do to extend the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ throughout the world? My good Jesus, teach me to do this and help me to do it!’ When the clock strikes, let's renew this prayer and the resolution to work at this, and do it even more especially at holy Mass, instituted to acknowledge sovereignly the supreme majesty of God and to obtain for us the graces we need to live and die under the glorious reign of His eternal Son. Amen.”

After the prayer, M. Vincent said, with a deep sentiment of humility and gratitude, “Please wait a minute, Messieurs. We're

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<sup>11</sup>*I do not seek my own glory but I honor my Father. Cf. Jn 8:54. (NAB)*

speaking about Providence, my dear confreres, and about God's wish that we abandon ourselves to it; and just look at how it has pleased His Goodness to give us proof just lately of how true He is to His promises. He has inspired a lady, recently deceased (she died yesterday), to do some good for this poor, insignificant Company and to a house other than this one. In her will, she left it 18,000 livres—a considerable amount, 18,000 livres! O Goodness of God, how admirable You are! O admirable guidance, how worthy of love You are! O infinite Providence, who sees to the needs of each individual! On the very day we were to speak about You, You show yourself to us; on the very day we were to stir ourselves up to rely on your fatherly care with regard to temporal matters so as to think only of the spiritual, that same day You send a young boy to us here to give us the first news of that large donation! When that boy arrived at the gate, he asked to speak to me and was told that I wasn't available; he persisted and in the end was so successful that he came into my room, where he presented me with the excerpt from the will of the deceased lady, Mme de Vins,<sup>12</sup> who remembered the poorest and most useful house in the Company, the Marseilles house, to which she bequeathed that sum of money, to be used as an annuity, provided that missions be given in the Marseilles diocese and, from time to time, on some of her lands in that region. Later, the Pastor of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet<sup>13</sup> informed me of this. Who could not admire, Messieurs, that grace of God, who, seeing this poor family in danger of foundering, put it back on its feet and strengthened it by this considerable assistance! The house is midway on the route to Rome and is a seaport from which ships embark for Italy and the Levant; consequently, it's very convenient for the Company. It takes care of the health and relief of the poor galley convicts, both the sick and those who are

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<sup>12</sup>Dame Laurence Veyrac de Paulian, Baronne de Castelnaud, was the widow of Melchior Dagouz de Montauban, Marquis de Vins, Maréchal of the King's troops. She died in Paris on February 20, 1659. By her will, drawn up on May 29, 1655, she left 18,000 livres to the Marseilles house for the maintenance of two Missioners. There is an excerpt of this act in the French National Archives (S 6707).

<sup>13</sup>Hippolyte Féret.

well, and handles the business of the slaves in Barbary. Along with all that, it does the same good works that other houses do.

“O my dear confreres, what a great reason for us to humble ourselves before God for the care He is taking to maintain us in this important house and in such an effective way, which we were not expecting! It’s a strong reason for us to acknowledge with all our might the good He does for that poor house, where our confreres are working so successfully and with such blessing. I’m telling the Company all this so that it may thank God, on the one hand, for the graces His Divine Goodness granted that good lady, who was very holy, and also for the charity His Infinite Mercy has done for us through her; and, on the other, so that it may ask Our Lord to be himself the eternal reward of her soul and to apply to her the merit of the good that will be done as a result of this donation. I ask all the priests to celebrate Mass tomorrow for this intention, if they have no other obligation. I almost forgot to tell you this, although I had intended to do so. That’s what I had to say to you.”

**199. - CONFORMITY TO THE WILL OF GOD**  
(Common Rules, Chap. II, Art. 3)

March 7, 1659

“My dear confreres, we’re explaining the second chapter of our Rules, concerning Gospel teachings. Recently, we spoke about this one: ‘Seek first the kingdom of God and His justice,’ contained in the second article of the chapter.

“This brings us to the third article, which states, *And because a sure way for a Christian to be able to grow rapidly in holiness is a conscientious effort to carry out God’s Will in all circumstances and at all times, each one of us, then, should try to integrate into his life, as far as possible, these four principles: (1) We should conscientiously carry out what is ordered and avoid what is for-*

*bidden, when these orders or prohibitions come from God, from the Church, from our Superiors, or from our Rules and Constitutions. (2) When there is a choice between several things indifferent in their nature and equally pleasing or displeasing, to be done at the same time, we should choose the less palatable rather than the more pleasing. This does not apply if the more pleasing things are necessary, since they then must be preferred to others. Still, our motivation ought not to be that we like them, but simply that they are more pleasing to God. If we are faced with several things indifferent in themselves but equally agreeable or disagreeable, then we may choose whichever one we wish, as coming from God's Providence. (3) When something unexpected happens to us in body or mind, be they afflictions or consolations, we are to accept all without fuss as coming from the loving hand of Our Lord. (4) Our motive for doing all these things is that they're God's Will, and in order to imitate, as far as possible in all that, Our Lord Jesus Christ, who always lived by these principles, and for that very motive. He tells us this himself: I always do what pleases my Father.*

“Now, in reading that, I find that a printer's error has slipped in,<sup>1</sup> which we didn't pick up; it's in the place where it's stated: *When there is a choice between several things indifferent in their nature and equally pleasing and displeasing, to be done at the same time*, because it should say, *When there is a choice between several things indifferent in their nature, and neither pleasing nor displeasing, to be done at the same time*; in that case, it's all right to chose whichever one we wish.

“So, the Rule says that this practice of doing God's Will helps us to attain the holiness of Christians and Missioners. We should note that there are various exercises suggested by masters of the spiritual life, which they practiced in different ways. Some proposed for themselves to have no preference in anything and felt that perfection consisted in desiring nothing, or refusing nothing God may send. In all circumstances, they would lift their hearts to God and had no preferences. This openness to God's Will is a holy practice.

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<sup>1</sup>The printer's error occurred only in the French version, not in the Latin.

O what a holy practice it is! To want what God wants in general and to want nothing in particular!

“(2) Others have determined to act with purity of intention, seeing God in whatever happens in order to do or to endure everything with Him in view. This is very difficult to grasp. To summarize, the practice of always doing God’s Will is much better than all that, for it includes openness to God’s Will and purity of intention, as well as all the other ways practiced and recommended; and, if there’s any other practice that leads to holiness, it will be found to a high degree in this one. Who is more open to God’s Will than someone who does it in everything, who doesn’t seek himself in anything, and who doesn’t even want things he could have unless it’s because God wants them? Is anyone freer and better disposed to do the Divine Will than that person? And how can purity of intention be better practiced than by doing God’s Will? Is there anyone who has more perfect purity of intention than to will and to do whatever God wills and in the way He wills it? If we compare all these practices, we’ll find that God is more glorified by our doing His Will than by all the others, and that there’s no one who honors Him more than the man who devotes himself in a special way to this holy practice. That’s one reason for us to really give ourselves to God to observe this Rule.

“Here’s a second reason, namely, that it’s certain that works done in a human, petty manner, without our giving them a noble purpose, such as doing God’s Will, are dead works. What is it but lifeless actions, if we participate in the Divine Office, meditate, preach, and work with no direction? It’s worthless currency, lacking the image of the Prince, for God takes works into account only when He sees himself in them and they’re dedicated to Him.

“Our father Adam was a good tree in the garden of the earthly paradise, producing naturally fruits pleasing to the eyes of his Lord; but when the devil made him commit sin, his will was perturbed. Separating itself from God’s Will, it made him incapable of producing anything of himself that might please God; and we who come from that tainted stock are, humanly speaking, just as powerless, with the result that what proceeds from that, actions stemming from the old Adam, are not at all pleasing to God, no, not at all, because

they're natural actions that have no connection with God, since they're not guided by Him.

“If there are theologians who think that what isn't done for God is sin, why wouldn't we think that, if it isn't sinful, it should at least be considered useless? Now, to see that our actions and inactivity are good, that what we do and fail to do have the conditions required to please God, the Rule gives us the means, when it orders us to do always and in all things the Will of God, and it states that each individual will strive, as far as possible, to make this practice his own. If we have sufficient grace from God and enough trust in His goodness—which He doesn't fail to give us—shouldn't we give ourselves to Him at this very moment to please Him and to act, from now on, in Him and through Him? *Deus virtutum*:<sup>2</sup> He's the God of hosts. So let's practice these virtues, let's do everything for God! If there were some in the Company who were faithful to that, if there were a large number of them, if all of us were among that blessed number, *O Sauveur*, what a blessing! *O mon Dieu*, how pleasing the Mission would be to You! Divine Goodness, You know it would! And we know, Messieurs, that our works are worthless if they're not vibrant and animated by the intention of doing them for God. That's the teaching of the Gospel, prompting us to do all to please Him. We have to give great praise to His Infinite Majesty for the grace it has granted to the Company of adopting this very holy and always sanctifying practice. Yes, from the very beginning, all of us have desired to enter this way of the perfect, which is to honor Our Lord in all our works; and if that hasn't been done as perfectly as it should be done, there's no need to seek the cause of it, it's this wretched man who hasn't given the example of it.

“The example of Our Lord is our third reason. It was His practice to do always the Will of His Father in everything, and He said that's why He came on earth—not to do His own Will, but the Will of His Father. O Savior! O Goodness! What a contrast, what depth You give to the practice of Your virtues! You are the King of Glory, yet You come into the world only to do the Will of the One who sent

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<sup>2</sup>Cf. Ps 80:5. (NAB)



You. You know, brothers, how dear this sacred affection was to the heart of Our Lord. *Cibus meus est*, He said, *ut faciam voluntatem ejus qui misit me.*<sup>3</sup> What nourishes, delights, and strengthens me is to do the Will of my Father.

“Since this is the case, Messieurs, shouldn’t we consider ourselves blessed to have entered a Company that makes special profession of practicing what the Son of God practiced? Shouldn’t we often lift our hearts to Him to know the height, the depth, and the breadth of this practice, which leads to God and fills us with Him, which encompasses all good things and helps us to give up the bad ones. *Cibus meus est ut faciam voluntatem ejus qui misit me.* O my Savior, that’s what You did! Saint John’s practice was penance; he was filled with the desire to do it and to get others to do it; that’s why he came into this world. And You, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, You came into it filled with this love of doing Your Father’s Will and of inculcating it in us. Elijah had this ardor and admirable zeal for the glory of his God; he was burning with enthusiasm to impress human hearts with respect and awe; and You, my Savior, were animated with that great, incomparable desire that God’s Will be done by all creatures. That’s why you inserted into the Lord’s Prayer, *fiat voluntas tua*. That’s the prayer You taught Your disciples; it’s what You willed everyone to ask and to do. To do what? The Will of the Eternal Father? Where? On earth as in heaven. And how? As the angels and saints do it: promptly, totally, constantly, and lovingly. I’m sure there are no priests here who have said Mass—or anyone who has done other actions holy in themselves—except to honor the majesty of God; yet, it may happen that God rejects our offerings because we did our own will on those days. Isn’t that what the prophet declared on the part of God: ‘I no longer want your fasts; you think you are honoring me and you are doing the opposite because, when you fast, you are doing your own will, and so you spoil the fasting?’ The same can be said of every work: doing your own will spoils your devotions, your ministries, your penances, etc. For the past twenty years, I’ve never

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<sup>3</sup>*My food is to do the will of the one who sent me.* Cf. Jn 4:34. (NAB)

read Isaiah, Chapter 58, without becoming very deeply moved, but, despite that, I'm no better.

“What, then, should we do so as not to waste our time and efforts? We should never act through our own interest or whim, but accustom ourselves to doing God's Will in all things—in all things, you see, and not just in some. It's sanctifying grace that makes the action and the person pleasing to God. What a consolation to think that, when I keep my Rules, when I carry out my ministry, I'm obeying Superiors and raising my heart to God to offer Him all those things, and, by so doing, am making myself constantly pleasing to God! So, then, it's sanctifying grace we should request, possess, and put to good use; otherwise, all is lost.

“ ‘Many will say to me,’ said Jesus Christ—and I was talking to you recently about this—‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy, expel demons, and work many wonders in Your name?’ ‘I never knew you,’ He will reply to them; ‘be gone, you evildoers.’ ‘But, Lord, are You calling evil-doing the prophecies and miracles we've done in Your name?’ ‘Get away from me, you villains, I don't know you.’ ‘And who, then, will enter the kingdom of heaven?’ ‘It will be those who do the Will of my Father, who is in heaven.’<sup>4</sup> Our Lord will never say ‘I don't know you’ to someone who has always tried to follow His Will. On the contrary, that's the person He'll have enter into His glory. O Savior, grant us the grace of being filled with that love, so that we won't bear any wild fruit but that all we produce may be done for and through You in order to be pleasing in your Father's eyes. Please help us to be faithful in this and always to do our work according to Your Will.

“Let's give ourselves to God, my dear confreres, to be attentive to this and to stand firm in it; for that will give us good reason to praise God. In what light will He not look on the Company in general and each man in particular? *Oh bien, in nomine Domini!* Those are plenty of reasons obliging us to make our own the practice of doing God's Will in all things and to cause us to resolve to

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<sup>4</sup>Cf. Mt 7:21-23. (NAB)

follow this teaching of Our Lord, *Cibus meus est ut faciam voluntatem ejus qui misit me*. Let's see now in what it consists.

“ I'm convinced that I have to practice it, but how? ” We should realize that all the works we do—or leave undone—are either commanded, forbidden, or indifferent, and the indifferent ones are such because they're neither forbidden nor commanded. That's how we can know God's Will. All the things a person does, I repeat, are either works ordered or forbidden, or are neither one nor the other. As for works commanded or forbidden, God wills that we do the former and don't do the latter: here's something commanded, I have to do it; here's something forbidden, I have to give it up. We must always do them, provided they're commanded by God, directly or indirectly—by God himself or by the Church. We must carry out whatever He commands us; we must do all that the Church orders; she is His spouse, and He is that father of the family who wants the children to obey their mother as they would obey Him. We'll be doing God's Will in that, if, directing to Him the action we're commanded to do, each of us says or intends, ‘ I want to do that in order to be pleasing to God, ’ or ‘ I don't want to do the forbidden action, so as to please His Goodness. ’ If we act in that way, we'll be doing without fail the Will of God. How does a child do his father's will, and a subject the will of the King? By doing what they order and avoiding what they forbid; the child does it to honor his father, and the subject to obey his King; and both of them do their wills when they carry out their words and orders. So, my dear confreres, you'll be doing God's Will when, doing what He commands and not doing what He forbids, you have the intention of glorifying that admirable Father and lovingly obeying that King of love. But, to really give life to this practice, you have to say, ‘ My God, I'm doing this or avoiding doing that because it's Your good pleasure. ’ That's the heart of the matter.

“ I said that the Church commands, and we must obey her as the spouse of Jesus Christ; for in that capacity she has the right to make laws and oblige the faithful to observe them; yes, she obliges us to observe what's ordained by the Councils, Popes, and Bishops. It

may seem that there's nothing meritorious in acting that way, but we can, nevertheless, make them good by offering them to God, even natural actions like eating, sleeping, etc., and doing them in the name of Our Lord, as the Apostle says.<sup>5</sup>

“In all these ways, then, we're doing God's Will: (1) by doing what's commanded and not doing what's forbidden, not only by God, His Church, our Rules, and our spiritual and Church Superiors, but also by the King, Governors, Magistrates, police officers, and judges established by God for temporal matters. To obey them is to do God's Will because God wants it that way; (2) by doing, in indifferent matters, actions that contribute more to mortifying the old man; and (3) by doing in the sight of God those that are neither pleasing nor displeasing to body or spirit—even natural things, although the inferior part may crave them—when necessity obliges us to do them.

“There's a fourth way of knowing God's Will, and it's by inspiration; for often He enlightens our understanding and gives impulses to our heart to be inspired by His Will; but we need the grain of salt not to be deceived in this. Among the multitude of thoughts and inspirations that come to us, some are apparently good, and yet they don't come from God and are not according to His pleasure. So then, we have to examine them carefully, have recourse to God himself, ask Him how that can be done, and ponder the reasons, the purpose, and the means to see if everything is seasoned according to His good pleasure. We should also propose them to wise persons and get the advice of those in charge of us, who are entrusted with the treasures of God's wisdom; in doing what they tell us, we'll be doing the Will of God.

“A fifth way of knowing and doing it is to reflect and to do things that are rational. One may present itself that is neither ordered nor forbidden, but is conformable to reason and, consequently, in accord with God's Will, which is never contrary to reason, and we should even do it according to the intention of the Church, which has us ask this grace of God by this prayer: *Praesta, quaesumus,*

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<sup>5</sup>Cf. 1 Cor 10:31. (NAB)

*omnipotens Deus, ut, semper rationabilia meditantes, quae tibi sunt placita et dictis exequamur et factis*: we entreat You, Almighty God, that, always meditating on what is reasonable, we may do, in word and act, the things that are pleasing to You. So, according to this prayer, to do something that seems reasonable is to do God's Will. That always means with the grain of salt of Christian prudence and the advice of those who direct us, because it may happen that what is involved is reasonable in itself but not in its present circumstances of time, place, or manner; in that case it shouldn't be done.

"It should be noted that we do God's Will actively when we do it in all the ways we've mentioned. We're doing it passively as well, by assenting to God when He does His Will in us, as in the unexpected things that happen without our thinking of them—some consolation that surprises us; we hear news, let's say, of the important conversion of a prominent person or of an entire country, or that God is being well served by persons we love, or that peace is made between two families or two provinces at odds with one another, whose dissension was scandalous to the Church—we have to welcome all that as coming from the hand of God, and rejoice about it in spirit as Our Lord did when He thanked His Father for having revealed His secrets to the simple. On the contrary, when something unpleasant happens to us, or an illness, a loss, a calumny, etc., we must also welcome that as coming from God because it's His pleasure to try us in that way, and He's the one who sends all these ordeals; *non est malum in civitate quod non fecerit Dominus*.<sup>6</sup> When Our Lord meditated in the Garden of Olives on the torments He had to suffer, He looked upon them as willed by His Father, and we must say as He did, 'O Lord, not my will but Yours be done.' So, since God's Will is known to us through these unexpected events, whether traumatic or comforting, we can practice His passive Will by accepting them as coming from God because it's up to Him alone to give us death or life. God's Will is, then, active and passive; it's active when we do it by the observance of His precepts and the

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<sup>6</sup>*There is no evil in a city that the Lord has not done.* Cf. Am 3:6. (NAB)

practice of things that are pleasing to Him; and it's passive when we allow Him to do these things himself within us without any action on our part. This isn't very clear, but time is too short for me to explain it better. We'll have a few conferences on it and then you'll see more clearly what God's Will is and how it should be practiced in every way. Meanwhile, I hope you'll get into the habit of offering God everything you do or suffer and say to Him, 'My God, it's Your Will that I prepare to give a sermon, to offer Holy Mass, to do a certain action; or that I'm tempted, sluggish, distressed; or that I'm upset or at peace, sad or happy. I will this, Lord, and I will it because it's Your Will.' Now let's look at some means to make this holy practice easier.

"The first means to start doing this is taught us in the Lord's Prayer, *Fiat voluntas tua sicut in caelo et in terra*; for, since Our Lord put these words in the daily prayer, He wants us to ask every day for the grace to do His Will on earth as it's done in heaven, unceasingly and perfectly, with simple, unchanging conformity to the Will of Our Lord. So let's ask Him often to be pleased to have us conform to all He wills and will have us do, and this will be a good means for us to obtain the grace of adopting this holy practice.

"The second means is to get into the habit, beginning tomorrow, or even right now, of not only saying this prayer, but also of doing what it says; for example, offering God your patience in listening to this poor man who's speaking to you, saying to Him, 'Lord, to glorify You, I want to hear and to do whatever is indicated to me on Your behalf.' You see, my dear confreres, it's important to actuate our will in this way and to accustom ourselves to renew our intention frequently, particularly when we get up in the morning: 'My God, I'm getting up to serve You; I'm going to meditation to please You, to hear or say Mass to honor You, to work because You will it.' Lastly, we have to strive to raise our hearts to Him in our principal actions in order to consecrate them entirely to Him and to do them in conformity to His Will.

" 'But, Monsieur, I can't remember that; I go for hours, half days, and entire days without thinking of God or consciously offering Him what I'm doing.' If there are any men like that among us,

they should humble themselves profoundly for it, be distressed at losing the merit of such actions, or at least of the pleasure God would have received if they had been offered to Him. To make up for this fault, each individual, at the beginning of the day, should make Him a general offering of all the works of the day; in addition, it's a good idea to repeat this offering once or twice during the morning and the same after dinner, saying to Him, 'My God, please accept all the impulses of my heart and body; draw them to yourself; I offer them to You with my Rules, my ministry, and my sufferings.' The more we do that, my dear confreres, the easier it will become and the greater benefit we'll have from it. It should be done at least four times a day. By this means, we'll deepen our love, and love will help us to persevere and grow in this holy practice. So, we need practice, Messieurs, we have to get into the practice of what I've just told you, in order to really practice God's Will.

"Mortification is also necessary because we have to be very firm with ourselves in order to renounce freely what we give to God, and it's by this virtue that we overcome ourselves. By it we can give up the pleasures and conveniences of life. It prompts us to do what human nature would avoid and what God asks. This, Messieurs, is what we have to set about doing properly, getting into the habit of mortifying ourselves interiorly and exteriorly in everything that appeals to human nature. That's the third means we have in order to make our own this practice of doing constantly the Will of God. Gradually, it will take hold of us and become a habit, or, to put it better, become a grace from God, with the result that, just as many people, by repeated acts, habituate themselves to it, we'll finish by being at home with it and always energized by it. How many people never lose sight of God! We see some among us always walking and acting in His presence. How many people in the world do this! Recently I was with someone whose conscience was bothering him because he was distracted three times in one day from thinking of God. Those people will be our judges and condemn us one day before the Divine Majesty for our forgetfulness of God—we who have nothing else to do than to love Him and to witness our love for Him by our attention and services.

“Let’s ask Our Lord, Messieurs, to grant us the grace of saying as He did, *Cibus meus est ut faciam voluntatem ejus qui misit me*. Oh, Fathers and Brothers, let’s do our best, beginning right now and at meditation tomorrow, to give ourselves to God in everything, always, and everywhere, in order to be hungry and thirsty for this justice. Let’s think about that; let’s clarify in particular what I told you in such a haphazard way and in such poor order; let’s excite our will to say and carry out these divine words of Jesus Christ, ‘My food is to do His Will and to perfect His work.’ It was Your pleasure, Savior of the world, Your ambrosia, Your nectar to do Your Father’s Will. We are Your children, who throw ourselves into Your arms to imitate Your practices; give us this grace. Since we can’t do it ourselves, we ask it of You, we hope for it from You, and we do so with confidence and a great desire to follow You. O Lord, if You are pleased to give this spirit to the Company so that it may work to become ever more pleasing in your sight, You’ll fill it with zeal to become like You; and this love is already helping it to live of Your life, so that each individual may say with Saint Paul, *Vivo ego, jam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus*.<sup>7</sup> O how blessed is the Company! O how blessed all of us are! If we aim for that, we’ll attain it without fail. Oh, what happiness to have verified in us these words, *Vivo ego, jam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus*! For we’re no longer living a human life, we’re living a divine life, and we’ll live it, my dear confreres, if our hearts are filled with, and our actions accompanied by, this intention to do God’s Will. Now, if some can say that they’re already doing that, which is true, others can also say, as I do, ‘Am I not unfortunate to see my confreres living the life of Jesus Christ, being pleasing in the sight of His Eternal Father, while I’m living a sensual, animal life, deserving to be barred from their conversation as the object of God’s displeasure?’ May it please His Goodness to have us adopt this sentiment so firmly in our soul that, being ashamed of our cowardice, we’ll work twice as hard to catch up with those most advanced on the road to perfection! May God grant us this grace!”

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<sup>7</sup>I live, no longer I, Christ truly lives in me. Cf. Gal 2:20. (NAB)



200. - A CONVERSATION WITH M. LOUIS LANGLOIS <sup>1</sup>

March 1659

M. Vincent sent for M. Langlois, priest of the Company, to tell him that the Archbishop of Narbonne,<sup>2</sup> who was only the Coadjutor at the time, had written to ask him to send the name of the person who would be in charge of the men he was going to send to Saint-Lazare for retreat and to be instructed in their functions in order to fulfill them properly and to be able to teach in elementary schools. He [M. Vincent] said that he had thought of him and had sent for him to ask him to do that and to be responsible for those persons, adding that he was going to inform the Coadjutor of Narbonne of this.

When M. Vincent asked M. Langlois to give himself to God to render this service to His Divine Majesty, M. Langlois excused himself, even saying that the priests of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet<sup>3</sup> would do a better job of this than the Company because they ran elementary schools and, consequently, were better aware of the qualities required of a school teacher.

M. Vincent replied that, since they came to us for this, we shouldn't refuse them, but that we also had to render this service to God and to the Church. He said he could make inquiries of some of those priests of Saint-Nicolas concerning the things they were accustomed to observe in similar circumstances and what a school teacher should do to carry out this duty well.

M. Langlois told M. Vincent that, as far as he was concerned, he was incapable of doing that and didn't have sufficient virtue, since he wasn't a prayerful person, and that someone else would do it better.

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**Conference 200.** - Manuscript of Repetitions of Prayer.

<sup>1</sup>Louis Langlois, born in Paris on January 6, 1616, was ordained a priest during Lent of 1640, entered the Congregation of the Mission on June 15, 1644, and took his vows on November 8, 1646. He was Superior in Luçon (1660-62), after which he was stationed in Fontainebleau.

<sup>2</sup>François Fouquet (Cf. XI, 327, n. 6).

<sup>3</sup>The priests of Adrien Bourdoise (cf. XI, 6, n. 1).

“It’s true,” said M. Vincent, “that of yourself and acting on your own, Monsieur, you’ll do nothing worthwhile and spoil things rather than do something commendable; so, you’re right in saying that you’ll spoil everything; however, Monsieur, God, is the one who will do all the good resulting from those exercises, and not you; for, of ourselves, Monsieur, we can do nothing but spoil everything. *Or sus*, Monsieur, go and do what you can for your part, and God will do the rest; encourage them strongly to give themselves to God in this ministry; and to stir them up to do so, make them see the benefits that will come to the Church and the honor God will draw from it.”

Then M. Langlois said to him, “Monsieur, since you want me to do and undertake this, despite my inability and lack of virtue, I’ll do whatever I can. I ask you, Monsieur, to kindly give me your blessing,” which M. Vincent did.

*Note:* M. Vincent told M. Langlois and me that the Coadjutor of Narbonne and some others had thought it was a good work, useful to the Church, to train persons to be school teachers in the parishes where there are none.

**201. - SIMPLICITY AND PRUDENCE**  
(Common Rules, Chap. II, Art. 4 and 5)

March 14, 1659

“My dear confreres, here are the fourth and fifth articles of the second chapter of our Rules, dealing with Gospel teachings, which will be the topic of this evening’s conference.

“First: *Jesus the Lord expects us to have the simplicity of a dove. This means saying things quite simply in the way we see them, without needless reservations. It also means doing things without any double-dealing or manipulation, our attention being focused solely*

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**Conference 201.** - Manuscript of Conferences. This conference has been published in large part by Abelly (*op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XV, pp. 238ff.) under a notably different form.

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 this world and reveals them to little ones.

“Second: But while Christ recommends the simplicity of a dove He tells us to have the prudence of a serpent as well. What He means is that we should speak and behave with discretion. We ought, therefore, to keep quiet about matters which should not be made known, especially if they are unsuitable or unlawful. When we are discussing things which it is good and proper to talk about we should hold back any details which would not be for God’s glory, or which could harm some other person, or which would make us foolishly smug. In actual practice this virtue is about choosing the right way to do things. We should make it a sacred principle, then, admitting of no exceptions, that since we are working for God we will always choose God-related ways for carrying out our work, and see and judge things from Christ’s point of view and not from a worldly-wise one; and not according to the feeble reasoning of our own mind either. That is how we can be prudent as serpents and simple as doves.

“If time permits, we’re going to talk about these two virtues. These Rules speak for themselves, brothers, and each of you understands them better than I, who, by wanting to tell you something to help you understand them better, am going to try your patience. *O Sauveur*, we’re talking about simplicity! So, the simplicity recommended by the Rule is the topic of our conference.

“Let’s look at the reasons we have to give ourselves to God to practice this virtue that’s so loveable. First of all, He invites us to do so when He says, *Estote prudentes sicut serpentes et simplices sicut columbae*.<sup>1</sup> When Our Lord told the Apostles He was sending them like sheep among wolves, He told them at the same time that they had to be as prudent as serpents and simple as doves. Then He added, ‘Beware, for they will hand you over to the courts and scourge you in their synagogues; and you will be led before gover-

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<sup>1</sup> *Be prudent as serpents and simple as doves*. Cf. Mt 10:16. (NAB)

nors and kings for my sake; but, when they hand you over, do not worry about what you are to say or how you are to speak; for, at that moment, you will be given what you are to say; the Holy Spirit will speak in you.<sup>2</sup> He mentions prudence first and then simplicity. The first is about going like sheep into the midst of wolves, where they ran the risk of being ill-treated. ‘Be prudent,’ He tells them. ‘Be on the alert, and, nevertheless, be simple;’ *cavete ab hominibus*;<sup>3</sup> be mindful of prudence; however, if you’re brought before judges, don’t worry about what you should say. That’s simplicity. You see that Our Lord links those two virtues, so He wants us to use them on the same occasion; He recommends both of them to us and leads us to understand that prudence and simplicity go well together when they’re understood properly. That’s the teaching of Jesus Christ; it’s directed to us, who want to practice the evangelical counsels and should embrace this one with reverence, love, and a strong resolution; consequently we should ask God often for these virtues, which He recommends, and work earnestly to acquire them.

“Simplicity is so pleasing to God! You know that Scripture says that His pleasure is to converse with the simple, the simple of heart, who act plainly and simply: *Cum simplicibus sermocinatio ejus*.<sup>4</sup> Do you want to find God? He’s speaking with the simple. O my Savior! O my dear confreres, you who feel the desire to be simple, what a happiness! What a happiness! Take courage, since you have God’s promise that His pleasure is to be with simple people.

“Another thing that recommends simplicity to us in a wonderful way are those words of Our Lord, *Confiteor tibi, Pater, quia abscondisti haec a sapientibus et prudentibus, et revelasti ea parvulis*.<sup>5</sup> I acknowledge this, Father, and thank You that the teaching I learned from Your Divine Majesty, which I am spreading among the people, is enjoyed only by the simple, and that You don’t allow the prudent of this world to understand it; You’ve hidden it from them, if not the words, at least the spirit.

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<sup>2</sup>Cf. Mt 10:17-20. (NAB)

<sup>3</sup>*Beware of people.* Cf. Mt 10:17. (NAB)

<sup>4</sup>Cf. Prv 3:32. (D-RB)

<sup>5</sup>*I confess to you, Father, because you have hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and have revealed them to little ones.* Cf. Mt 11:25. (NAB)

*“O Sauveur! O mon Dieu!* That should really frighten us. We run after knowledge as if our entire happiness depended on it. Woe to us if we don't have it! We do have to have enough of it; we have to study, but in moderation. Others seek an understanding of business matters, of passing for clever persons skilled in engaging in business in the world. They're the ones from whom God keeps the insight into Christian truths: from the wise and learned of the world. To whom, then, does He give it? To simple people, to good people. We see that verified in the difference we remark in the faith of peasants and our own. What I retain from my experience of this is the discernment I've always made that true religion—true religion, Messieurs, true religion—is found among the poor. God enriches them with a lively faith; they believe, they touch, they taste the words of life. You never see them in their illnesses, troubles, and food shortages get carried away with impatience, or murmur and complain; not at all—or rarely.

“They usually remain at peace during trials and tribulations. What's the reason for that? It's faith. And why? Because they're simple, God gives them in abundance the graces He refuses the rich and wise of this world. But to that let's add that everyone loves simple, candid people, who don't use subtleties or tricks, who are straightforward and speak sincerely, with the result that whatever they say comes from their heart. When they're at court, they're respected there, esteemed by all; in a well-regulated Company, each individual shows them special affection, for, although everyone doesn't act frankly, nevertheless, even such persons don't fail to love this in others.

“For all these reasons, we should give ourselves to God to make ourselves pleasing in His eyes by this virtue of simplicity. There are some in the Company who do this, and it's very obvious. Oh, how obvious it is! They're striving to acquire this virtue and they preach it by their example.

“ ‘But, Monsieur, what is it? I don't know how to practice it.’ There are some who claim there are two kinds of simplicity: one purely natural and silly, found in certain persons with poor judgment or discernment, which comes rather from . . . I wouldn't dare

say this—than from reason. Talk to them, and you see that they're dull-witted. That's worthless simplicity—or at least it's not a virtue.

“There's another kind that has a certain relation with God. Oh, the beautiful virtue! God is a simple being, who receives nothing from anyone else; He's a sovereign, infinite essence, with no admixture; He's a pure being, who never changes. Now, this virtue of the Creator is found in some creatures with whom He shares it, and is lived by them in the manner indicated in the Rule.

“It's given another definition, namely, that it's a virtue which keeps at a distance from us things that don't correspond to the simplicity of Adam when he was in the state of grace, nor to that of the second Adam, Our Lord, or the Apostles and other saints, when they were living on this earth. Their works and speech had no artifice in them, and no other object but God. According to these definitions, simplicity is concerned with seeing that actions and words are straightforward and sincere.

“I'm well aware that people think of simplicity in general as truth or purity of intention: truth, because it sees that our thoughts conform to the words and other signs by which we express them; purity of intention, because it makes all our acts of virtue tend straight to God. However, when we think of simplicity as a particular virtue, properly so-called, it includes not only purity and truth, but also its characteristic of keeping from our words and actions all deceit, craftiness, and duplicity; it's in this sense that our Rule speaks about it and that I intend to speak to you about it.<sup>6</sup> And to do this more clearly and in a more helpful way, we'll divide it in two: simplicity in words, and simplicity in actions.

“Simplicity in words consists in saying things as we have them at heart—note this, as they are at heart, as we think them. Anything else is called cunning, slyness, duplicity, which are contrary to the

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<sup>6</sup>The root of this thought can be found in *La Perle Évangélique* by an anonymous Flemish author, who had a strong influence on Benet of Canfield and Saint Francis de Sales. The latter wrote that there seemed to be “no difference between truth, purity [of intention], and simplicity.” (Cf. *Oeuvres complètes*, Paris 1821, t. 2, p. 181.) Influenced, in turn, by these two spiritual guides, Saint Vincent referred to simplicity as “my gospel.” Cf. *Vincentiana*, vol. 49, no. 4-6 (July-December 2005), Richard McCullen, C.M., “My Gospel...Let then Simplicity Live...,” p. 326.

virtue of which we're speaking, a virtue requiring us to say things as they are, without reflecting too much on this or that, speaking sincerely and very plainly, and, in addition, with a pure intention of pleasing God. It's not simplicity to reveal all sorts of thoughts, for this virtue is discreet and is never contrary to prudence, which helps us discern what's good to say from what is not. So then, our tongue has to express outwardly the things we say in the same way as we think them in our mind; otherwise, we should keep silent about them. During a conversation, the opportunity may arise to propose something good in its substance and circumstances; we have to speak up quite simply; but sometimes there are good things to be said that, because of certain circumstances, may be harmful, so, if we state the substance, we have to omit the circumstance. Holy Scripture is perfectly pure in itself, and can be helpful in all kinds of discussions; but, if it's used in a joking way, that's wrong; or, if it's used to mislead someone, that's forbidden; or, when what we relate from it is for our own exaltation, that's a sham. Let's always use good things for good purposes, or not say a word. Those three occasions are misleading and show that, when things are contrary to God or the neighbor, or for my own commendation, I shouldn't express what's in my heart.

“The poor late wife of the General of the Galleys<sup>7</sup> asked me more than a hundred times what simplicity was, and she was the simplest person I ever met. She couldn't open her mouth or do anything except in simplicity of heart; but she knew how to separate harmful and useless circumstances from the nature of things, for she was also one of the most prudent. She had a high degree of simplicity and prudence, yet she had no idea of this. There are persons like that who have certain virtues, but God hides it from them because He judges it advisable; and the person who's unaware of this is truly simple; on the contrary, the one who thinks he's virtuous, is not.

“So, Messieurs, getting back to acts of simplicity, if we speak, let it be done simply and never with double meaning, never for some sensual or temporal self-interest, or to win someone over to

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<sup>7</sup>Mme de Gondi.

our way of thinking, never for something that's for our own praise or advantage, but always to please God. It would be wonderful, brothers, if the Mission were like that, wonderful before God and wonderful before everyone. There's nothing more pleasing than this to attract good people.

“So much for what concerns our speech. As for the other part of simplicity, which pertains to actions, its characteristic, as we mentioned, is that it causes us to act sincerely, straightforwardly, and always with God in view, in business matters, ministry, and exercises of devotion, excluding any kind of hypocrisy, deceit, and empty pretense. For example, someone gives a present to another person and pretends that he's doing it through friendship; however, it's really so that the other will give him something of greater value in return. That's permissible, according to the world and perhaps according to God; still, it's contrary to simplicity, which can't bear our acting one way but having another in view. If this virtue causes us to speak according to our interior thoughts, it also causes us to act the same way, with Christian frankness and uprightness, and to do it for God, for that must always be our aim.

“In line with that, persons who, through human respect, want to appear other than they really are, don't have this simplicity in what they do. This applies also to their clothing when it's elaborate or covered with jewelry and lace trimmings. Having rooms that are well appointed, decorated with statues, paintings, and superfluous furniture is also contrary to this virtue, as is having a great many books for show, taking pleasure in vain or useless things and in a variety of necessary things when one suffices; giving polished homilies in a pompous style, and, lastly, having in view something other than God in our exercises. All that is contrary to Christian simplicity in action. So, this is the simplicity the Rule requires.

“That brings us to prudence. You know the definitions given by theologians and the various senses in which it's taken in Scripture. I'm not going to speak to you about that. Prudence in itself, however, is really just as it's described in the Rule; its workings concern words and actions; it's the duty of the prudent person to speak prudently, and not indiscreetly, about all things, and not disparagingly about any of them. *O Sauveur!* Where can we find persons like that



who speak only with the proper reserve, when it's suitable, and in discreet language! In a word, this virtue requires us to say what we have to say discreetly and with good judgment.

“His duty is also to do what he does prudently, wisely, and for a good reason, not only with regard to the substance of the action, but also considering its circumstances, with the result that the prudent person acts properly, at the right time, and for the right purpose. The imprudent person, on the contrary, doesn't consider the way of acting or the timeliness or the goal he should pursue, and that's where he's at fault, whereas prudence, acting with discretion, does everything with weight, number, and measure.

“Now, assuming it to be true that simplicity has as its object words and actions, it's the same for prudence; it governs words and actions; and just as simple persons should say only things that are good in their nature and circumstances, and remain silent about those that are contrary to God, harmful to the neighbor, or tend to their own praise, prudent people—even though they are prudent—have to have the same reserve, circumspection, and discretion.

“So, what's the difference between those two virtues? There isn't any; their nature and effects are the same. Prudence and simplicity have the same goal, which is to speak and act well, and one can't exist without the other. I know, however, that a difference can be found by distinction of reason; but actually they have only one and the same substance and purpose. Human, worldly prudence has wealth, honor, and pleasure for its goal and is totally opposed to true prudence and Christian simplicity, which distance us from attachment to those apparent, perishable benefits to help us to embrace solid, permanent benefits; they're two good, inseparable sisters. Oh, anyone who knows how to deal with them properly will accumulate great treasures of grace and merit! So practice them, Messieurs; win the day. But who's going to win the day? It will be those who constantly aspire to Our Lord and work to acquire them; they're the ones, by the grace of God.

“Prudence has another aim, which is to choose the means to attain the goal to which one aspires. The aim of Christian prudence is to take the shortest, surest ways to perfection. Let's forget about

political and temporal prudence, which tends only to temporal, and sometimes unjust, successes and uses only uncertain, human means; let's talk about that holy virtue Our Lord recommends to those who want to follow Him; it's the one that helps us to attain the goal to which He wants to lead us, which is God. It's the function of prudence to produce this happy outcome; through it we discern what's good and what's better for that, and causes us to use divine means for divine things.

“People can choose means proportioned to the goal they set up for themselves in two ways: the first is through reasoning, by which they envisage doing this or that, things that natural intelligence indicates to them; the other is through the teachings of faith, using the means God taught us on earth. Take, for example, a young man who applies to be admitted to a Community; before entering, however, he goes to consult a theologian to get his advice. ‘I feel urged to give myself to God in a certain Company,’ he tells him, ‘but I’d rather not do it without some advice.’ In order to make a proper judgment concerning his vocation, the theologian has to use the infallible principles of Our Lord, who says, ‘Blessed are those who leave father, mother, brothers, sisters, property, pleasures, etc., and follow me.’<sup>8</sup> If he bases his judgment on that, he’ll judge according to God; but, if he follows his own judgment and says, ‘My friend, what you’re planning is very serious, and you’re still young; religious life is austere; wait awhile; you have a father and mother who’ll be distressed if you leave them; I don’t think you should rush into this.’ To make a judgment in this way is, in our way of thinking, a prudence that’s according to the world, ignoring the Gospel and saying to the Son of God, ‘You don’t understand anything, Lord; you haven’t considered how hard it is to give up everything.’ So, to judge things correctly and make good use of prudence, we have to form our judgment on Christian teachings, which are always sure, and not on the misleading maxims of worldly persons. ‘Sell what you have,’ says Our Lord, ‘give it to the poor and follow me.’<sup>9</sup> Someone comes to you and says, ‘I’m undecided; what’s the surest

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<sup>8</sup>Cf. Mt 19:29. (NAB)

<sup>9</sup>Cf. Mt 19:21. (NAB)

thing for me to do: to keep what I have and remain as I am, or to embrace poverty and the evangelical life?’

“To use our intelligence and reason well, it must be our inviolable rule to judge everything as Our Lord did; but, I repeat, always and in all things, and to ask ourselves, if need be, ‘How did Our Lord judge this? How did He act in a similar situation? What did He say about it? I have to adjust my way of acting to His teachings and examples.’ Let’s be determined to do that, Messieurs, let’s walk on this path with assurance; it’s a royal rule; heaven and earth will pass away, but His words will not pass away. If we act contrary to the teachings of Jesus Christ and go against His guidance, that’s where the danger lies, that’s where those fail miserably who think they can sail against wind and tide, guided by the star of their own reason.

“Oh, if God grants us the grace of adopting this practice of never judging with human reasoning because it never arrives at the truth, never attains God or divine reasons, never; if, I repeat, we consider our reason alone as deceptive and we act according to the Gospel, let’s bless Our Lord, my dear confreres, and strive to judge as He did and to do what He has recommended by word and example. Not only that, but let’s enter into His mind so that we may enter into His workings. Doing good isn’t everything; we have to do it well, after the example of Our Lord, of whom it’s said in the Gospel that He did all things well: *Bene omnia fecit*.<sup>10</sup> Fasting, keeping the Rules, turning our attention to God isn’t everything; we have to do all that in His spirit, that is, with perfection, with the purpose and appropriateness with which He himself did them. So then, prudence consists in judging and acting as Eternal Wisdom judged and acted.

“*Or sus*, Messieurs, *or sus*, *or sus*, we should be content if we act like that; but if we don’t, we have good reason for regret and improvement. So you see that those two virtues are closely connected; they’re almost one and the same. Let’s bless God for having called us here to make them our special practice. The Son of God practiced them to an eminent degree in all situations; as, when the adulterous woman was brought to Him to be condemned, He was unwilling to

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<sup>10</sup>Cf. Mk 7:37. (NAB)

act as a judge, and yet He wanted to save her. What was He to do? 'Let him among you who is without sin,' He said to the Jews, 'cast the first stone.'<sup>11</sup>

"Simplicity and prudence, you see, are in those words. Simplicity corresponds to the impulse He had in His heart to save that poor creature and to do the Will of His Father; and prudence is found in the way he acted to succeed in His plan. In this he knew how to unite those two virtues perfectly. It was the same when they tempted Him regarding the tribute to Caesar. 'Should it be paid?' they said to him; 'What do you think?' Our Lord, on the one hand, wanted to see that the honor due to His Father was rendered. On the other, he wanted to do no injustice to that of Caesar, without, however, ordering the tribute to be paid him, so as not to pass judgment on the question in the presence of those people, who would have said that he favored monopolies. So what's He going to say to them? He asks to see the coin of tribute and, hearing from their mouths that it was the image of the Prince that was engraved on it, He said to them, 'Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God what belongs to God.'<sup>12</sup> The simplicity of that reply is admirable, for it corresponds to the intention Jesus Christ had in His heart to see that the King of heaven and the King of earth received the honor due them, and it prudently avoids the trap those wicked men were laying to take Him by surprise.

"O Savior, You who practiced these virtues to such a high degree, grant us the grace of entering into them in order to please You, and to practice them to honor You. We know, Lord, that through them You glorified Your Father, and that those who have the happiness of working to acquire them are pleasing to You. Grant that they may be the virtues of the Priests of the Mission, and may there be sincerity and discretion in their words and actions!

"We see them in those priests of the Tuesday Conferences, connected with this house, who act simply and prudently, and who, having sometimes taken as the subject of their talks the spirit of

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<sup>11</sup>Cf. Jn 8:7. (NAB)

<sup>12</sup>Cf. Mt 22:21. (NAB)

their Society, have shown that the spirit of simplicity is present in it. Now, my dear confreres, if those priests, who are not so bound to God as we are, have such a simple, prudent spirit; if those who have less obligation to strive for holiness than we do because of our vocation and vows, show, nevertheless, in their way of acting that they have these virtues, with what greater reason should we work to acquire them, and what good reason we have to hope that God will give them to us by His grace, if we take care to apply ourselves to this! Is there anything so easy, so just, and so commendable as to distance ourselves from those pretended, double-dealing, inconsiderate, and foolish actions? But how? By the constant practice of this simplicity and prudence, which are the remedies for it. And as humiliation, according to Saint Bernard, is a true means of becoming humble, so also, by the frequent acts we make of these two virtues united in this way, we'll soon become both simple and prudent. It's always understood that this will be done with the grace of God, which we should often ask of Him.

“Let's turn now to Our Lord, who is simplicity personified and, all together, say to Him, 'O gracious Jesus, You came into this world to teach simplicity, to do away with the contrary vice, and to teach us divine prudence in order to destroy that of the world. You see before You a Company that longs only for the grace to observe Your teachings, to model itself on Your way of acting, and to advance in the ways of holiness You have prescribed for it. This is all it desires and asks. Give us a share, Lord, in these divine virtues, so prominent in You; fill each of us with this desire to become more simple and prudent with Christian prudence. This is the prayer we make to You in unity of heart and with the trust children have in their father. Please present to the majesty of the Eternal Father our desires and intentions, our words and works, that He may be ever glorified by them. Amen.' ”

202. - GENTLENESS  
(Common Rules, Chap. II, Art. 6)

March 28, 1659

“A minor health problem I had today made me wonder if I’d still be able to try your patience this evening by explaining the sixth article of our Rules, which follows the one we discussed recently.

“Up to now, we’ve covered five articles of the second chapter, the first of which concerns the Gospel teachings the Company must adopt, and we said how it has to give itself to God to be nourished by this ambrosia from heaven in order to live the way Our Lord lived, and how we must direct all our conduct toward Him and model it on His. If we do, we’ll be conforming our lives to the life of the Author of this admirable teaching, which He practiced first himself.

“He gave as the first teaching to seek always God’s glory and His justice—always and before all else. Oh, how beautiful that is, Messieurs, to seek first of all the reign of God in ourselves and to procure it in others! How far would a Company that lived this teaching of advancing God’s glory more and more further its own happiness! What good reason would it not have to hope that everything would turn to its advantage! If God were pleased to grant us this grace, our happiness would be incomparable. I knew a wise man of the world—but wise in the wisdom of God—our benefactor the late Commander de Sillery,<sup>1</sup> who had this practice. He used to say to me, ‘Every day and in everything, we have to consider where things are going.’ Now, if, among sensible persons who have common wisdom, there are some who wonder if they’re walking on the right path and ask themselves, ‘Where are you going?’ how much more should those who make profession of following the Gospel teaching, especially the one of seeking in all things the glory of God,<sup>2</sup> ask themselves, ‘Why am I doing that? Is it for self-gratification? Is it because I have an aversion to other things? Is

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**Conference 202.** - Manuscript of Conferences. This conference is found nearly in its entirety in Abelly (*op. cit.*, bk. I, chap. XIX, pp. 79ff.; bk. III, chap. XII, sect. 15, pp. 191ff.).

<sup>1</sup>Noël Brulart, Commander de Sillery (cf. XI, 234, n. 3).

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Mt 6:33. (NAB)

it to please some insignificant creature? But isn't it rather to consider first of all the glory of God and to seek His justice? What a life, Messieurs, what a life that is! Is that a human life? No, it's angelic, since it's because of my love for God that I'm doing what I do, and refraining from doing what I do not do.

"The addition of the article that follows, on God's Will, which is the soul of the Company and one of the practices it should have most at heart, is intended to give each one of us in particular a very easy, excellent, and infallible means of holiness, causing our actions to be no longer human or angelic actions, but actions of God, since they're done in and through Him. What a life, Messieurs, what a life Missioners will have! What a Company, if it has that as its basis!

"Next comes simplicity, which causes God to delight in a soul in which it dwells. Let's just consider those among us in whom the stamp of this virtue is more obvious. Isn't it true that they're the kindest, that their sincerity wins us over, and that we enjoy dealing with them? But who wouldn't, since Our Lord himself is pleased with simple persons?

"Likewise, prudence, understood correctly, makes us pleasing to God, since it inclines us to things that concern His glory and helps us to avoid those that turn us away from it. It not only helps us to refrain from duplicity in word and action, but causes us to do everything with wisdom, circumspection, and honesty, in order to reach our goals through the means the Gospel teaches us, not for a time, but for always. That's where the prudent constantly walk. Oh, what a life! Oh, what a Company that will be!

"If you add gentleness and humility to that, what will we lack? Gentleness! Gentleness! What a beautiful virtue! That's what we're going to talk about now, and about humility, if time permits. They're two sisters who get along well together, just like simplicity and prudence, which can't be separated.

"I ask you, then, what will become of the priest and the Brother who seek the kingdom of God, embrace the holy practice of His Will, practice Christian simplicity and prudence and, lastly, the gentleness and humility of Our Lord? What will all of us become, if

we're all faithful to this? What will the Mission be as a Company then? God can help you to understand; as for me, I can't explain it. At meditation tomorrow, spend your time reflecting on what such a Company is like and what kind of man has this practice.

“Here's what the Rule says about gentleness: *We should all make a great effort to learn the lesson Jesus Christ taught us: 'Learn from me because I am gentle and humble of heart.'*<sup>3</sup> *We should remember that he himself said that by gentleness we inherit the earth. If we act on this we win people over so that they will turn to God. 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.*

“I'm not going on to humility; we don't have enough time to discuss it this evening.

“So then, this is a lesson, a lesson from Our Lord Jesus Christ, who's teaching us that we should learn from Him that He's gentle and humble of heart. *'Learn from me,'* He says. O Savior, what an expression! But what an honor to be Your pupils and to learn this lesson that's so short and dynamic, but so excellent that it makes us like You! O my Savior, don't You have the same authority over us that the philosophers had in the olden days over their followers, who were so closely attached to their teachings that it was enough to say, *'The master said this,'* for them to believe it and never deviate from it?

“If then, the philosophers, by their reasoning, could produce that effect of having such great credibility among their disciples that what they said was followed by acts with regard to human matters, how much more does Our Lord, Eternal Wisdom, deserve to be believed and followed in divine matters? *O Sauveur!* O my dear confreres! What answer would we give Him, if He called us right now to account for all the lessons He's given us? What will we say to Him at the hour of death, when He reproaches us for having

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<sup>3</sup>Cf. Mt 11:29. (NAB)



learned them so badly, we who are His pupils, to whom He's taught the truths that bring about efficacious grace, when we strive to put them into practice? And yet, it will happen that we haven't benefited from them and haven't shared His sentiments, but have failed to do what He told us to do.

“‘Learn from me to be gentle,’ He says. If it were simply a Saint Paul or a Saint Peter who, on their own, urged us to learn gentleness from Him, perhaps we could be excused from this; but, my dear confreres, He's God made man, who came to earth to show us what we should be like in order to be pleasing to His Father. It's the Master of Masters who's teaching us. Teaching us what? ‘That I am gentle.’ And what else? ‘That I am humble.’ My Lord, give us a share in Your great gentleness; we ask this of You by Gentleness itself, who can refuse nothing.

“Gentleness, Messieurs, has several acts, which can be reduced to three main ones. The first act has two functions, the first of which is to repress impulses of anger, outbursts of that fire that makes the face red, troubles the soul, and causes a person to be no longer what he was. A serene countenance changes color and becomes dark or greyish or flushed. What does gentleness do? The characteristic of this virtue is to put a stop to that and to prevent a person from giving in to those bad effects. The gentle person still feels the emotion but resists it so it doesn't get the better of him; it may happen that he becomes a little flushed, but he soon gets control of himself. We mustn't be surprised to see ourselves assailed by this passion; natural impulses anticipate those of grace, but the latter prevail over them. So then, we shouldn't be surprised at these attacks but ask for the grace to overcome them, assured that, even though we may feel some revolt in ourselves contrary to gentleness, it has the property to repress this. That, then, is the first act, which is wonderfully beautiful, and so beautiful that it prevents the ugliness of vice from manifesting itself. A certain resilience in minds and souls not only tempers the heat of anger, but stifles the slightest feelings of it.

“Oh, wretched man that I am! I've been studying this lesson so long and have still not learned it! I lose my temper, I change, I complain, I find fault. Just this evening I berated the Brother at the door,

who came to tell me that someone was asking for me, saying to him, ‘*Mon Dieu*, Brother! What are you doing? I told you I didn’t want to speak to anyone.’ I pray that God—and that Brother—will forgive me! At other times I’m very brusque with some of them and speak loudly and harshly. I haven’t yet learned to be gentle. Oh, wretched man that I am! I entreat the Company to put up with me and to forgive me. A person who has this virtue doesn’t fall into these wretched failings; and even if he does feel some bitterness, it still has only gentle results.

“Here’s another function of this first act of gentleness: while it’s useful at times to express anger, to shout, to tell someone off, or to punish someone, it causes souls who have this virtue of gentleness not to do these things because of a fit of anger, but because they think they should be done, like the Son of God, who called Saint Peter ‘Satan,’ and who said to the Jews ‘Begone, you hypocrites,’ not just once but several times; we see this word repeated in a single chapter ten or twelve times. On other occasions, He drove the buyers and sellers from the Temple, overturned the tables, and gave other signs of an irate man. Were these fits of anger? No, He possessed gentleness to a supreme degree, and it governed all His emotions. In us, this virtue causes us to master our passions, but in Our Lord, who had only propassions, it simply caused Him to advance or delay acts of anger, according as it was expedient. If then, He was severe on certain occasions—He who was basically gentle and benign—it was to correct the persons to whom He was speaking, to root out sin, and to get rid of scandal; it was to edify souls and for our instruction.

“Oh, what great success would a Superior have who acted that way! His corrections would be well received because they’d be based on reason and not on whim; if he gave a strong reprimand, it would never be done because of his quick temper, but always for the good of the person being admonished. Just as Our Lord should be our model, in whatever state we’re in, those in leadership should consider how He governed, and pattern themselves on Him. He governed by love; but, if He sometimes promised a reward, at other times He also threatened a punishment. We have to do the same, but

always through this principle of love; we're then in the state in which the prophet wanted God to be, when he said, *Domine, ne in furore tuo arguas me.*<sup>4</sup> That poor King felt that God was angry with him; that's why he asked Him not to punish him in His wrath. Everyone feels that way—no one wants to be corrected in anger—therefore, they have to master anger and vengeance so that nothing proceeds from them that's not done through love. There are few people who don't experience the first emotions, as I said; but the gentle person gets over them immediately.

“So then, the first act of gentleness is to repress the opposite emotion as soon as we feel it, either by subduing the anger completely, or by using it so well, when necessary, that it's in no way separated from gentleness. So, Messieurs, now that we're speaking of this, let's make the intention to recollect ourselves, lift our hearts to God every time some occasion presents itself of losing our temper, nip this desire in the bud, and say to Him, 'Lord, You who see me attacked by this temptation, deliver me from the evil it's prompting me to do.' So then, let each of us make the intention of acting in this way. May God grant us this grace!

“The second act of gentleness is to have a very pleasant, cordial, and serene expression on our face for the persons who come to us, so that we may be a comfort to them. Some people, with a smiling face and cheerful disposition, please everyone, since God has gifted them with the grace of a cordial, gentle, happy manner, by which they seem to offer you their heart and ask for yours in return; whereas others, boorish persons like me, present themselves with a stern, gloomy, or forbidding expression; this is contrary to gentleness. For that reason, my dear confreres, a true Missioner will do well to pattern himself on the former persons and to act in such a way that he gives comfort and confidence to all those who come to him. You see from experience that this approachability attracts hearts and wins them over; and, on the contrary, the comment has been made of upper class persons who hold office that, when they're too serious and cold, everyone fears them and keeps their

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<sup>4</sup>*Lord, do not reprove me in your anger.* Cf. Ps 6:2. (NAB)

distance. And, since we have to work with poor country people, with the ordinands, with retreatants, and with all sorts of persons, it's impossible for us to produce good results if we're like dry land that yields only thistles. We need a certain charm and a pleasant countenance so as not to scare anyone away.

“Three or four days ago I was greatly consoled at the joy I noted in someone who was leaving this house, in which, he said, he had experienced a gentle welcome, an openness of heart, and a charming simplicity (that was his expression), which had touched him deeply. *Or sus*, brothers, if there's anyone alive who should cultivate this way of acting, it's people who do what we do: missions, seminaries, etc., where it's a question of adopting this gentle manner to enter people's souls in order to win them over; for this can be done only with this affable and gracious exterior.

“O Savior, how fortunate were those who had the honor of approaching You! What an expression, what gentleness, what warmth You showed them in order to attract them! What confidence did You not give souls to approach You! Oh, what a sign of love! Saint Andrew was the first, and through him Saint Peter, then all the others. My Savior, what success the person who has this loving, delightful approachability would have in your Church! Sinners and the righteous would come to him, some to be set right and others to be encouraged. Isaiah says of Our Lord. . . . It's stated somewhere in Holy Scripture that Our Lord would be fed on butter and honey; this is to express to us His gentleness, which would be given Him to discern good from evil. How does that go? Does anyone remember?”

M. Portail got up and said, *Butyrum et mel comedet, ut sciat reprobare malum et eligere bonum*.<sup>5</sup> M. Vincent thanked him and repeated the passage in French, “He will eat butter and honey, so that he will know how to refuse evil and choose good.” Then he added, “I think only gentle souls receive the gift of discernment; for, since anger is a passion that troubles reason, it has to be the contrary virtue that imparts discernment. O gentle Savior, give us this

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<sup>5</sup>*He shall be living on curds and honey by the time he learns to reject the bad and choose the good.* Is 7:15. (NAB)

gentleness. By Your mercy, some men in the house—even many—practice it; but others don't do it enough; give all of them that same grace, and grant me that of imitating them in this affable, gracious manner.

“The third act of gentleness is shown when, if someone offends us, we let it pass and ignore it or make excuses for him, saying, ‘He did that without thinking, he acted in haste; he got carried away by the first strong feeling.’ In a word, we turn our thoughts away from the supposed grievance, and if the person repeats those regrettable things to docile persons in order to make them bitter, they don't even open their mouth to respond, pretending they don't hear him.

“I heard that one day a Chancellor of France<sup>6</sup> was coming out of the Council meeting, and, as he was mounting his mule (for in those days they weren't yet using carriages), a man who had lost his lawsuit said to him, ‘O you wicked judge, you've deprived me of my property; God will punish you, and I call you to His judgment.’ History tells us that this *seigneur* went off, looking neither right nor left, and never said a word. If it was Christian virtue that caused him to swallow this bitterness in that way, what an example for us! And even if it wasn't through this virtue but from a moral principle that he was able to endure this indignity, how embarrassed should we be for sometimes losing our temper over trifles!

“That happened to Chancellor de Sillery, who loved gentleness to an eminent degree, dating from the time of an incident that occurred when he was Counselor in the Parlement, where he saw two of his fellow lawyers attack one another with words and insults. Noticing their haggard, pale, and frightful faces, he made this reflection, ‘My word! Those men whom I've seen with human faces, I now see transformed into animals, they snarl, they foam at the mouth, and they treat one another like wild beasts.’ This made such an impression on him that, judging the enormity of the vice from the deformity of those enraged men, he made the intention to work constantly at patience and gentleness.

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<sup>6</sup>Nicolas Brulart, Marquis de Sillery, Chancellor of France and brother of Commander Noël Brulart de Sillery.

“Now, if that example had such power over the Chief Justice of the kingdom that it made him endure the shameful reproach of that litigant, without showing him any resentment—which is certainly admirable for someone of his rank—and when human reasons were not lacking, nor easy means to punish such boldness, shouldn’t Your example, my Savior, have greater power over us? Can we see You practicing incomparable gentleness toward the greatest criminals without becoming gentle ourselves? Shouldn’t we be moved by the examples and reprimands we find in following You? Lamb of God, You who take away the sins of the world, make us like You in this.

“Gentleness not only helps us to excuse the affronts and injustices we receive, but it would even have us treat gently and with pleasant words those who do these things to us; if they were so outrageous as to slap us in the face, we should put up with it for God; and it’s this virtue that produces that effect. Yes, a servant of God who truly possesses it, even should he be mistreated, offers that rough treatment to God’s Divine Majesty and remains at peace.

“O my dear confreres, if the Son of God seemed so kind in His conversation, how much greater does His gentleness appear in His Passion, to the point that no angry word escaped Him against the deicides who covered Him with insults and spittle and laughed at His sufferings. ‘Friend,’ He said to Judas, who handed Him over to His enemies. Oh, what a friend! He saw him coming a hundred paces away, then twenty paces; but even more, He had seen this traitor every day since his conception, and He goes to meet him with this gentle word, ‘Friend.’ He acted the same way with everything else. ‘Who are you looking for? Here I am,’ He said to him. Let’s meditate on all that, Messieurs; we’ll find stupendous acts of gentleness, which surpass human understanding. Let’s also consider how He maintained this gentleness everywhere. They crown Him, they burden Him with His Cross, they stretch Him out on it, they hammer the nails into His hands and feet; they raise Him up and drop His Cross violently into the hole they had prepared for it; in a word, far from mingling any gentleness with all that, they treat Him as cruelly as possible.

“There He is in that horrible torment, a torment I ask the Company to judge by the weight of His body, the stretching of His arms, the roughness of the nails, the number and nature of His pierced nerves. What suffering, my dear confreres! Who can imagine a greater suffering? If you’re willing to taste all the excesses of His most bitter Passion, you’re going to wonder how He was able or willing to endure them, He who had only to transfigure himself on Calvary, as on Tabor, to make himself feared and adored. And, after admiring all this, you’ll say, like this gentle Redeemer, ‘See if there is any sorrow like mine!’<sup>7</sup>

“What does He say on the Cross? Five words, and not one of them shows any impatience. He says clearly, ‘*Eli, Eli, Father, Father, why have you abandoned me?*’<sup>8</sup> But this isn’t a complaint, it’s an expression of tormented nature, suffering agony with no consolation. The superior part of His soul acquiesces gently to this; otherwise, having the power to overthrow this rabble and cause all of them to die and to free himself from their hands, He could have done it, but He didn’t. O Jesus my God! What an example for us who have committed ourselves to imitate You! What a lesson for those who are unwilling to suffer anything!

“After that, my dear confreres, shouldn’t we encourage one another and love this virtue, by which God not only will give us the grace of repressing angry reactions in order to behave graciously toward our neighbor and to render good for evil, but also to endure patiently the sufferings, injuries, torture, and death itself that people might inflict on us? Grant us the grace, Lord, to benefit from those You endured with so much love and gentleness. Many people have benefitted from them, through Your infinite goodness, and perhaps I’m the only one here who hasn’t yet begun to be both gentle and longsuffering. Ask God, my dear confreres, ask Him to give me a share in this virtue of Jesus Christ and not permit me to stagnate forever in the faults I so often commit against gentleness. And because an old man rarely abandons his bad habits, please put up with me and don’t tire of asking Our Lord to change and pardon me.”

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<sup>7</sup>Cf. Lam 1:12. (NAB)

<sup>8</sup>Cf. Mt 27:46. (NAB)

203. - HUMILITY  
(Common Rules, Chap. II, Art. 7)

April 18, 1659

“My dear confreres, we’ve now reached the seventh article of the second chapter of our Rules. At the last conference on this topic, we said we were invited by Our Lord to learn from Him a lesson He himself taught us. ‘Learn from me,’ He said, ‘that I am gentle and humble of heart.’<sup>1</sup>

“‘That I am gentle.’ We spoke about that at the time, but didn’t get to the part, ‘that I am humble of heart,’ although I had intended to do so. There wasn’t enough time, and, unfortunately, I don’t make much progress. So, we left off at the second lesson, which we have to look at now. Here’s what our Rule says about it: *Now, this humility was very often recommended by Christ Himself, by word and example, and the Congregation should make a great effort to master it. It involves three things: (1) to admit in all honesty that we deserve people’s contempt; (2) to be glad if people notice our failings and treat us accordingly; (3) to conceal, if possible, because of our personal unworthiness, anything the Lord may achieve through us or in us. If that is not possible, though, to give the credit for it to God’s mercy and to other people’s merits. That is the basis of all holiness in the Gospels 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.*

“The meaning of this article of the Rule is so clear that everyone can understand it, and it needs almost no explanation.

“So then, my very dear confreres, it’s a question of holy humility, which was so loved and so strongly recommended by Our Lord that we should adopt it as recommended by Our Lord and loved by Him. If I were to ask someone in the Company to

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Conference 203. - Manuscript of Conferences. We find another redaction of this conference in Abelly, who published a long excerpt from it (*op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XIII, sect II, pp.21ff.).

<sup>1</sup>Cf. Mt 11:29. (NAB)



speaking—no matter whom—he'd give us a number of experts and reasons for this, and I could give you a few as well; nevertheless, to honor what Our Lord said and felt about it, we'll simply say that He himself recommended it to us: 'Learn from me,' He said, 'that I am humble.' If it were an Apostle, if it were Saint Peter or Saint Paul who taught us this lesson, if it were the Prophets or some saint, we might say that they were disciples like we are; if it were philosophers . . . . Alas! They were ignorant of this virtue, and Aristotle, who spoke so eloquently of all the other moral virtues, said nothing about this one.

"Our Lord alone said and could say, *Discite a me quia mitis sum et humilis corde*. Oh, what words! 'Learn from me,' not from someone else, not from a human being, but from a God; 'learn from me. . . .' What would you like us to learn? 'That I am humble.' O Savior, what an expression: that You are humble! 'Yes, I am, not simply exteriorly, through ostentation or boasting, but humble of heart, not by a slight or passing humiliation, but with a heart genuinely humbled before my Eternal Father, with a heart always humbled before men and for sinful men, always concerned with despicable and contemptible things, and always embracing them amiably, actively and passively. Learn from me that I am humble, and learn to be the same yourself.'

"All that, brothers, is so contrary to the spirit of the world and its practice, so far removed from the disposition and nature of each individual that, if God hadn't said and done it, no one would be willing to hear it, for everyone has such a high opinion of what he is interiorly and what he produces exteriorly that there's not a single one of them who doesn't naturally want to be well thought of and who doesn't do everything to be esteemed, praised, and preferred to others. Through a certain spirit of nature spoiled by the first man, everyone falls into this evil inclination and walks into this wretched trap.

"Nevertheless, Messieurs, here's something strange: I've often asked in confession and in my visits as well, 'What virtue do you desire the most? Which one has the greatest attraction for you?' and I've noticed that almost everyone has replied, 'Humility.' 'It's a

virtue I really love,' people tell me, 'but, even though I love it, I'm still filled with pride and am bothersome to others, whom I put beneath myself; but I can't even stand myself and shouldn't be trying to raise myself up as I do.' Why is that? Because, even though we have a natural inclination to pride, we're also inclined to humility because it's beautiful in theory; or, at least, since two contrary inclinations can't exist at the same time in the same person, we'd like to have this inclination for that virtue. And how does that happen? Because the grace received in Baptism gives this desire. Yes, the Spirit of Our Lord gives the same penchant for virtue that nature gives for vice.

"If I ask you, my dear confreres, what virtue you love the most, and I ask myself the same thing, all of us will say humility, and yet, if someone asks you, 'How do you find yourself acting? Do you have this virtue?' 'No, I find myself just the opposite; I'm inclined to exterior actions that make me look good, I seek to be honored, I want people to listen to me, I weigh my words and polish my sentences, in a word, I make the best of myself.' 'But don't you know that this is preaching yourself and not Jesus Christ, that those lofty sermons that are only idle talk are making you useless to the people?' 'Yes, I do, but all the same, I have to win the esteem of the world.' Oh, what blindness! Oh, what a misfortune! O Messieurs, if only Our Lord in His goodness were pleased to get us away from this detestable practice and ground us in the practice of holy humility, if only He were pleased to grant us that sanctifying grace of giving us the love of our own contempt, what a great grace that would be! *Mon Dieu!* How precious it would be to us!

"We have to admit that we have a curious attraction for the contrary vice and that the evil spirit has a secret, very powerful influence over human beings, so that, despite our knowledge of the beauty and holiness of humility, we still allow ourselves to get carried away by the violence of pride. But, *mon Sauveur*, my dear confreres! Isn't it time to resist this? The Son of God has told us to be humble, and says in addition, 'Whoever humbles himself will be exalted.'<sup>2</sup> This is a teaching of salvation that comes from heaven;

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<sup>2</sup>Cf. Mt 23:12. (NAB)

and isn't it amazing and a surprise that we can believe the truth of these words and yet refuse to do our part to make them effective?

"We see that in another place Our Lord says, 'Whoever humbles himself will be exalted, and whoever exalts himself will be brought low.' Yet, there are those who try to pass for learned men, with strong minds and good judgment, for wise men, for good Superiors and vigilant Officers; and they don't see that it's those people who'll be humbled and brought low. *O Sauveur!* What madness!

"*Or sus*, Messieurs, shouldn't we admit that there's something wrong in the man who, knowing the advantages of humility, still doesn't do all in his power to hide himself in the bowels of the earth, who doesn't fear feelings of pride, esteem, and the praise of others, and who doesn't consider himself the least of all? O my Savior, how the lesson in the words, 'Learn from me that I am gentle and humble of heart,' has also been taught us by Your actions!

"What is His life, Messieurs, but a series of practices of humility? It's a continual humiliation, active and passive. He loved it so much that He never abandoned it on earth. Not only did He love it while He was alive, but also after His precious death, leaving a crucifix as an immortal monument of the humiliations of His Divine Person, appearing as a criminal and a man hanged [on a cross], and willing that the Church place Him before our eyes in that state of ignominy, since He died in it for us. He willed that our Benefactor be represented to us as a wicked man and that the Author of life suffer the most shameful and infamous death imaginable. O my Savior, what love You had for this virtue! Why did You give yourself over to such extreme abjection? It's because You're well aware of the excellence of humiliations and the malice of the contrary sin, which not only makes the other sins worse, but vitiates works that are not bad in themselves—and even those that are good, even the holiest ones.

"So then, His entire life was filled with humiliations: For the admirable body formed by the Holy Spirit to live such a long time within a virgin! To be willing to have it said that He had been refused lodging and was obliged to stay in a stable, and that, after having received some homage from heaven and earth, from angels

and from men, to be immediately disregarded and forced to flee in poverty to Egypt as an infant—what am I saying—as a weak and powerless God.

“If time permitted, this would be the place to visualize Our Lord’s life as a continuous act of esteem and love of contempt; His heart was filled with this; and anyone who might dissect it—as was done formerly with saints who were opened up to see what they had in their heart, where signs of what they had loved most during life were often found—would undoubtedly find that, on the adorable Heart of Jesus, holy humility was especially engraved; and, perhaps it will be no exaggeration if I dare say, preferably to all other virtues.

“*Mon Dieu*, my dear confreres, now that the time has come when His Divine Goodness causes us to speak of this, let’s all ask Him—but humbly—to give us the grace of sharing in His humility and to succeed in practicing it, like Him who did it constantly. Happy will we be if it can be said of each of us what Saint Paul said of Our humbled Lord, *Humiliavit semetipsum, formam servi accipiens*.<sup>3</sup>

“Eternal Father, You who willed that Your Son be clothed with our flesh in order to be like us, *in similitudinem hominum factus et habitu inventus ut homo*,<sup>4</sup> clothe us with His virtue of humility, so that we may be like Him.

“O Savior, what a desire, what ardor, what a thirst You had for this virtue, since You worked at it constantly, strove to abase yourself everywhere, and encouraged all creatures to contribute to your humiliation! Who could imitate You? But who could even speak of this virtue? Lord, may You yourself give us the grace to speak about it to one another; human words fall upon our ear without penetrating to the interior, but a single word of Yours, spoken to the ear of our heart, will cause us to give up any thought of the futile renown by which most people lose the merit of their actions. Many appear good, but they’re filled with that smoke of self-esteem that causes them to have neither weight nor consistency but disappear like vapor.

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<sup>3</sup>He humbled himself, taking the form of a slave. Cf. Phil 2:7-8. (NAB)

<sup>4</sup>Made in human likeness and found human in appearance. Cf. Phil 2:7. (NAB)

“You know, my God, that this renunciation of honor is so contrary to nature that, if You don’t speak to us, we’ll never begin it as we should. So then, speak to us, Lord, speak to us yourself; we’re here as so many servants who are listening to You. The children of Israel wanted Moses, and not You, to speak to them. They feared that the splendor of Your majesty would cause them to die; but we, on the contrary, entreat You to speak to us so that we may live, and live of the life of Jesus Christ. So then, my dear confreres, say to God, ‘Speak to us, Lord, speak to us yourself, You, and not this poor man who’s talking to us, for what he tells us is so common and ineffective that we’re not moved by it. Only Son of the Father, say to us once and for all, “Learn humility from me,” and grant that this expression may produce what it signifies.’

“In what does it consist? It consists, Messieurs, in loving contempt, in desiring abasement, and, when it happens, rejoicing in it for the love of Jesus Christ. That’s difficult, but is there anything grace can’t do, and we as well? Love of our own abjection and what I’ve just said are the same thing. So then, we have to be glad to be known as weak-minded, harsh by nature, lacking virtue, subject to all sorts of failings, glad that people insult and ignore us, treat us as ignorant persons, reproach us for our faults, and tell everyone we’re depraved and unbearable.

“ ‘Monsieur, what are you saying? All that is far removed from our past practices and present disposition.’ *Durus est hic sermo.*<sup>5</sup> True, this is really hard; but, when we say that it should be done for love of God, and that God has attached great advantages to the practice of humility, for example, that the last will be first,<sup>6</sup> that those who make themselves the least will be the greatest, and that those who humble themselves will be exalted,<sup>7</sup> it encourages us to acquire this virtue. So, I want to welcome it, with the help of God, because it’s pleasing to Him. We’ll be doing something very acceptable to Him if we all determine to do this and really practice it—not for just a while, but for always, repeating often our intention

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<sup>5</sup>*This saying is hard.* Cf. Jn 6:60. (NAB)

<sup>6</sup>Cf. Mt 19:30. (NAB)

<sup>7</sup>Cf. Mt 18:4. (NAB)

to honor and glorify God, to please Him, and to love Him. Nothing is more touching than God's interest, nor more tender than the thought of His goodness and good pleasure, and nothing stronger than to say, 'It's for a God who loves me that I want to humble myself; it's for Him that I want to love my abjection.' We have to reach that point, Messieurs; each one of us has to tend to it, and may all of us lead the Company to it.

"It's one thing for an individual to feel drawn to self-contempt, but that's not enough; he also has to be attached to it with regard to the Company. We shouldn't welcome humiliations only for ourselves personally, but for all in general, being glad when people say that the Mission is of no use in the Church, that it's composed of poor people and does badly whatever it does, that its ministries in rural areas are unsuccessful, its seminaries don't attract people, and its ordination retreats are without method. You see, brothers, if we have the Spirit of God, we have to accept that the Company have the reputation we just mentioned and be placed beneath every other Company, far from wishing that marvelous things be said of it, or that people know it's doing this and that, that important persons think highly of it and Bishops have a good opinion of it. Oh, may God preserve us from such foolishness! Only the spirit of the world and the malice of pride can suggest such thoughts to us. On the contrary, we should desire and rejoice that it's actually despised, and love this contempt, regardless of what human nature and worldly prudence have to say about it, for as long as it pleases God to make that last and no matter how great it may be.

"As for being first in importance, virtue, usefulness, and good name, we should leave these to everyone, always speaking well of other Communities—never badly—and attributing to them all the successes and good things that are done. You'll find persons who contradict this, but don't believe them, they're destroyers and flatterers. Think highly of all states and all the holy Orders in the Church, but esteem them in God for their merit, love them with all your heart, and don't think you're doing a great thing by preferring them to nobodies like us.

"Our Lord is giving many in the Company the grace of acquiring this virtue swiftly, animating their actions with the desire of their

own self-emptying and doing everything to remain hidden and to humble themselves. Grant all of us the grace, my God—all of us—to have no other desire, and that humility may be the virtue of the Mission. O holy virtue, how beautiful you are! O Little Company, how loving you will be if God gives you this grace!

“Take careful note of this: if ever you’ve heard others talk about some good thing that was done in the Company, you’ll see that it’s because they saw in it some small trace of humility, some lowly, abject actions, such as instructing peasants and serving poor persons. If you see ordinands leaving the house edified, it’s because they noted a humble, simple way of acting in it, which is a novelty for them and something charming and attractive to everyone. There was one man at the last ordination retreat who expressed, and left behind in writing, the sentiments he took away with him from this house because of some touch of humility he remarked.

“When the Church, which is aware of the importance of this virtue, wants to proceed to the inquiry about a saint in view of his canonization, among the questions it’s accustomed to ask, I think one of the first is this: ‘Was he humble?’ If, then, one of the first requirements of this process is humility, *mon Dieu*, brothers, why don’t we put it among the first—or even make it the very first—in our heart and in our examinations of conscience, knowing that it’s the basis of all the other virtues?

“If God is pleased to put all of you in the humble disposition He asks of you, how many graces will He give you, both for your own sanctification and for the salvation of the neighbor! So then, let’s ask Him, not only each individual for himself, but for all of us together, for the acknowledgment of our wretchedness, a strong aversion for all self-esteem, praise, or good name, and a love of our own contempt.

“Our Lord wasn’t only humble in himself, but also with regard to His little band, which He made up of a few poor, rustic men, unlearned and unpolished, who didn’t even get along with one another, who, in the end all deserted Him, and who, after His death, were treated like Him: banished, despised, accused, condemned, and tortured. Let’s all help one another, my dear confreres, to share

in their humiliations; they were the first to receive the instruction and example of their Master; let's not be ashamed to follow them. He himself is the one who's still speaking to us. At this moment He's saying to you as He did to them, 'Learn from me that I am humble of heart; act as you've seen me act; for, from the very first step I took right up until the end, I showed you how to practice humility; it's what I've always taught you.'

"The other day I was with some gentlemen from outside, and one of them said, 'I don't know what humility is, except from the way the philosophers describe it—a courteous modesty, a respectable attitude, deferential behavior, etc.'

" 'But, Monsieur, someone said to him, who knows better the nature of virtue than Our Lord? Who knew better than He the depth of humility, the strength it has to attract the other virtues, and that, without it, a Christian is deprived of the embellishments of grace he should have?' Things went further than that. . . . It's better for me to keep silent.

"The Apostles composed a Creed, *Credo in Deum Patrem*, etc., not only to agree on their beliefs, but also to distinguish Christians from Jews and unbelievers, so that, when they met someone and were asked, 'Who are you?' they would reply *Credo in Deum; Credo in Jesum Christum*.

"If we were free to take humility today as the sign of a Missioner, Messieurs, so that he would be distinguished among other Christians and other priests more by this virtue than by his reputation, what a grace so much in keeping with our state Our Lord would be giving us! Let's pray that, if someone should ask us about our state, He may allow us to say, 'It's humility.' Let this be our virtue. If someone says to us, 'Who goes there?' we can say, 'Humility!' May this be our password!

"Our Rule states that this humility should have three conditions, the first of which is self-contempt. Actually, Messieurs, if each of us really makes an effort, we'll all discover how reasonable that is. Yes, after we've carefully examined ourselves on the corruption of our nature, the fickleness of our mind, the darkness of our understanding, the disorder of our will, and the lack of purity of our



affections, and when we've thoroughly studied our works and our output, we'll find that it's all worthy of contempt. '*Quoi!* All the sermons we've given, the confessions we've heard, the care and pains we've taken for our neighbor and other interests!' Yes, if we review the best things we've done, we'll find that we've acted poorly as to the manner, have gone astray as to the purpose of them, and, all things considered, have done more evil than good.

"Things can't be otherwise, my dear confreres, for what can be expected of human weakness? What can nothingness produce? What can sin do, and are we anything other than that? If then, each individual really looks at himself, he'll see that he deserves only contempt, not simply in certain things but in all things in general. We can be certain, Messieurs, that we're worthy of scorn and always contemptible because of our own opposition to the being and holiness of God and our remoteness from the life and actions of Jesus Christ. And what convinces us of this truth is the natural, constant inclination we have toward evil, our incapacity to do good, and our experience that, even when we think we've succeeded well in some activity or have been judicious in our discernment and advice, the contrary happens; and God allows us to be disdained for them.

"Let's examine ourselves carefully, and we'll find that, in whatever we think, say, and do, either in the substance or in the circumstances, we're filled with and surrounded by reasons for disgrace and contempt. Let's examine ourselves carefully—really carefully—we'll find ourselves not only worse than other people, but worse than the demons. Some in the Company believe that they're worse than the demons in hell; for, if those miserable spirits had at hand the means we do to become better, they'd use them thousands of times better than we do. And, in fact, haven't they said to certain persons, 'O wretched person that you are! There you are, in a state to honor God, and you're offending Him! If we didn't have this perversity for it and this propensity to evil from which we can't extricate ourselves, if it were possible for us to do penance, if His Son had granted us the grace of dying for us, if He had given us the good thoughts, the assistance, and the time you have to mend your ways and to serve Him,

and, above all, the example of His extreme humiliations, how very differently we'd act from the way you're doing! *Quoi!* You believe in God and you live so badly! *Quoi!* You receive the Sacraments so often and new graces every day, and you're no better for it! O heavens! O earth! Be disconcerted by such great insensitivity as ours and such ingratitude for God's benefits! Without a doubt, Messieurs, we're worse than the demons!

"The second condition our humility must have is to accept that others know our faults and look down on us for them. To tell the truth, that's not pleasing to the old man, and you might all say to me, '*Durus est hic sermo*; this is really hard.' Nevertheless, we have to reach that point; we have to accept the scorn people may show for our state, our person, our manner of acting, or the way we talk. Our Lord could have avoided the mockeries, insults, and reproaches He received from the Jews, but He didn't. God forbid, Messieurs, that we're so weak that, when we have to suffer some embarrassment, we reject it and make excuses, for holy humility can't allow that!"

At that moment the clock struck, and M. Vincent paused to ask if it was nine o'clock. Being told that it was, he showed his surprise because he still had a lot of things to say. And he added, "What are we going to do? We'll have to stop there; God will tell you the rest tomorrow at meditation, where you'll understand His words much better than mine. Pay attention to what He recommends to you about this virtue and ask Him to help you to understand it.

"Should it please Him to inflame our hearts only with the desire for humiliations, that will be quite enough, even though we won't know humility like Our Lord did, who, by practicing it, saw the height, the depth, the length, and the breadth of it. He also understood its relationship with the perfections of God His Father and the insignificance of His creature and of sinful man. We'll never see that except in a very obscure way; nevertheless, in our darkness, let's be confident that, if we begin to love humiliations, God will give us this virtue and increase it in us by the acts He'll help us to make of it. One humiliation draws another, and the first degree of humility serves to take the next step to the second, and the second to the third, fourth, and fifth.

“O Savior, O Savior, You said of the humble Publican that his prayer had been heard! O my dear confreres, if He gave this testimony of that man, who was a blameworthy person, for what should we not hope, if we’re humble? And what about the Pharisee? He was a man separated from the people by his position, which was like a religious Order among the Jews; he gave thanks to God, he fasted, and he satisfied His justice. Yet, God reproves him; and why? Because he attaches importance to his own works, thinks highly of them, is complacent about them, and thinks he himself has done them.

“So then, we have a righteous man and a sinner; for the righteous man the virtues were vices and the cause of his damnation because he lacked humility; and, on the contrary, for the sinner, one single act of humility was a means of salvation. He stands at the door and beats his breast; he doesn’t dare to lift his eyes to heaven, and, even though he’s blameworthy, he still goes away justified.

“Humility brings all the other virtues to the soul, and, from the sinner that a person was, he becomes pleasing to God by the fact of humbling himself. Even if we’re villains, if we have recourse to humility, it changes us into righteous men; and although we should be like angels, if we lack this humility, our fate is sealed; even though we may have the other virtues, they’ll be taken from us because of the lack of the one we don’t have, and we become like the damned, who have none of them. Regardless of how charitable a man is, if he’s not humble, he has no charity; and without charity, even should he have enough faith to move mountains, or should give all he has to the poor and his body to the flames, all that would still be useless to him.

“My dear confreres, let’s leave with this thought: ‘Even if I have all the virtues, but don’t have humility, I have nothing but sin, and I’m only a proud pharisee and an abominable Missioner.’

“My Savior, help us to really understand this truth, help us to see the excellence of this virtue, help us to love it and, by loving it, may we reject all vain thoughts. Let’s begin, my dear confreres, starting right now, to see how beautiful it is and how pleasing it is in those who strive constantly to humble themselves, how peaceful they are,

and how they're esteemed. On the contrary, what a lowly opinion we have of those who run after honor and work to be esteemed; isn't it true that they torture themselves to no avail, that most people despise them, ridicule them, and make light of them? We'll see all that and yet will have so little sense as to run after these diversions of blind and corrupt nature!

"It's characteristic of humility to prevent us from aspiring to any esteem but Yours, my God, You who give things their value. Human beings don't know the worth of them. Isn't it foolish and more than foolish to prefer the esteem of the world to Yours, the shadow to the substance, a lie to the truth?

"Savior of my soul, fill us with those affections that humbled You so much, with those affections that caused You to prefer insults to praise, and with those affections that made You seek the glory of Your Father in the midst of your own shame. May we begin this very moment to reject everything that doesn't tend to Your honor and our contempt, everything that smacks of vanity, ostentation, and self-esteem; may we strive from now on to perform acts of true humility; may we renounce once and for all the applause of deceived and deceitful persons and vain ideas of the good results of our works; lastly, my Savior, may we learn, by Your grace and example, to be truly humble of heart."

**204. - MORTIFICATION**  
**(Common Rules, Chap. II, Art. 8 and 9)**

May 2, 1659

"We've come to the eighth article on Gospel teaching, which states: *Jesus Christ said, 'Anyone who wants to come after me must deny himself and take up his cross each day;'*<sup>1</sup> and Saint Paul

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**Conference 204.** - Manuscript of Conferences. Abelly published most of this conference, but his redaction is somewhat different (*op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XIX, pp. 286ff., pp. 289ff.; chap. VIII, sect. II, pp. 84ff.; chap. XIII, sect. I, p. 202).

<sup>1</sup>Cf. Mt 16:24. (NAB)

*added, in the same vein: 'If you live according to your unspiritual nature you shall die, but if, by the Spirit, you mortify it you shall live.'*<sup>2</sup> Each one, therefore, should be most conscientious in accepting the overruling of his personal wishes and opinion, and in disciplining the gratification of his own judgment and each of his senses.

“If the ninth article, which follows, isn’t the same as this one, at least it bears a close relation to it. It goes like this: *In the same spirit each one is to avoid over-attachment to relatives. Christ indicated this when He refused to have as a disciple anyone who did not “hate” his father, mother, brothers, and sisters. He promised a hundredfold in this world, and eternal life in the next, to all who left family for the sake of the Gospel. All this goes to show what an obstacle to full Christian living blood relationships can be. We do not stop loving them, however, but it will be with a spiritual love and according to the spirit of Jesus Christ.*

“So, my dear confreres, that’s the topic of this evening’s conference, and it speaks for itself. This Rule is so obvious and understandable that it would be trying your patience to speak to you about something so clear, and to attempt to add to it would be to confuse its meaning.

“This is a counsel Our Lord gives to those who want to follow Him and who present themselves to Him for that purpose. ‘Do you want to come after me? Fine! Do you want to conform your life to mine? Fine again! Do you realize, however, that you have to begin by denying yourselves and continuing to carry your cross?’ Now, that’s not given to everyone, but only to a few; and, that’s why so many thousands of persons who followed Him in order to listen to Him, abandoned Him and went away, not being found worthy of being His disciples because they weren’t prepared to follow Him in the way Our Lord said they should. They weren’t ready to overcome themselves. ‘I will this,’ He told them, ‘come, but two things must be done: first, deny yourselves, that is, leave that old Adam behind; and, second, carry your cross, and do it every day; based on that, see if you’re capable of following me and of remaining in my school.’

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<sup>2</sup>Rom 8:13. (NAB)

“So then, we have to deny ourselves; this is a necessity for anyone who wants to be a disciple of that Divine Master. We’ll see in what ways we deny ourselves; and I’ll be drawing part of what I say from the Rule, which points out four of them, and part from Saint Basil,<sup>3</sup> whose words on that are very moving.

“What, then, does it mean to deny ourselves? The Rule states that it’s to renounce our own judgment, our will, our senses, and our relatives. What a life, Messieurs, to deny ourselves totally for love of God, to bring our judgment into harmony with that of our neighbor, submitting ourselves to those we should through virtue, and conforming to God’s judgment of things! That’s how Our Lord acted. By judgment is understood knowledge, intelligence, and understanding. So, Our Lord was willing to have people know that His judgment was not His own but that of His Father by these words: *Mea doctrina non est mea, sed ejus qui misit me*;<sup>4</sup> my knowledge and understanding are not from me, but from my Father; I consider the judgment He makes of things, and I judge them the same way. O my dear confreres! O my dear confreres! What a victory for a Christian to submit his insights and reason for love of God! What is that? It’s Our Lord’s practice to renounce His own ideas. Who denies himself better than the person who submits his own judgment? A question is proposed and each individual gives his opinion on it. Now, to deny oneself on such an occasion doesn’t mean refusing to say what one thinks about it, but he has to submit his reasons, and the person who submits his judgment prefers to follow another person’s judgment rather than his own. Our Lord, who was Wisdom personified, didn’t exercise His own judgment but submitted himself to His Father. And for us to be true Missioners and His disciples, we have to submit our judgment to God, to our Rules, to holy obedience, and, through condescension, to everyone; and that’s what virtue is. I was saying just recently that it was Saint Vincent Ferrer’s<sup>5</sup> opinion that the means of sanctifying oneself was to con-

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<sup>3</sup>Basil the Great of Caesarea (329-79), a Father of the Greek Church and a Founder of monasticism.

<sup>4</sup>*My teaching is not my own but is from the one who sent me.* Cf. Jn 7:16. (NAB)

<sup>5</sup>Saint Vincent Ferrer (cf. XI, 6, n. 2).

form oneself to the judgment of others by renouncing our own. So then, like Our Lord, let's bring our judgment into harmony with God's judgment, made known to us through Holy Scripture. As for our own, let's not exercise it except in things in which neither our Rules nor Superiors have anything to say. So then, *in nomine Domini*, we can form our reasoning on what is most conformable to the spirit of the Gospel.

“To renounce our own will: *Quae placita sunt ei, facio semper*,<sup>6</sup> I always do God's Will. That's what His Son Our Lord, Wisdom itself, said and did. If it pleased His Divine Goodness to grant us the grace of doing always the Will of God, of the Rules, and of obedience, then we'd be worthy of being in His school; but, my Lord, as long as we delight in our own will, we'll be in no way prepared to follow You, nor merit bearing our sufferings, nor have any part with You, as we will have if we truly renounce our own will for love of God.

“Third, we have to mortify our interior and exterior senses; we must keep perpetual watch over them and take special care to subject them to God. O wretch that I am! How dare I say this, I who am so far removed from this practice, always so undisciplined with regard to seeing and hearing, and so preoccupied with the gratification of taste! Grant me the grace, my God, of pardon for the past and mortification for the future. Curiosity to see things is frequent and dangerous; I've been tried by this passion. And what power curiosity to hear things has to distract our mind! If there are any who allow themselves to get carried away by these unruly desires of seeing and hearing, they should ask Our Lord fervently to grant them the grace of renouncing that. Curiosity caused the downfall of our first father, and he would have actually been lost if he hadn't found himself by penance, as is said in the Book of Wisdom. Curiosity to touch things can also have unfortunate consequences. *Or sus*, we have to watch over ourselves so as never to let go of the rein of our passions or gratify our senses.

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<sup>6</sup>*I do always the things that are pleasing to him.* Cf. Jn 8:29. (NAB)

“The Rule also states something that seems harsh, yet we have to bow our head to it; the Son of God said very clearly that, in order to deny ourselves, we must hate our relatives, but that means, if they try to prevent us from going to Him; for, when they lead us to Him, or don’t keep us from doing it, He doesn’t require this hatred of us, but when they turn us away from this; then *qui non odit patrem suum et matrem et uxorem et filios et fratres et sorores, adhuc autem et animam suam, non potest meus esse discipulus*: anyone who does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, cannot be my disciple.<sup>7</sup> This, strictly speaking, is not to hate them, but only to act as if we hated them—I mean to leave them, to disobey them, etc., if they try to prevent us from obeying God and following Our Lord Jesus Christ.

“I think, Messieurs, that Our Lord means this the way I said, that relatives who oppose the happiness of children who want to give themselves to God must be forsaken; it’s in that case that we have to forsake the affection of relatives. ‘But, Monsieur, Our Lord didn’t do that, he always stayed with Saint Joseph and the Blessed Virgin, he had a good relationship with his relatives.’ Yes, but those holy parents always submitted their understanding and desires to that Divine Child; they were consistent in their actions and affections for Him through the instinctive power of the adorable wisdom and eternal Will of His Father, who had established Him as the director and guide of Saint Joseph and the Blessed Virgin. And our relatives, on the contrary, are often so far from this submission to God’s plans that they try to prevent us from following them; and then we have to hate them and leave them. ‘But they don’t do that.’ All the better; we must love them in Our Lord, not to be attached to them by affection because they’re good, but because they’re detached, so that we may become better by following our common Savior, who alone is perfect.

“The Canons state that parents in dire need have the right to make claims on their children, wherever and in whatever state they may be, in order to be assisted by them in their suffering state, when

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<sup>7</sup>Cf. Lk 14:26. (NAB)



it's a necessity of nature, and that the children may even leave religious life, after asking permission of Superiors, whether they obtain it or not. That's to be understood, as I said, in cases of genuine, and not imagined, necessity. Then they may leave and go to help them, and later return to the place and state they left, as many persons have done; there are many examples of that. Often, however, parents may pretend to need you; they're not comfortable; they'd like to be better off. It's not the present need that's urging them on, but fear of the future because they don't have confidence in God; or, if they're poor because of their social class, they'd be very glad to be able to live without having to work. Even if that's the case, we have to be content to pray for them and to contribute in any other way we can to their consolation and relief, so that they may love and serve God. But we have to plan this in such a way that we don't get carried away by the desire to see them, for, if, under the pretext of procuring their salvation, we put our own in jeopardy, we leave the ministry in which God wants us to be, and, instead of leaving our relatives, we go in search of them, we leave Our Lord for them, and then we fall into the unworthy situation He warned us about in these words, 'Whoever loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.'<sup>8</sup> You see, to anyone who wants to be His disciple He says very plainly that this means distancing oneself from one's relatives. Doesn't God himself say to Abraham, 'Leave your homeland and your relatives,'<sup>9</sup> which the holy man did immediately?

"Oh, what obedience! But, Divine Goodness, by that You willed to show us that native land and relatives are impediments to our holiness. Our Lord also showed us this when He said to one of His disciples, who asked Him to go to bury his father, 'Let the dead bury their dead,'<sup>10</sup> and He wouldn't allow another, who wanted to go to sell what he had and give it to the poor, to leave Him. 'Follow me,' He said to both of them. From this we should realize that there are grave disadvantages to going back to our own region, once we've

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<sup>8</sup>Cf. Mt 10:37. (NAB)

<sup>9</sup>Cf. Gn 12:1. (NAB)

<sup>10</sup>Cf. Mt 8:22. (NAB)

left it for the service of Our Lord; and experience has shown us this only too well both within and outside our Congregation. In the beginning we lost several men because of our leniency in letting them go home; for, once they were there, the presence of those objects they had formerly loved caused them to return to their original thoughts, and they found themselves once again with those tender feelings of youth and with troublesome affections contrary to piety and fear of the Lord; at the least, they got involved in family matters, feelings of adversity or prosperity, useless sufferings or vain joys; and they became caught up in them like a fly who has fallen into a spider's web, from which it can't escape.

"I call myself as witness to this truth. From the time I was still in the home of the General of the Galleys,<sup>11</sup> and before he made the first establishment of our Congregation, it happened that, when the galleys were at Bordeaux, he sent me there to give a mission to the poor convicts; I did so by using members of some religious Orders of the city, two for each galley. Now, before leaving Paris on this journey, I was talking with two friends concerning the order I had received about this, saying to them, 'Messieurs, I'm going off to work near the place where I was born; I'm wondering if it would be good idea for me to make a visit home.' Both of them encouraged me to go. 'Go on, Monsieur,' they said, 'your presence will console your relatives; you can speak to them about God, etc.' The reason I wondered about doing this is that I had seen several good priests who had done wonders when they had been away from home for some time, and I noted that when they went to see their family, they returned completely changed and became useless for the people. They got totally involved in the affairs of their families, which occupied all their thoughts, when previously they were busy only with their ministries

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<sup>11</sup>Philippe-Emmanuel de Gondi was the father of the second Cardinal de Retz, Jean-François Paul de Gondi, notorious for his intrigues during the Fronde. When Philippe-Emmanuel became a widower, he entered the Oratorian Fathers and spent the rest of his life in the practice of Christian and religious virtues, dying in Joigny on June 29, 1662. The Congregation of the Mission, the Oratory, and Carmel honor him as an outstanding benefactor. Remarks on his life are found in R. P. Ingold, *Bibliothèque oratorienne* (3 vols., Paris: Poussielgue, 1882-83), vol. I, pp. 421-48; and Louis Batterel, *Mémoires domestiques pour servir à l'histoire de l'Oratoire* (4 vols., Paris: Picard, 1902-05), vol. I, pp. 322-61.

and were detached from flesh and blood. 'I'm afraid of becoming attached like that to my relatives,' I said. And, in fact, after spending eight to ten days with them to instruct them in the ways of salvation and to steer them away from the desire for possessions—even to telling them they should expect nothing from me and that, even if I had chests of gold and silver, I wouldn't give them anything because a priest who has anything owes it to God and to the poor—the day I departed, it was so painful for me to leave my poor relatives that I did nothing but weep all the way back, and wept almost constantly. Those tears were followed by the thought of doing something to assist them and to better their situation, to give this to one, that to another. My mind was deeply moved and I was sharing in this way what I had and what I didn't have. I say this to my own shame, and I say it because perhaps God allowed that to make me understand better the importance of the Gospel counsel of which we're speaking. This troubling passion for improving the lot of my brothers and sisters plagued me for three months; it was a constant weight on my poor mind. In the midst of that, when I found myself somewhat free, I prayed that God would be pleased to deliver me from that temptation, and I prayed to Him so much about this that He finally had pity on me and took away those tender feelings for my relatives. And, even though they had to ask for alms, and still do, He gave me the grace of entrusting them to His Providence and to consider them happier than if they had been well off.

"I say this to the Company because there's something important in this Rule, based on the Gospel, which excludes from the disciples of Jesus Christ all those who do not hate father and mother, brothers and sisters, and which, in line with that, exhorts us to give up any inordinate attachment to our relations. Let's pray for them, and, if we can be of service to them in charity, let's do it, but let's hold fast against nature, which, being always inclined in that direction, will turn us aside, if possible, from the school of Jesus Christ. Let's be steadfast.

"So, here are four ways to deny ourselves: (1) Renounce our judgment; (2) our will; (3) our senses; and (4) our relatives. That's what the Rule recommends, and the grace we must ask of God.

“Saint Basil relates all this and says that this renunciation extends to forgetting our past life; otherwise, we’ll think about the days of our youth, the expressions of tenderness we’ve experienced, or the annoyances we’ve had. In whatever sense it may be, we must renounce the memory of all that, for nothing stirs up the appetite for forbidden things more than the thought of their false comforts. So then, in order to truly renounce all those dangerous allurements of our poor youth, we have to forget all those allurements.

“The fifth way to deny ourselves, says this saint, is to renounce pomp: ‘The devil and all his pomps,’ he says. ‘But, Monsieur, we’re poor priests who have already given that up, we have only simple clothing, cheap furniture, and nothing that smacks of pomp.’ We can have a pompous spirit, Messieurs. Alas, yes we can! To strive to give beautiful sermons, to have people talk about us, to boast about the good we’ve done, to become puffed up with pride—all that is to have a pompous spirit, and, in order to combat it, it’s better to do a thing less well than to take pleasure in having done it really well. We have to renounce vanity and applause; we have to give ourselves to God, my dear confreres, in order to distance ourselves from self-esteem and the praises of the world, which cause us to be pompous.

“Recently, a preacher was talking to me about this. ‘Monsieur,’ he said, ‘as soon as a preacher starts looking for honor and popularity, he’s handing himself over to the tyranny of the public; and, thinking to have himself noticed for his fine talks, he becomes a slave of reputation.’ We can add to this that the man who churns out magnificent thoughts in a pompous style is opposed to the spirit of Our Lord, who said, ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit.’<sup>12</sup> In this, Eternal Wisdom shows how much Gospel workers should avoid grandeur in words and actions, and adopt a humble, plain, ordinary way of speaking and acting. It’s the devil who hands us over to that tyranny of wanting to succeed, and who, seeing us inclined to go about our work simply, says to us, ‘That’s too common; it’s too dull

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<sup>12</sup>Cf. Mt 5:3. (NAB)

and most unworthy of Christian majesty.' What a ruse of the devil! Watch out for that, Messieurs; give up those vanities. I ask you, by the depths of the heart of Our Lord, to renounce that worldly, diabolical ostentation; keep before your eyes the very humble and opposite manner of Our Lord.

"He could have made a great display of His works and given a supreme efficaciousness to His words, but He didn't. 'You will do what I am doing,' He said to His disciples, 'and much more.'<sup>13</sup> But, Lord, in doing what You did, why do You will them to do more than You? It's because, Messieurs, Our Lord wants to allow himself to be surpassed in public actions in order to excel in humble and secret ones. He wants the good results of the Gospel and not worldly fame; and for this purpose, He did more by His servants than by himself. One time, He willed that Saint Peter would convert 3,000 persons, and another time 5,000, and that the entire world be enlightened by the Apostles. As for himself, even though He was the Light of the World, He preached only in Jerusalem and the environs, and He did it knowing that He'd succeed there less than elsewhere. Yes, He went to the Jews as those most capable of despising and contradicting Him. So, He did little, but His poor, ignorant, uncouth disciples, animated by His virtue, did more than He did. Why? Because He willed to be humble in that.

"O Messieurs, how far we are from that! Why don't we always yield the advantage to others and choose the worst and most humiliating for ourselves? For, assuredly, that's what's most acceptable and honorable before Our Lord, who is everything we should aspire to be. Let's take this into consideration for His sake. Take this public action that I'm doing; I could prolong it to great length; I won't do that. I'll omit some things that might give it a certain appeal and help me to make a name for myself. Of two thoughts that may come to me, I'll present the lesser one in order to humble myself, and I'll hold back the best one to sacrifice it to God in the secret of my heart. Our Lord is found and is pleased only in humility of heart and simplicity in words and actions; it's futile to look for Him

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<sup>13</sup>Cf. Jn 14:12. (NAB)

elsewhere. If you want to find Him, my dear confreres, give up the desire to make an impression, ostentation in mind and body, and, in a word, all the vanities and attachments of life.

“Saint Basil includes a sixth way of self-renunciation: to give up the passion for being well, for taking good care of ourselves, for doing the impossible to keep ourselves fit. Actually, this concern for living well, this fear of suffering, and this weakness some have for devoting their whole mind to good things in the care of their insignificant life, are great obstacles in the service of God. Those persons don’t have the freedom to follow Jesus Christ. We’re His disciples, and He finds us chained up like slaves. To what? To a little health, an imaginary cure, an infirmary where nothing is lacking, a house that pleases us, an outing that entertains us, a time of rest that has laziness written all over it. ‘But the doctor told me not to strain myself so much, to go get some fresh air, to have a change of residence.’ Oh, what wretchedness! Do important people leave their usual residence because they’re sometimes not feeling well; or a Bishop his diocese; or a Governor his post; or a citizen his town; and does a merchant leave his business? Do Kings themselves do that? Rarely. If they’re sick, they stay where they are. The late King<sup>14</sup> was ill for four or five months at Saint-Germain, and he stayed there without budging; in the end he died a beautiful, very Christian, death. Attachment to life isn’t without its pretext. *Immisit in faciem ejus spiraculum vitae.*<sup>15</sup> ‘It’s a gift from God,’ someone will say, ‘it has to be preserved.’ Yes, but what’s trying to be maintained is self-love; that’s why Our Lord said, ‘Whoever saves his life will lose it.’<sup>16</sup> And elsewhere He adds that a person can make no greater act of love than to give his life for his friend. Isn’t God our friend? Isn’t our neighbor as well? Wouldn’t we be unworthy of enjoying the existence God gives us, if we were to refuse to use it for such worthy reasons? Knowing that we have our life from His liberal hand, we’d be doing an injustice not to spend it according to His plans.

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<sup>14</sup>Louis XIII, whom Saint Vincent attended on his deathbed.

<sup>15</sup>*He instilled into his face the breath of life.* Cf. Gn 2:7. (NAB)

<sup>16</sup>Cf. Mk 8:35. (NAB)

“Another way to deny ourselves is *spoliare veterem hominem et induere novum*,<sup>17</sup> that is, take off the old man and clothe ourselves with the new. In accord with that, every day, when we’re vesting for Holy Mass, we say, *Exue me, Domine, veterem hominem et indue me novum*,<sup>18</sup> etc. We do that, Messieurs, when we try to rid ourselves of our passions and imperfections, *exue me, Domine*, when the man who was filthy is purified. I was proud; I withdraw from that by acts of humility; and in that way I strip myself of old habits. When I eliminate my past negligence and struggle against my present laziness, what am I doing? I’m purging myself of that old leaven, which corrupts all the dough, and am giving life to my actions by the vigilance and intention I bring to this. Thus, working like that all our life—not only to correct our vices and evil inclinations, but also to regulate our lifestyle and activities to be on a level with those of the new man, Our Lord Jesus Christ—is to divest ourselves constantly of the old Adam and to clothe ourselves with the new. In a word, *exue me, Domine, veterem hominem et indue me novum*.

“Saint Paul says that by Baptism we clothe ourselves in this way with Jesus Christ: ‘You are baptized in Jesus Christ, you have clothed yourselves with Jesus Christ;’ *quicumque in Christo baptizati estis, Christum induistis*.<sup>19</sup> What are we doing when we establish mortification, patience, humility, etc. in ourselves? We establish Jesus Christ there; and those who strive for all the Christian virtues may say, as Saint Paul did, *Vivo ego, non jam ego, vivit vero in me Christus*: ‘It is no longer I who live, it is Jesus Christ who lives in me.’<sup>20</sup> I was living, *vivo ego*; it’s no longer I who live, *vivit vero in me Christus*.

“May it please God to grant us the grace of becoming like a good wine grower who carries a knife in his pocket, with which he cuts off anything he finds harmful to his vine! And because it buds more

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<sup>17</sup>Cf. Col 3:9-10. (NAB)

<sup>18</sup>*Strip me of the old man, Lord, and clothe me with the new.*

<sup>19</sup>Cf. Gal 3:27. (NAB)

<sup>20</sup>Cf. Gal 2:20. (NAB)

than he wishes and constantly produces useless shoots, he always has his knife ready and often keeps it in his hand to cut off anything superfluous as soon as he notices it, so that the strength of the sap from the vine stock may rise fully to the shoots that are to bear the fruit. That's how we have to constantly use the knife of mortification to cut off the evil output of corrupt nature, which never tires of growing branches of its corruption so that they might prevent Jesus Christ, who is compared to the stock of the vine and who compares us to the vine shoots, from having us bear abundant fruit by the practice of the holy virtues.

“The man who always prunes his vines is a good wine grower, and we, too, will be good disciples if we constantly mortify our senses, work to subdue our passions, to submit our judgment, and to control our will, doing all that in the ways we've mentioned. Then we'll have the consolation of saying, 'I divest myself of the old Adam and do all I can to clothe myself with the new.' Courage, brothers, courage! When God, who is the master of this vineyard, has removed from our souls whatever is useless and evil, He'll cause us to live in Our Lord, like branches that bear fruit, in order to bear even more. We'll have a little difficulty in the beginning, but He'll grant us the grace of overcoming one thing, then another—today an impulse to anger, tomorrow a repugnance to obedience. Courage! Pleasure follows pain, and the greater difficulty the faithful find in self-renunciation, the greater joy they have in mortifying themselves, and their reward is great in proportion to the work entailed.

“So then, it's by mortification that we have to remove from ourselves anything that displeases God; it's what helps us to carry the cross with Our Lord and to do it every day, as He commands, if we mortify ourselves each day. The sign that a man is following Our Lord is to see whether he mortifies himself continually. Let's work at that, my dear confreres, so that not a day goes by that we don't perform at least three or four acts of mortification; and by our doing this, it will be true to say that we're following Our Lord, that we'll be worthy of the title of His disciples, and that we'll be walking on



the narrow path that leads to life. By our doing this, He'll reign in us during this mortal life and we with Him in eternal life.

“What did You do all Your life, my Lord, except to battle continually against the world, the flesh, and the devil? Did You always do Your own Will, did You ever consider Your own judgment, did You ever listen to sensuality? No, never; in You there was nothing but continual mortification and absolute renunciation in all things. Please, Messieurs, consider His poverty, see that it went so far as not even to have a stone on which He could lay His head; look at His food, His frugality in eating dry bread. As for honor, look how He fought against it, and pattern your own life and practices on that.

“Messieurs, let's keep this example before our eyes and never lose sight of the mortification of Our Lord, since, in order to follow Him, we have the obligation to mortify ourselves after His example. Let's model our affections on His, so that His footsteps may be the rule of our own in the way of holiness. The saints are saints because they walked in His footsteps, denied themselves, and mortified themselves in everything. So, Messieurs, there's reason to hope that the Divine Goodness will give us the spirit of mortification, will remove from us all that displeases Him, and afterward will give us the virtues that will make us pleasing in His eyes. But, my dear confreres, let's work at this ardently and faithfully, with love and patience. In that case, we can be sure that God will grant us the grace to carry our cross constantly, to follow Jesus Christ closely, and to live of His life in time and in eternity. Amen.”

205. - INDIFFERENCE <sup>1</sup>  
(Common Rules, Chap. II, Art. 10)

May 16, 1659

“My dear confreres, since I wasn’t sure yesterday if I’d be able to speak with you this evening, you were given another topic for the conference, of which the discussion would be far more useful—with each one mentioning what Our Lord had given him—than anything I could say to you, which would only try the Company’s patience. However, I intend to speak to you about openness to God’s Will, as found in the Rule, Chapter II, Art. 10, on Gospel teaching.

*“Each one should show great eagerness in that sort of openness to God’s Will which Jesus Christ and the saints developed so carefully. This means that we should not have a disproportionate liking for any ministry, person, or place, especially our native land, or anything of that sort. We should even be ready and willing to leave all these things gladly if our Superior asks it, or even hints at it, and to put up with any disappointment or disruption this causes, without complaint, accepting that, in all this, the Superior has done well in the Lord.*

“So we’re going to speak about the virtue of openness to God’s Will [indifference], to which our Rule directs us. This is certainly right, for how could the Company attain holiness, if it doesn’t acquire openness to God’s Will and detachment from all things? How will it achieve the intended purpose of going to instruct poor people, withdrawing them from sin, and, with God’s blessing, putting them in a state of grace, if we aren’t open to God’s Will, which draws down the same grace we want to diffuse among them? How, moreover, if we’re attached to the world and ourselves, to our pleasures and self-esteem, how, I repeat, could we work for the sanctification of the clergy, which consists in turning away from these things? No one can give what he doesn’t have: *Nemo dat quod non habet*. We want to lead others to detachment from earth’s

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**Conference 205.** - Manuscript of Conferences. Abelly reproduced this conference almost in its entirety (*op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. V, sect. II, pp. 42ff.) but gives a very different wording.

<sup>1</sup> For an interpretation of the word “indifference,” as used by Saint Vincent, see Conference 188.

greediness and nature's gratification. *O Sauveur!* How shall we do this, if we ourselves are attached to them? But how can we seek the kingdom of God and its justice, if we're tied to something else that strips us of the means and the freedom to seek them? How can we do God's Will, which is one of our Rules, if we follow our own will in things that are displeasing to Him, particularly comforts, honors, and pitiful self-esteem? But how can we renounce ourselves, according to Our Lord's counsel, if we're attached to these things? How can we detach ourselves from everything, if we don't renounce the slightest thing that blocks us? Do you want a remedy for this, Messieurs? Openness to God's Will must set the captive free; this virtue alone draws us away from the tyranny of the senses and the love of creatures. Therefore, you see how necessary this virtue is and what an obligation we have to give ourselves to God to work at acquiring it, if we don't want to be slaves to ourselves and slaves to an animal—because he who lets himself be led by his sensual nature doesn't deserve to be called a man, but an animal.

“Today I was reading the reflection of a saint, who says that openness to God's Will is the height of holiness, the sum of all virtues, and the destruction of vices. Openness to God's Will must necessarily be akin to the nature of perfect love, for it's an activity of love, inclining the heart to all that's better and destroying everything that keeps it from this, like fire, which not only aims at its center, but consumes anything that holds it back. So, my dear confreres, if openness to God's Will detaches your hearts from earth, they'll be afire with the practice of the Will of God. When they stop loving other things, they will necessarily be filled with God's love. It's in this sense that openness to God's Will is the source of all virtues and the death of all vices.

“Let's say what it is. It must be differentiated into two parts: first, the action of openness to God's Will, and second, the state of openness to God's Will.

“An indifferent action is a voluntary, moral act, which is neither good nor bad. Some think there's no such act, meaning that, if an action isn't good, it's bad. But, be that as it may, we presume here an intermediate possibility: a voluntary action that's con-

cerned with what's neither good nor bad. We have an obligation to nourish ourselves; that's why we eat. This act isn't classed as a virtuous act. There's nothing bad in it, provided the substance of the action isn't spoiled by any excess or is something forbidden. Walking, sitting, standing, or taking one road or another are of themselves indifferent actions that are neither meritorious nor blameworthy, if there are no evil circumstances. So much for indifferent actions.

“As for the state of openness to God's Will, it's a state in which a virtue is found whereby a person detaches himself from creatures in order to be united to the Creator. It's not only a virtue; it is, in some way, a state that encompasses it and in which it acts; it's a state, but one in which this virtue must be active, by which the heart detaches itself from the things that hold it captive. Where is the loving heart? It's in the thing it loves. Consequently, our heart is held captive where our love is; it can't escape, it can't rise any higher, it can't go right or left; it's stopped right there. The miser's heart is where his treasure is; and our treasure is where our heart is. What's regrettable is that the things keeping us enslaved are usually very base things. *Eh quoi!* A trifle, something we imagine, a sharp word said to us, a less-than-gracious welcome, a slight refusal, the mere thought that we're not held in much account—all this hurts and upsets us to the point that we can't get over it. Our self-love binds us to these imaginary hurts; we don't know how to cope, it's always working on us. And why? Because we're held captive by this passion.

“It's characteristic of openness to God's Will to take from us any resentment and desire, detaching us from ourselves and from every creature; that's its purpose. That's the happiness in which it places us—provided it's active and working. And how? We have to strive to know ourselves and say to ourselves, ‘Now then, my soul, what are your attachments? What do we prize? What captivates us? Do we have the freedom of the children of God, or are we bound to possessions, comforts, and honors?’ We must examine ourselves to discover our bonds in order to break them. To tell the truth, Messieurs, the efficacy of meditation should aim at our becoming

well aware of our inclinations and attachments, making the resolution to struggle against them and to correct ourselves and then carry out well what we've resolved. First, to examine ourselves, and when we feel tied down to anything, to work at detaching ourselves from it and to free ourselves by resolutions and acts opposed to it. Surely we have good reason to fear falling into those wretched bonds from which we can't escape. *O Sauveur! O Sauveur!* What misery!

"I knew a gentleman—I've said this before—a gentleman from Bresse, named M. de Rougemont, who had been in a lot of quarrels; he was a tall, well-built man, often engaged in fighting, having been called to act as a second for other gentlemen who were dueling, or challenging on his own those persons who crossed him. He told me this, and you wouldn't believe how many people he had beaten, wounded, and killed. Finally God touched his heart so efficaciously that he entered into himself, and, recognizing the unfortunate state in which he was, determined to change his life, which he did. After this change, having remained some time in the beginning stage of his progress, he made such great strides that he asked permission of the Bishop of Lyons to keep the Blessed Sacrament in his chapel, in order to be able to honor Our Lord there and better to foster his piety, which was remarkable and known to all. That gave me the desire one day to go to see him at his home, where he told me about his devotional practices, including, among others, his detachment from creatures. 'I'm convinced that, if I'm not attached to anything,' he said, 'I'll go to God, who is my only desire; and, to do that, I'm careful to see whether the friendship of any nobleman, relative, or neighbor holds me back; if self-love hinders me from going forward; if my possessions or vanity are tying me down; if my business or pleasures are an obstacle to me; and when I realize that something is diverting me from my Sovereign Good, I pray, I cut, I make short work of it, and free myself from this bond; those are my practices.'

"He told me the following in detail, and I've always remembered it: One day, while traveling, he was thinking of God as usual; he examined his conscience to see if, since the time he had re-

nounced everything, he still had any attachment. He ran through his business affairs, his possessions, his connections, his reputation, honors, and the trifling enjoyments of the human heart. He mulled over them, and finally, he hit upon his sword. 'Why do you carry it?' he thought. 'But how could I bear to lose it? *Quoi!* To take off this dear sword, which has served me so well on so many occasions, and which, after God, has rescued me from a thousand dangers! If someone attacked me again, I'd be lost without it. But some quarrel could also arise, in which, if you were wearing a sword, you might not be able to resist using it, and you'd offend God once again in that. *O mon Dieu*, what shall I do?' he said. 'Can the instrument of my shame and my sin take hold of my heart? I find that this sword alone is a burden to me. Oh! I'll no longer be so cowardly as to carry it.' And at that moment, finding himself facing a large rock, he got down from his horse, took the sword, and struck the rock—bang, bang, bang! Finally he smashed it to pieces and left. He told me that this act of detachment, breaking that iron chain holding him captive, gave him such great freedom that, although it was against the inclination of his heart, which loved that sword, he never again was attached to anything perishable; he prized only God.

"What a great lesson, Messieurs, and what a great embarrassment for a wretch like me, who remains attached now to one thing, and then to another! I don't reflect on this, or, if I do, I don't make enough effort to be freed of it. This is a great source of shame for me, and for those like me, who never examine themselves to see to what they're attached, or never ask themselves, 'What holds sway over me, and what's this hodgepodge of objects and attachments that uselessly take up my time and my thoughts?' Or, if they do reflect on this on certain occasions, they simply stop at that, and, instead of freeing themselves from this bondage, become more enslaved, with the result that they can't get out of it. What a pity, Messieurs, that people see us always groveling on the ground, always with our stomachs against the earth, always stagnating in our faults and wretchedness! That's what must be said of those who don't strive for openness to God's Will, who make no progress in virtue, who always have the same stumbling block and don't try to

remove it. Who won't be afraid that God will abandon us, Messieurs? Who has ever seen a slave like Him? Why don't we have His zeal for freedom? O Savior! You've opened freedom's gate for us; teach us to find it; make known to us the importance of our freedom; help us to have recourse to You in order to reach it; enlighten us, my Savior, to see to what we're attached, and please place us *in libertatem filiorum Dei*.<sup>2</sup>

"My dear confreres, when God sent His Son into the world to redeem us, He made us His children. The cowardly man, who allows himself to be subjugated by creatures, becomes a slave and, losing that freedom of the children of God, seems to blaspheme eternally, as if he were saying that God isn't his Father, or that He's less lovable than the thing he loves and this pleasure that captivates him.

"But to what was the Son of God attached? Do you know how submissive He was to His Father's Will? He makes this comparison, through the Prophet-King: like the submission of a beast of burden to its master. He's alluding to His perfect resignation in that of this animal, which has no choice or desire. You do what you want with it; it's always ready to set off and go, to take on a saddle or a pack, to be hitched to the plow or to stand still; it's indifferent to everything, allowing itself to be led around, without the slightest attachment to its stall, and with no inclination to go to one side or another. It isn't attached to anything. Haven't you seen, in passing, mules standing in front of a door? Five or six of them stand together, waiting for their driver to come out, and when he gets there, they leave. They turn right or left, doing whatever he wishes, even coming to a stop. They're attached to nothing. *Ut jumentum factus sum apud te*.<sup>3</sup> 'That's how I am,' Our Lord says, in order to convey to us how He was ready to do anything God wanted of Him. Oh, what flexibility! Oh, what self-surrender! What happened to Him? *Et ego sum semper tecum*.<sup>4</sup> He was always with God. 'Because I've done your Will, Lord, and never my own, you were with me.'

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<sup>2</sup>*In the freedom of the children of God.* Cf. Rom 8:21. (NAB)

<sup>3</sup>*I was like a brute beast in your presence.* Cf. Ps 73:22. (NAB)

<sup>4</sup>*And I am always with you.* Cf. Ps 73:23. (NAB)

“What does the person do who is perfectly submissive to the orders of Providence? He acts like the beast of burden that gives itself to whatever is wanted, when it’s wanted, and in the manner desired. And what do I do when I surrender myself in this way? I attract God to myself because I have no will of my own. *Tenuisti manum dexteram meam, et in voluntate tua deduxisti me, et cum gloria suscepisti me.*<sup>5</sup> You’ve taken me by the hand and led me where You willed. If I’ve done any good, it’s You who have guided me. I’ve committed myself to the least sign of Your Will. Why? Because I’ve become a beast of burden for You, my God. I’ve given myself over to hard work, scorn, sufferings, and all the dispositions of Your good pleasure; and because of that, Lord, You’ve made use of me for the things that have been pleasing to You.

“Don’t you see, brothers, how successful those persons are who are open to God’s Will? They consider only God and God leads them. You’ll see them tomorrow, this week, all year, and their entire life at peace, fervent, and continually oriented toward God. They always pour forth on souls the gentle and beneficial effects of God’s work in them. If you compare a person who’s open to God’s Will with those who are not, you’ll see, on the one hand, his brilliant, intelligent ways of acting, and they’ll always be very fruitful. Within the person himself we see only progress, strength in his words, blessings on his undertakings, grace in his advice, and good repute in his actions. *Et in voluntate tua deduxisti me.* You’ve led me, Lord, by the way of Your Will. You’ll see, on the other hand, persons attached to their own satisfaction, who have only worldly thoughts, servile conversations, and dead works. The difference, then, between one and the other comes from the fact that the latter are united with creatures, but the former separate themselves from them, and that nature acts in base persons, but grace acts in those who raise themselves to God and whose only desire is to do His Will. That’s why the latter can say, in a certain sense, like Our Lord, *Et cum gloria suscepisti me:* You’ve received me with glory; You’ve given me power over heaven and earth; I’ve acted like a

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<sup>5</sup>You have taken hold of my right hand, and have guided me by Your Will, and have received me with glory. Cf. Ps 73:23-24. (NAB)



beast of burden toward God and others. I'm so stupid that I don't know if I need to use the masculine or feminine article with 'beast of burden.' *Or sus*, blessed be Our Lord! Because He had this spirit of submission and openness to God's Will, He had His Father with Him, leading Him by the hand in the way of His Will, filling and surrounding Him with the splendor of His glory.

"Let's ask Him, my dear confreres, to grant us the grace of placing ourselves in that state, in order to be always under God's guidance, that He may take us by the hand and lead us before His Majesty. O my Savior, don't let us have any bonds, no more than a beast of burden that doesn't seek to carry one thing rather than another, to belong to a rich master rather than to a poor one, or to be in this region rather than in that one! Everything is fine with it. It waits, it goes, it suffers, and it works both night and day; nothing surprises it.

"*Mon Dieu!* That's beautiful; I'd really like to do the same, but I see plainly that I'm held captive. I have a hard time detaching myself from the things I love—not being able to preach or to be of service, to be satisfied, to have a good reputation. I'd find it very hard to submit myself to all sorts of persons; nevertheless, with Your grace, my God, I can do everything. I'm not asking to be an angel, or like an Apostle. In a certain sense, I am already. O my God, what I desire is simply the pliant disposition You give to animals, the courage to suffer You give to soldiers and their fidelity to military life. O my dear confreres, shame on us to see ourselves outdone by hapless soldiers and poor animals in things so pleasing to God that His own Son willed to carry them out in person! Shame, Messieurs! Don't listen to this wretch who's speaking to you, the most unworthy of all men to aspire to that blessed state, because of the poor use I've made of my freedom and God's graces, since I've loved things other than Him. Let's give ourselves to His infinite goodness, Messieurs, confident that He'll purify us from that earthly attachment in which we've been wallowing. We have to work at being open to God's Will by detaching ourselves from our judgment, our will, our inclinations, and anything that's not God. It's an active virtue, and, if it doesn't act, it's not virtue. We have to work at it, my

dear confreres. We have to exert ourselves often, always—and tomorrow at meditation. Why not?

“The Rule goes on to say that Our Lord had great respect for and practiced the openness to God’s Will that we just saw. It adds that the saints, by their example, have also taught us this. O Saint Peter, you said rightly that you left everything, and you showed it when you recognized Jesus Christ on the shore: *Dominus est!* For that Apostle immediately pulled off his garment, jumped out of the boat, and started to swim. He didn’t hold on to anything. *Dominus est!* He came to Him detached from everything. *O mon Sauveur!* What detachment! He prized his Master alone and not his boat, his garment, or his life.

“O Saint Paul! O great Saint Paul who, from the moment of your conversion, had this infused grace of openness to God’s Will! *Domine, quid me vis facere?*<sup>6</sup> ‘I’m here, ready to do what pleases You. I’m not holding on to anything.’ ‘Lord, what do you want me to do?’ What admirable words! They indicate a detachment as complete as it is astonishing. What an abundance of graces suddenly poured into this vessel of election! What a wonderful moment, which changed a persecutor into an Apostle! Oh, what great insight was then given him! By cutting him off from the law, his commission, his fortune, and his opinions, it causes him to say all at once, *Domine, quid me vis facere?*

“Surely the Rule is right in saying that Our Lord and the saints valued and practiced openness to God’s Will, and all of us are obliged to imitate them. Yes, my dear confreres, this virtue is necessary for Missioners because they don’t belong to themselves but to Our Lord, who has sent them and wants to make use of them. Why? In order to do what He did and to suffer like Him. ‘As My Father has sent Me,’ He said to His disciples, ‘I send you; and just as they persecuted Me, they will persecute you.’

“Furthermore, speaking of Saint Paul, He said, ‘*Ostendam illi quanta oporteat eum pro nomine meo pati.*’ I will show him how

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<sup>6</sup>Lord, what do you want me to do? Cf. Acts 9:6. (NAB)

much he has to suffer for My name.<sup>7</sup> And indeed, what did he not endure; it's amazing! It's incredible how much he suffered in his person, his honor, and his ministry. This heart of Saint Paul, so accepting and generous, was persecuted in various places. He was forced to escape from Damascus through a window; elsewhere he was flogged and cast into the sea; sometimes he was stoned, often imprisoned, despised, pursued, and, in the end, was martyred. He was destined to suffer: *Ostendam illi quanta oporteat eum pro nomine meo pati*. I'll show him how much he has to suffer. And so he did. Yes, what he suffered is extraordinary, extraordinary, extraordinary!

“But what shall we say about Abraham, the leader of the truly obedient and perfectly detached? God commanded him to leave his country and his relatives. ‘Leave your land, abandon everything, and go.’ He does so without objecting or delaying. What compliance, my dear confreres, what openness to God's Will! But, my God, You don't stop at that. You probed into his heart, to see if he was capable of going further. ‘Yes,’ God said to His servant, ‘I want another proof of your love: I want you to sacrifice your son to Me.’<sup>8</sup> The patriarch had no doubt about whether or not he should do it. ‘Let's go,’ he says. He takes everything needed to sacrifice him; he takes Isaac and his sword; they walk on and reach the designated place. The pyre is ready, the father's arm is raised, and the boy is at his feet awaiting the blow. How open Abraham is to God's Will! How far above natural feelings he is and how free in his actions and affections, since he's so prompt in submitting them to the strangest and least expected of God's orders!

“But don't you admire the obedience of the son as well as that of the father? Just look at his virtue; he doesn't ask questions about what has been planned in his regard. He lets himself be led and tied up; he goes on his knees; he surrenders his life. It suffices for him to know that his father wills this. *O mon Dieu!* O my dear confreres! What good reason we have to fear that the children of our under-

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<sup>7</sup>Cf. Acts 9:16. (NAB)

<sup>8</sup>Cf. Gn 22:1-18. (NAB)

standing are far removed from this self-denial! Are these insights, this knowledge, and this learning we have or claim to have really brought into subjection? Are you prepared, brothers, to sacrifice them to God? Let's take a close look at ourselves, and let's suppose a Superior says to us, 'Let's stop at that; you've studied enough; change houses; do something else.' That may happen to some of you; how will you feel about it? How will you feel, brothers, if you're asked for your Isaac? Will you cut the throat of this thirst for knowledge, of the pleasure of being in this place and not in another, of this stubbornness in wanting one thing and rejecting another? Examine your conscience sincerely; you'll find that you're not open to God's Will. *Eh, bon Dieu!* There have been some in the Company who, because they weren't sent to study after their seminary as they expected, grumbled, complained, and made such a fuss that it's really sad. But, Monsieur, but, my dear brother, didn't you come here to do God's Will and not your own, to obey and not to study? *Oh bien!* You're not going to study. This child of your mind is keeping you attached; this immoderate attachment is holding you prisoner. Go, learn how to free yourself and to be open to God's Will; let that be your lesson.

"Some have the passion for becoming priests before the time; others, for preaching, for debating, for being engaged in a certain work, for coming and going; there are few who don't have their beloved Isaac; but we have to give him up; we have to empty our hearts of any love other than that of God, and of any will other than that of obedience. *Or sus,* I think I can see that all of you are disposed to do this, and I hope God will give you that grace. Yes, my God, I hope from Your goodness, which sees my attachments, that You'll speak to me first of all; and I, who see that I'm incapable of mending my ways, will say in my old age, like David, 'Lord, have mercy on me.' For you, brothers, who are in a position to work at acquiring virtue, strive for that of openness to God's Will, for, if it pleases God that you obtain it, you'll have the source of virtues and the death of vices.

"Before coming to the means for practicing it, if you want another reason to have a great love for it, the truth is that the person

who's open to God's Will belongs wholly to God, God is everything to him, and everything else is nothing. Say to him, that's white, and it's white; say black, and it's black; come back, and he comes back; work, and he works. He's always ready to do anything, even without being told.

“Do you know the thought that occurs to me when someone talks about the needs of the far-off foreign missions? We hear about them; we feel attracted to them; we think that M. Nacquart, M. Gondrée,<sup>9</sup> and all those other Missioners who died as apostolic men for the institution of a new Church are happy. Indeed, they're blessed, for they've saved their souls by giving their lives for the faith and for Christian charity. That's beautiful; yes, it's something holy. Everyone praises their zeal and courage; and then that's it. If, however, we had that openness to God's Will, or if we didn't hold on to a certain trinket we like and to a certain something we've put aside, who wouldn't volunteer for Madagascar, for Barbary, Poland, or wherever else God is pleased to be served by the Company? But if we don't do it, it's because we're holding something back. There are sickly old men who have asked to be sent there and who have asked it even if they have a serious disability. Oh, that's because their hearts are free; they go in spirit wherever God wants to be known, and nothing detains them here except His Will! If we weren't entangled in some wretched bramble, we'd all say: 'My God, send me, I give myself to You for any place on earth where my Superiors will think it suitable for me to go to announce Jesus Christ; and, even if I should die there, I'd be disposed to go and would present myself to them for that, knowing that my salvation lies in obedience, and obedience lies in Your Will.'

“The means of obtaining from God this openness to His Will is continual mortification, both interior and exterior. I'm not going to give you any other. Our primary concern is to see whether we have a greater inclination toward one thing than toward another, and which ones attract us more closely to them, in order to be on the watch for this, you see, so as to work continually at distancing our-

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<sup>9</sup>Nicolas Gondrée (cf. XI, 263, n. 8).

selves from them, and to retrench and suppress anything we've set our hearts on, so we can divest ourselves of all created things and mortify our senses and passions always and everywhere.

“Let's make the intention today, and begin tomorrow, to combat our satisfactions and attachments, one after the other. Have no doubt, my very dear confreres, have no doubt that, if you're faithful, Our Lord will help you to succeed; thus, from being slaves to ourselves and to things that we like apart from God, we'll attain the freedom of His children, subject only to the Will of this Heavenly Father. *Lex justo non est posita*.<sup>10</sup> Persons open to God's Will are above every law; they're in a different category from others, and, like glorified bodies, they pass through everything and go everywhere—nothing stops or delays them. *O Sauveur!* how happy we'd be if we were as detached as beasts of burden, like You, Lord, who compared yourself to a beast of burden, in order to adapt yourself to the greatest flexibility imaginable! We entreat You, our Liberator, to grant us at least the grace of sharing in this disposition, confident that we'll never again lose our freedom or abandon the practice of holy openness to God's Will! We'll always have this openness in our understanding and will, where nothing will enter that may distract us from carrying out all that You ordain. In doing this, You'll be leading us by the hand, helping us to do Your Will, and, in the end, bringing us into glory. Amen.

“I recommend to your prayers the Bishop of Meaux,<sup>11</sup> who has been dying for the past two days and is suffering greatly in this state. This will be like a lamp in the Church that has gone out, one that enlightened both the people and the clergy by his great gentleness, wisdom, moral leadership, and steadfastness. He was very good to our Company, and we were fortunate that he brought us into his diocese and maintained us there. Providence had permitted that we be withdrawn from Crécy, and when this good Prelate saw that, he took the matter in hand. Because God gave the Company the

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<sup>10</sup>*The law is not meant for the righteous person.* Cf. 1 Tim 1:9. (NAB)

<sup>11</sup>Dominique Séguier (1595-1659), brother of Chancellor Pierre Séguier, was named Bishop of Auxerre in 1631 and transferred to Meaux in 1638. He resigned in 1659 and died in Paris on May 16 of the same year.

grace to prefer leaving everything rather than offend the person who had established us there, we wanted to depart in order to satisfy him, and to do so for the love of God alone, with nothing else in mind. In the course of the trial, this good Bishop gave me to understand that we should intervene in it in order to be re-established there. I asked him to excuse us for not wanting to litigate against our benefactor.<sup>12</sup> 'He put us there of his own accord, and now wants to dispose of his foundation in a different way. That's fine; we want him to do as he pleases.' 'So then, you'll play that role,' he said to us, 'and I'll play another. I'm going to act in opposition to that man's plans.' And, in fact, he bore the expenses of this case and supported and pleaded our cause and, in the end, he was successful. We have been upheld; and the capital that the founder wanted to divert to the general hospital has been awarded to us. Providence likewise permitted that, when the founder saw that we had preferred to withdraw, in deference to him, rather than to defend ourselves, he came here to this house to express his regret for what he'd done. Not only that, but he told me something else. . . . It's better not to say what it was.

"We have, therefore, good reason to pray for this good Prelate. Beginning this evening, we'll raise our hearts to God and pray that, in His mercy, He may be pleased to welcome him. We'll send someone early tomorrow morning to find out if he has died; and in that case, we'll offer our Masses for his intention.

"I also recommend the great needs of the Company. God is putting it to the test in the ways His Goodness knows; may it please His Infinite Goodness that we'll make good use of this!"

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<sup>12</sup>Pierre Lorthon, secretary of King Louis XIII. When the house was first established in Crécy (1641), Pierre Lorthon had promised the Congregation of the Mission a revenue of four thousand livres from five large farms he had obtained from the King and Queen. On further reflection, he preferred to give two thousand livres to the hospital in Crécy and to keep the balance for himself. This resulted in a lawsuit between Lorthon and the Bishop of Meaux, Dominique Séguier, which did not close until 1659, in favor of the Missioners. As mentioned here, Saint Vincent would have preferred to renounce everything rather than take a benefactor to court. Deprived of the resources on which he was counting, he left only one priest and a Brother at Crécy. The priest said Mass daily in the chapel, heard the confessions of those who came to him, and visited the sick of the parish who asked for him.

206. – UNIFORMITY  
(Common Rules, Chap. II, Art. 11)

May 23, 1659

“My dear confreres, the eleventh article of the chapter on Gospel teachings reads as follows: *Christ the Lord wished to lead a communal style of life, so that He would be like other people and in that way win them over more easily to God the Father. All of us, then, as far as possible, are to maintain uniformity in everything; we should look on this as the safeguard of good order and of the holiness which comes of being together. In the same way we should avoid anything out of the ordinary, as it can be the cause of jealousy and disagreement. All this applies not only to food, clothing, bedding, and so on, but also to methods of direction, teaching, preaching, exercising authority, and even spiritual practices. Only one thing is needed for this uniformity to be maintained constantly among us, namely, the most exact observance of our Rules and Constitutions.*

“You see, my dear confreres, that the gist of this article concerns uniformity; everything else is directed toward that. Now, since we have to speak of this virtue or state of uniformity, we’ll restrict what the Rule states, more or less, to our little method, and we can say first of all what it is (that’s where I think we should begin), then the reasons we have for giving ourselves to God to be of one mind and to have only one heart and soul, and we’ll give a means for this.

“I wondered whether I should explain the Rule word for word, or speak to you according to this division, and I felt that the material required being treated in the latter way.

“The meaning of the term *uniformity* speaks for itself; it’s so clear and obvious that no one can have any doubt about it, particularly those who have done their studies.

“Uniformity is a state or a virtue, or both together. Considered in an individual, uniformity is a virtue that causes the person to act in conformity with his state in life; considered in a Company, it’s a state which, uniting all the individuals, forms of several members one living body with its own functions.



“So then, Missioners are of one mind if they all have only one same spirit that animates them; and they’re uniform if they have only one soul that has the same faculties in each of them.

“ ‘What do you understand by faculties?’ I mean understanding, will, and memory, which are the faculties or powers of the soul, and should be similar in each one of us; so, strictly speaking, uniformity means having the same judgment and will regarding the things that concern our vocation.

“Now, in this relationship or similarity that is ours because of this union, natural characteristics should be distinguished from moral actions; for it’s difficult for physical characteristics to be alike: no two faces are ever the same, no more than the way two people walk, talk, and gesture is the same; they’re always a little different. Nature creates these differences, and God’s power is admirable in these variations distinguishing one person from another.

“As for moral actions, however, unanimity must be found in them because the virtues that produce them reside in the soul; all of us must have one and the same soul and, consequently, one and the same judgment, will, and ways of acting.

“ ‘But how can this be, Monsieur? We differ in our opinions and in the way we judge; one man sees things differently from the other; one has learning and the other does not; one has a keen mind, and someone like me is obtuse. Given our differences in intelligence, how can we not have different opinions?’ It’s true that it’s almost impossible to be all alike with regard to knowledge; but with regard to the purpose of our vocation, which is to tend toward our own holiness and to work for the instruction of the people and the promotion of the clergy, we have to agree in judgment, judge in the same manner, and make ourselves similar in practice; also, as the Rule states, we must all be of one mind in placing a high value on our exercises, and one same heart, as far as possible, in loving them, conforming our judgment and will, then, to the Rules, and using the means that lead to this.

“Perhaps the extremes can help us to understand better this state of which we’re speaking. One extreme of unanimity is to divide and separate: one person pulls to one side, another pulls to the other;

each one acts according to the way he understands the matter. The other extreme is to yield to negligence, caprice, and the disorderly actions of the neighbor.

“Our virtue lies in the middle; it consists in the union of our judgment and conformity of our will to attain holiness and to serve persons who are poor; and this is achieved by the common means the Rules point out to us. So, it helps us to avoid equally separating ourselves from this unity and aligning ourselves with those who separate or distance themselves from it. It causes us to be of one mind in all the Community practices. God knows the benefits that will come to us from this, if we make good use of it. It causes us to have the same will and non-will among us, along with a holy condescension for each other’s opinions, provided they’re not contrary to virtue. Lastly, it can’t tolerate arguments or quarreling, but attaches us to the spirit of the Rules, which proposes to unite us with God and among ourselves and to be united with the people as well, in order to win them over to God.

“What motives do we have to preserve and increase this uniformity?

“We find many of them in Holy Scripture. The first is in Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, chapter 15, where he recommends *ut unanimes uno ore honorificetis Deum et Patrem Domini Nostri Jesu Christi*,<sup>1</sup> so that you may honor God the Father with one same heart and voice. In line with that, we must always be uniform and of one mind in order to praise and serve God, and be only one in heart, in harmony with everyone, agreeing to the same manner of honoring and pleasing Him. It’s a question here of the service of God, and each individual must adapt to it.

“Saint Paul also states in Philippians, chapter 2, *Implete gaudium meum ut idem sapiatis, eandem caritatem habentes, unanimes idipsum sentientes*; <sup>2</sup> ‘Complete my joy,’ that Apostle said, ‘have but one and the same heart in order to preserve charity.’ And, recommending to the faithful that they have only one heart

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<sup>1</sup>Rom 15:6. (NAB)

<sup>2</sup>Phil 2:2. (NAB)

and one soul in the practice of religion, he says, *Credentium erat cor unum et anima una*; <sup>3</sup> have the same faith and the same practices. *Idem sentientes*,<sup>4</sup> he tells us; do whatever you can to have the same affections, to judge things in the same way, to be in agreement and never to argue. If one man gives his opinion, let the others go along with it and approve it, considering it better than their own. Virtue requires this and, if you act like that, my dear confreres, people will see that you're virtuous.

“Another passage states, *Unanimes collaborantes*: all working with one mind.<sup>5</sup> We mustn't only be united in our interior sentiments, but also in exterior ministries, all of us engaged according to our obligations; and since all Christians must concur in everything regarding Christianity, we, too, must cooperate in all the works of the Mission and conform ourselves to the order and manner of doing them.

“One of nature's wonders is that each species of created things resembles the other in itself and in what it produces; for example, all the stocks of a vine show in general that it's a vine; even each individual stock gives evidence of this, being the same as the others in form, bark, branches, and leaves; they all blossom at the same time; not only that, they all bear the same fruit and contribute all together to the production of the wine the master expects from them; they're all of one accord. That's how our Company should be with regard to God's plans.

“Look at the different kinds of birds there are, and think about the individuals of each species; you'll find that what one does, the other does. Take, for example, the pigeons of a dove cote: they look alike, they all have the same little ways of acting, they do the same things, and what one does, the other does; they all have the same characteristics. And look at the bees in a hive; they're like a little community; they have the same form, the same activity, the same purpose.

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<sup>3</sup>The community of believers was of one heart and mind. Cf. Acts 4:32. (NAB)

<sup>4</sup>Thinking the same thing. Cf. Phil 2:2. (NAB)

<sup>5</sup>Cf. Phil 1:27. (D-RB)

“Now, all these animal species are uniform by instinct and, because moral actions go beyond instinct and are formed by reason, they must likewise aim more perfectly for uniformity, which, willed and ordained by God, should cause us to do through reason what animals do through instinct. What nature gives to animals, grace has to work in us. Yes, my dear confreres, we must give ourselves to God to have a holy union among ourselves that gives us the same spirit, will and non-will, and manner of acting. We have to ask God to give us one heart and one soul like the first Christians. Grant us, Lord, the grace of not having two hearts and two souls but only one heart and soul, giving form and uniformity to the entire Company. Take from us our individualistic hearts and souls, which distance us from unity; take from us any individualistic way of acting, which isn't in harmony with what's done in common; may all of us have only one same heart, the principle of our life, and one same soul, which animates us to charity in virtue of that unitive, divine strength that brings about the communion of saints.

“Another reason we have for practicing uniformity is that, by becoming man, the Son of God willed to take on an ordinary life in order to conform himself to human beings and, in this way, to draw them closer to His Father; and He became, even more than Saint Paul, all to all, in order to win over everyone. He not only adopted our natural human ways, but, in a certain sense, our moral ones as well: an understanding like ours, a way of comprehending physical things the way we do, a will that led Him, as ours does, to what this understanding was showing Him as beautiful and good. He likewise judged natural things as we do; and that was apparent in the comparisons he used: the grain of wheat, which can't germinate if it doesn't rot; the seed cast on good ground, that bears a hundredfold; the merchant, who leaves his home and goes away; the green wood and the dry; and similar familiar things He said, which show that He had the same thoughts on them as we do. He also had the same manner of acting; He walked like us and worked like us. In a word, in order to insert himself better among us, He became like us; and, since resemblance develops love, He willed to appear and act like us in order to be loved. He willed to take on our nature in order that we

might be united to Him. He became man to show by His way of life how we should live. He was the image of His Father; and, as if that wasn't enough for Him, He willed to join to this adorable image conformity with human beings, in order to win over all of them, as the Rule states.

“That reason alone should convince us, but there are so many others that treat of this that I'll just recall one more that touches us closely: uniformity creates union in the Company, it's the cement that binds us together, the beauty that makes us amiable and causes us, in fact, to be drawn to it; and this reciprocal love makes us strive to have the same ways of understanding, to want the same things, and to pursue the same plans.

“If, on the contrary, you take from among us this uniformity that creates a resemblance, you take away love; all that's left is a disfigured body and complete desolation; where there are individualistic men, there's division. What do those men do, who try to preach *caeli caelorum*,<sup>6</sup> or to excel, or overestimate their own importance? They breed envy in others who see this individualism, which is not only a lack of uniformity, but creates disunion.

“Those who try to be different in the way they dress, in what they eat, or in other common needs upset those who follow the common way. O wretch that I am, I must be a burden to the whole house because I don't do what others do. I have a private room and a special bed; when I was no longer able to come and go, I made use of the infamy (that's what he called the little carriage he used, meaning that it was a disgrace for him and for the whole Company that a man of his class should ride in a carriage), and I've done other wretched things; I preach uniformity and I myself am anything but uniform. O Savior of my soul, please compensate for these failings by a powerful grace that will help me to serve the Company by some practices of virtue, above all, that of humility.

“So then, we should all be the same with regard to food, clothing, and lodging; and, in addition, uniform in our method of directing, teaching, preaching, and exercising authority, as also in our spiritual practices; these are the very words of the Rule.

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<sup>6</sup>In a pompous style.

“Nevertheless, there’s a certain distinction to be made and some exception to this general uniformity, for everyone can’t follow the common way; for example, the sick and infirm can’t do what everyone else does; they need a room with a fire, people to serve them, and a special diet that’s appropriate for their condition. Is that being individualistic? No, because each man in turn is treated the same way when he’s sick, and uniformity is better observed by relieving patients in whatever way we can than in doing otherwise, since the condition they’re in demands it. By taking what’s given them and letting someone else tell them what to do, they don’t fail in uniformity in this, but are in conformity with the intention of the Rule and of the Community.

“There are other things that seem to be contrary to uniformity and yet are not, like differences in habits: the priests have long ones; the Brothers wear short ones. That’s because this is suited to their respective situations. Among the Brothers themselves there are variations: some wear black; others wear grey, and they do so by order of the Company, with which God has inspired this diversity. Why? Because, for the men who live in the house and are engaged in ordinary work, it’s correct to wear black, but for those who minister outside it’s advisable to be dressed in grey. From the beginning, we felt this was appropriate and have continued ever since; consequently, we don’t think there’s any lack of uniformity among our Brothers because of this difference in color, but, on the contrary, there’s uniformity because it’s by order of the Company.

“And not only should the Brothers act that way, but even the priests on certain occasions that have to do with the glory of God, obliging them to change their way of dressing and to be clothed like laymen. Haven’t we seen one of our men dressed in colored clothing, with a sword at his side, in order to go into England? If he had been recognized as a priest there, he would have been arrested, as has happened to others. So then, there are times when priests, religious, and even the Capuchins, dress like merchants or gentlemen, carrying a sword and wearing their hair long. Is that failing in the uniformity of their state or Order? Not at all, because it’s done through obedience and for a good reason, and is even part of uniformity.

“In line with that, Brothers, all of you should be ready to change your habit whenever it’s advisable; and those who have found it difficult to wear the grey habit should regret having insisted that the Brother who does the sewing clothe them otherwise. That happened a while ago to someone who asked him for a black habit, put pressure on him, and got one without the order of the Superior. I have to say that, when he was admonished of his fault, he showed remorse. I exhort you, as strongly as I can, Brothers, to wear black when the Superior permits, and grey, every time he orders you to do so; and those of you who are wearing the grey habit should realize the fault they’d commit by changing it without an order. No one should ever get impatient at being dressed that way and must not ask to change his clothing because of its color. I forbid the tailor ever to give the black habit to those who don’t have one, unless those in charge in the house tell him to do so. *Eh quoi*, Brothers! Does wearing grey make you any less Brothers? Does the habit make the monk, or do colors make the qualifications of persons? What makes you Coadjutors of the Mission? It’s the grace God gave you of calling you to it; it’s the happiness you have of serving God in it by the observance of Christian virtue; it’s the charity you show your neighbor. That’s the habit of a Missioner. We live together in order to fulfill the Law of God and not to wear this or that color. So then, live content in the state and in the habit in which you are.

“Surely, my dear confreres, we should believe that our peace and glory lie in virtue, and our virtue in a resemblance to Jesus Christ and uniformity among ourselves; that’s what banishes envy and discord and everything that divides hearts; that’s what makes us uniform in preaching, catechizing, hearing confessions, teaching, in leadership, and in our dealings with God and with our neighbor.

“Let’s make ourselves one in spirit; we’ll be in a paradise; I know of none on this earth except among those who adapt to one another so that everyone will be similar; I know of nothing in this world that can complete our happiness except uniformity among ourselves, which makes us like Our Lord and unites us to God. Oh, what a consolation if we have this grace! It’s a foretaste of blessedness. If we have the contrary, it’s a preview of hell, where there’s only hatred and division.

“If God in His goodness is pleased to grant us the mercy of loving one another, we’ll take care not to raise ourselves up or strive to surpass others, for that destroys friendship, stirs up envy, and generates aversions. If, until now, we’ve tried to excel, in the name of God, brothers, don’t allow this to happen any longer among us! If I’m capable of being high-minded in my reflections and speech, I’ll only go half as high; if I can do something extraordinarily well, or show off my knowledge or that I work harder than most people, away with all that! That’s not how Our Lord acted; as mighty as He was, He adjusted himself to the level of the weak. If I have two ideas, one beautiful and clever, and the other more common and less showy, I’ll take the latter and give up the former. Let’s settle for the average; let the scholar appear to have ordinary knowledge and let the strong man who works, labor humbly; for whatever is said or done for the poor people in a patronizing spirit is vain and useless; it goes over their head; the wind carries it away over the housetops, and what Caesar’s blood stained garment did, amid the loud cries of those who carried it,<sup>7</sup> is like what those preachers do who make a display of novelties, curiosities, and strange things, in a grave or mournful tone of voice. And what do they do? They move natural sentiments a little but don’t give life to the dead or the lights of the Gospel to ignorant people. I have to say that there’s someone among us who shouts and carries on and, using puffed up language, seems to be trying to dazzle his hearers, instead of bringing them in a loving way to knowledge of God and of their duty. I hear that he’s doing his best to correct himself; if he does, he’ll have good reason to hope that God will bless him.

“Let’s endeavor, Messieurs, to preach with as little lofty language as possible and less eloquently, in order to adapt ourselves to others who preach, but are less learned and talented. I met a good Pastor near La Rochelle, who, hearing that the Fathers of Christian Doctrine in Toulouse preached simply so as to be clearly understood, had a great desire to hear them, especially since, until then,

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<sup>7</sup>This is a reference to Caesar’s funeral, at which Antony gave his eulogy of Caesar while holding up his bloodstained garment. When the crowd saw this, they went into a state of wild excitement.



he had seen preaching done only in a pompous way. That disturbed him because he saw that it was doing the people no good. He asked his Bishop's permission to go to see this holy novelty, which seemed in conformity with the custom of the early workers of the Church. 'The people,' he said, 'don't understand what's being preached to them; they're not able to grasp fine points of doctrine, subtle ideas, and the flowery rhetoric with which sermons are sprinkled, but they do understand a good story and some teaching of morality that's clear and well explained, on the level, and according to the needs, of the people.' That good man recognized the abuse and wanted to find the remedy for it. I knew him and so did M. Portail, who may recall what I'm saying to you. He died a saint. With the Bishop's permission, he left his parish and went to see those men of the Gospel, who preached so familiarly that even the most uncouth persons could understand and remember their instructions. That's how the Congregation of the Mission should act.

"Let me add this: not only should we preach in a familiar way, but we should be average preachers in order for all of us to be uniform; for each man can become average, but few can attain loftiness. The lofty mind can lower itself to an average level, and the lowly mind can raise itself to the same degree; this will banish far from us envy, rivalry, and gossip, and will build union and uniformity among us and in our exercises.

"If we want to have within us the image of the adorable Trinity and a holy relationship with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, let's establish ourselves in this spirit. What creates unity and single-mindedness in God, if not equality and the distinction of the Three Persons? And what creates Their love if not Their resemblance? And if there were no love among Them, what would be loveable in Them, said the Blessed Bishop of Geneva? So then, there's uniformity in the Blessed Trinity: what the Father wants, the Son wants; what the Holy Spirit does, the Father and the Son do and act the same way; They have only one power and one way of acting. That's the source of holiness and our model. Let's make ourselves uniform; we'll be many as if we were only one, and we'll have holy

union in plurality. If we already have a little, but not enough, let's ask God for what we lack, and see in what we differ from one another in order to try to resemble one another and be equal; for resemblance and equality engender love, and love tends toward unity. So then, let's all strive to have the same likings and to be in agreement regarding the things that are done or are allowed to be done among us.

“The means of having this union of hearts and uniformity of action is to keep the Rules. That says it all, my dear confreres. Everything in this observance aims at making us uniform, and if it's well observed, it will help all of us to do the same thing in the same ways and for the same purposes. Everything is marked out for us; and to see how each individual should be and should act, we have only to look into that mirror. One day, someone said to me, ‘Look at the Carthusians, they're like cattle; they walk the same way; and if you see one, you see them all.’ It's true, Messieurs, they're all men of prayer, people of consequence, all men of solid virtue, faithful to their Constitutions. Let's be similar, my dear confreres, in our meditations and spiritual practices, in the way we celebrate and serve Holy Mass, in observing recollection, in conversation, in the manner of giving missions, in teaching knowledge of salvation, and in directing retreatants and ordination retreats; in a word, let's make ourselves uniform in all our general and personal obligations, according to our Regulations.

“What can I say of the Church's thinking on this topic? Isn't the Church uniform in its practices? Isn't what's done in Rome done in France, Germany, Poland, the Indies, and elsewhere? Doesn't it have the same Sacrifice, the same Sacraments, the same ceremonies, and the same language everywhere? And, even though people complained in the beginning that Mass was being celebrated in a language they didn't understand, nevertheless, in order to be preserved in one and the same spirit, after having weighed everything and compared this difficulty with the inconveniences that might result if each country had Holy Mass in its own language, the Church wanted everyone to be unanimous and uniform in all these things. It willed that all nations be conformed to the usage it

established, despite the complaints made about this. And why? Because, in addition to the fact that God is honored by this universal practice, great abuses are avoided by this conformity. Oh, if you had only seen, I don't want to say the ugliness, but the diversity, of the ceremonies of the Mass forty years ago, it would have made you ashamed! I don't think there was anything uglier in the world than the different ways people were celebrating it: some began the Mass with the *Pater noster*; others would take the chasuble in their hands and say the *Introibo*, and then they'd put on that chasuble. Once I was at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, where I noticed seven or eight priests who all said Mass differently; one did it one way, the other another way; the diversity was worthy of tears. *Or sus*, God be blessed that His Divine Goodness has been pleased to gradually remedy this great disorder! All of it hasn't been set right, for, alas, how much variation in the celebration of the Holy Mysteries is still apparent! How many poorly formed priests there still are who lack instruction or are unwilling to follow the correct way that should create the uniformity indicated by the rubrics!

“O Savior! You so loved uniformity that not only did You become man to have it along with other men, by conforming yourself to their way of acting, but You also recommended to all Christians, in speaking to Your disciples, to be only one among themselves, in the same way that You were only one with Your Father. In conformity with that recommendation, You were willing to adapt yourself to the will and inclinations of each individual and to all that good and bad people desired of You in Your life and in Your death. O good Jesus, please give all of us this virtue of being in agreement in understanding, will, and action, and being in conformity in teaching catechism, preaching, and in all the observances of the Company.

“Let's hope, my dear confreres, that in so doing we'll enjoy the immortal glory enjoyed by Father, Son, and Holy Spirit because we'll be united by the same bond of love that unites Them. So then, let there no longer be two wills in the Company, but one single will; not two hearts, but one single heart; not a difference of opinion, but uniformity in everything. What else will we then have but peace, union, and paradise!”

207. – CHARITY  
(Common Rules, Chap. II, Art. 12)

May 30, 1659

“My dear confreres, here’s the twelfth article of the second chapter of the Gospel teachings contained in our Rules: *Charitable behavior toward the neighbor should always be characteristic of us. We should try, then: (1) to behave toward others in the way we might reasonably expect to be treated by them; (2) to agree with others, and to accept everything in the Lord; (3) to put up with one another without grumbling; (4) to weep with those who weep; (5) to rejoice with those who rejoice; (6) to yield precedence to one another; (7) to be kind and helpful to one another in all sincerity; (8) finally, to be all things to all people so that we may win everyone for Christ. All of this is to be understood as in no way going against the commandments of God, or Church law, or the Rules or Constitutions of our Congregation.*

“So then, my dear confreres, this evening’s conference is about charity toward our neighbor or, to put it better, about the acts that proceed from this charity and the works it should produce.

“This charity is obligatory; it’s a divine precept, which embraces several others. Each of us knows that the Law and the Prophets are included in the love of God and neighbor. Everything refers back to that; everything is directed to it; and this love has such strength and is so privileged that anyone who possesses it fulfills the laws of God because they all relate to this love, and this love helps us to do whatever God asks of us; *qui enim diligit proximum legem implevit.*<sup>1</sup>

“Now, that concerns not only love of God but love of the neighbor for the love of God. Notice, ‘for the love of God,’ which is so great that human understanding can’t grasp it; enlightenment from on high is needed to raise us up in order to show us the height and depth, the breadth and excellence of this love.

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**Conference 207.** - Archives of the Mission, text of Brother Bertrand Ducourneau. Part of this conference was published in Abelly (*op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XI, pp. 107ff.) with rather extensive modifications in format. The copy in the Manuscript of Conferences is closer to Brother Ducourneau’s text.

<sup>1</sup>For one who loves another [the neighbor] has fulfilled the law. Cf. Rom 13:8. (NAB)

“Saint Thomas puts forward this question, namely, who has the greater merit, the one who loves God and neglects the neighbor, or the one who loves the neighbor for the love of God? He himself gives the solution to this dilemma, concluding that it’s more meritorious to love the neighbor for the love of God than to love God without reference to the neighbor. He proves it in the following way, which may seem paradoxical: ‘To go into the heart of God,’ he says, ‘to confine all one’s love to that place, is not the most perfect because the perfection of the Law consists in loving God and the neighbor.’ Give me a man who loves God alone, a soul elevated in contemplation, who never thinks about his brothers; that man, finding it very agreeable to love in this way a God who appears to him the only thing loveable, stops at savoring this infinite source of sweetness. And then you have another who loves the neighbor, no matter how rough and crude he may be, but loves him for the love of God. Which of these loves, I ask you, is the purest and least self-interested? Doubtless it’s the second, and in this way it fulfills the Law most perfectly. He loves God and the neighbor; what more can he do? The first loves only God, but the other loves both. We really must give ourselves to God to imprint these truths on our soul, to organize our life according to this spirit, and to do the works of this love. There are no people in the world more obliged to do this than we are, nor any Community that should apply itself more to the external practice of heartfelt charity.

“And why? Because God has raised up this Little Company, like all the others, for His love and good pleasure. They all aim to love Him, but they love Him in different ways: the Carthusians by solitude, the Capuchins by poverty, others by chanting His praises; and we, my dear confreres, if we have love, we should show it by bringing people to love God and the neighbor, to love the neighbor for God and God for the neighbor. We’ve been chosen by God as instruments of His immense, paternal charity, which is intended to be established and to expand in souls. Ah, if we only realized what this holy zeal is! We’ll never see it clearly in this life; for, if we did, how differently we’d act—at least a wretched man like me would.

“So, our vocation is to go, not just to one parish, not just to one diocese, but all over the world; and to do what? To set people’s hearts on fire, to do what the Son of God did. He came to set the world on fire in order to inflame it with His love. What do we have to desire but that it may burn and consume everything. My dear confreres, let’s reflect on that, please. It’s true then, that I’m sent not only to love God but to make Him loved. It’s not enough for me to love God, if my neighbor doesn’t love Him. I have to love my neighbor as the image of God and the object of His love, and to act in such a way that people, in their turn, love their Creator, who knows them and acknowledges them as His brothers, whom He has saved, and that by mutual charity they love one another for love of God, who has loved them so much as to hand over His own Son to death for them. So then, that’s my obligation. *O mon Dieu!* How many faults I’ve committed against that! How little I’ve realized the importance of my Rule and have paid so little attention to the active and passive charity to which God calls me! Each of us must be convinced of that before God. Let’s all say to Him, ‘O my God, I’ve been remiss on that point; forgive my past failings and grant me the grace of having Your holy love imprinted very clearly on my heart, and that it may be the life of my life and the soul of my actions, so that, being apparent outside of me, it may also enter and work in the souls with whom I come in contact.’

“Now, if we’re really called to take the love of God far and near, if we must set nations on fire with it, if our vocation is to go throughout the world to spread this divine fire, if that’s the case, I say, if that’s the case, brothers, how I myself must burn with this divine fire! How I must be afire with loving those with whom I live and with edifying my own confreres by the exercise of love, and inspiring my dear confreres to practice the acts that proceed from it! At the hour of death, we’ll see the irreparable loss we’ve suffered—if not all of us, at least those who don’t have this brotherly love and don’t live it as they should. How can we give it to others if we don’t have it among ourselves? Let’s take a good look to see if we do have it—not in a general way but each individually—and whether it’s present to the degree it should be; for, if it’s not burning, if we don’t

love one another as Jesus Christ has loved us, and produce acts like His, how can we hope to take this love all over the world? We can't give what we don't have. How can a Company inflame hearts with true charity, if the Company itself doesn't have it?

"This would be the place to explain that virtue according to our ordinary method and to say what it is; but let's put that aside; everyone knows that, so let's look at it from its effects.

"What is its first one? What does a heart animated by it produce? What stands out with it, as opposed to a man who doesn't have it and has only natural inclinations? To do to each individual the good we would reasonably want him to do to us summarizes charity. Is it true that I do to my neighbor what I'd like him to do to me? Ah, that's the real test! But how many Missioners have at least this interior disposition? Not many! *O mon Dieu!* Where are they? There are many like me who pay no attention to doing for others what they're quite pleased to accept for themselves; and not having this love, there's no charity; for charity causes us to do for our neighbor the good that a person has the right to expect from a faithful friend.

"Let's look at the Son of God; what a heart of charity He had; what a fire of love! Please tell us, Jesus, who pulled You away from heaven to come to endure the curse of earth and the many persecutions and torments You suffered? O Savior! Source of love humbled even to our level and to a vile agony, who showed, in that, greater love for the neighbor than You yourself did? You came to lay yourself open to all our misfortunes, to take the form of a sinner, to lead a life of suffering and to undergo a shameful death for us; is there any love like that? But who else could love in such an outstanding way? Only Our Lord, who was so enamored with the love of creatures as to leave the throne of His Father to come to take a body subject to weaknesses. And why? To establish among us, by His word and example, love of the neighbor. This is the love that crucified Him and brought about that admirable work of our redemption. O Messieurs, if we had only a little of that love, would we stand around with our arms folded? Would we let those we could assist perish? Oh, no! Charity can't remain idle; it impels us to work for the salvation and consolation of others.

“This first effect enlightens our understanding; that enlightenment leads to esteem; and esteem moves the will to love, causing the person who loves to be convinced of the honor and affection he should have for his neighbor, to be filled with it, and to show it by word and works.

“Can someone who has this esteem and affection for the neighbor speak ill of him? Can he do anything that might displease him? Having these sentiments in his heart, can he see his brother and friend without showing his love for him? From the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks and, ordinarily, exterior actions give witness to what is within the person; those who have true charity interiorly will manifest it externally. It’s characteristic of fire to give light and heat, and it’s characteristic of love to show respect and kindness to the person who is loved. Have we felt less esteem and affection for certain persons? Do we not, from time to time, allow thoughts of this more or less? If that’s the case, we don’t have that charity which dismisses the first feelings of contempt and the seed of aversion; for, if we had that divine virtue, which is a participation of the Sun of Justice, it would dispel the mists of our corruption and make us see what’s good and beautiful in our neighbor in order to honor and cherish him for them. I admit that, if there has sometimes been a certain lessening among us in that area, God has now looked on us with the eyes of His mercy.”

Here M. Vincent, raising his eyes to heaven in a sentiment of gratitude, repeated, “God has looked on us with the eyes of His mercy; He has taken pity on us by removing from the Company a few troublesome men who were the cause of this lessening of love, with the result that someone said to me recently, ‘You know, Monsieur, I think we’re living in this house like children, in the freedom of innocence and the mutual practice of sincere friendship; we don’t hear any boasting or taunting; we respect one another; no one opposes the others.’”

“O Savior, You who have banished from the Company acts contrary to this first effect of charity, preserve it in that cordial union in which, by Your grace, it now lives. Please don’t allow it to be changed by any breath of pride or by the spirit of division, which is on the watch



to ruin us, or that it may never find itself in the wretched state in which it was in the past. I say *in the past*, for Your Goodness withdrew it from that state long ago, so that twenty, fifty years from now, and forever, this Company may live in that cordial, mutual esteem.

“Please ask God frequently for this, Messieurs, and pray in solidarity with one another so that all Missioners may always love one another. Let’s console ourselves by the fact that this is being done at present, and ask God not to allow them ever to grow lax in the practice of this brotherly love. *Or sus*, let’s move on to the other effects.

“The second effect of charity is never to contradict others. We’re with other people and are talking about something good; someone says what he thinks and someone else tactlessly says, ‘That’s not right; you can’t prove it to me.’ To do that is to hurt the person who’s contradicted; and if he isn’t really humble, he’ll try to maintain his opinion, and this leads to arguing, which kills charity. I don’t win over my brother by contradicting him but by accepting simply in Our Lord what he’s put forward. Maybe he’s right and I’m not; he’s trying to contribute something to a simple conversation, and I turn it into an argument; yet, if I knew what he meant in saying what he did, I might approve it. Shame on the contradiction that divides hearts! Let’s avoid it like a fever that makes us thirsty, like a devastating plague, like a demon that ravages the holiest Companies; let’s drive out this evil spirit by our prayers, lifting our thoughts often to God, especially when we have the opportunity to see other people’s point of view, so that He may grant us the grace to act that way, far from contradicting and hurting them. They’re simply saying what they think, so let’s accept it just as simply. If some of them slander or ridicule others (O Savior, don’t ever allow that!), but if that does happen, don’t rebuke them in public; no, don’t do it. I don’t think that’s effective or according to Rule, to theology, or to Gospel teaching, but should be done individually and in private.

“This afternoon I was wondering if Our Lord had ever contradicted any of His disciples in the presence of the others; no example came to mind except His contradiction of Peter, when He said to him, ‘O Satan!’<sup>2</sup> and that was spontaneous; and one other time

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<sup>2</sup>Cf. Mt 16:23. (NAB)

when he [Peter] boasted that he'd follow his Master to death. 'Ah,' He said, 'you'll deny me three times tonight!'

"Be that as it may, we see that Our Lord was very reluctant to contradict anyone, so why shouldn't we be the same? He had the right to reprove His men publicly because He was the way and the truth; but we who can lose our self-control really have to restrain ourselves so as never to contradict those who speak, for fear of embarrassing them, sparking an argument, or fighting against the truth. Let's give ourselves to God, Messieurs, to keep ourselves from doing that. If we have the opposite opinion, either let's say nothing or simply say things as we see them, without attacking either the interpretation given them by others or the way they relate them, believing that they're right in acting as they do. That's how charity is kind, as Saint Paul states.<sup>3</sup> That's the second effect.

"The third is seen in the way we bear one another's weaknesses. Whom can we call perfect? No one on this earth. But whom can we not call imperfect? Since everyone has faults, then who doesn't need forbearance? Anyone who strives to know himself well will see many weaknesses and failings in himself, and will even acknowledge that he can't help having them, or, consequently, trying the patience of others; just let him examine himself in body and mind. Sometimes we'll find ourselves—each and every one of us—strangely opposed to a person who isn't bad, but everything about him displeases us. The way he looks at things, listens, speaks, or acts, everything about him will seem flawed to us because of our own evil natural inclinations. Someone else will speak clearly and be grammatically correct, and we'll find his ideas vague and his words insipid because of our antipathy for him, which, however, is involuntary; and if he happens to notice this, we're glad that he doesn't resent it, but excuses us for it. Why, then, will we not also hold him excused when he looks at us the wrong way or disapproves of our words and actions, for this dislike we have of him may be mutual? Sometimes we're cheerful and sometimes we're sad; someone may have seen us overjoyed yesterday, and to-

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<sup>3</sup>Cf. 1 Cor 13:4. (NAB)

day he thinks we're too gloomy. Since we'd like the other to put up with us in these extremes of our changing moods, isn't it only right that we should bear with him in similar circumstances?

“Let's put ourselves on trial; let each of us carefully examine the evidence, our bodily weaknesses, our undisciplined passions, our inclination to evil, our wild imagination, our infidelity and ingratitude toward God, and our behavior toward others; we'll discover in ourselves more malicious acts and reasons for humiliation than in anyone else in the world; then we can say courageously, 'I'm the greatest sinner and the most unbearable of men.' Yes, if we examine ourselves closely, we'll find that we're a real burden to those with whom we come in contact; and if anyone has reached that point of being well aware of all his weaknesses, which is the result of the grace of God, rest assured that he's also at the point needed to see the obligation he has to bear with others; he won't see any faults in them, or, if he does, they'll seem very small in comparison with his own. Thus, in the midst of his own weakness, he'll bear charitably with his neighbor. What wonderful forbearance Our Lord has! You see that beam that supports all the weight of the ceiling, without which it would fall; He has likewise supported us in our falls, blindness, and sluggishness. It's as if all of us were weighed down with ills and miseries of body and soul, and this kind Savior took it upon himself to undergo the suffering and shame of them. If we reflected seriously on this, we who are guilty of them would see how much we deserve to be punished and despised for them, for piling up fault upon fault every day—especially me, a wretched keeper of pigs, who do that by my bad habits and by my ignorance, which is so great that I hardly know what I'm saying.

“I've just said that, when we've reached that point of knowing ourselves well, we easily bear with one another... and now I forget what I was going to say or where I was... please bear with me. What are we doing by bearing with one another? We're practicing *alter alterius onera portate*.<sup>4</sup> What will you be doing when you bear with

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<sup>4</sup>*Bear one another's burdens.* Cf. Gal 6:2. (NAB)

your confreres? You'll be fulfilling the Law of Jesus Christ. Let's all say to Him, 'My Lord, I no longer want to notice any faults but my own; grant that, from now on, enlightened by the splendor of Your example, I may carry everyone in my heart and bear with them with Your strength; grant me the grace to do this, inflame me with Your love.'

'I'm moving on quickly to the fourth effect of charity. By it, we can't see someone suffering without suffering along with him, or see someone cry without crying as well. This is an act of love, causing people to enter one another's hearts and to feel what they feel, far from those persons who have no feeling for the anguish of the afflicted, or the suffering of poor persons. Ah, how tenderhearted the Son of God was! They call Him to go see Lazarus; He goes; Magdalen gets up and goes to meet Him in tears; the Jews follow her, and they're also crying; everyone begins to weep. What does Our Lord do? He's so tenderhearted and compassionate that He weeps along with them. It's this sensitivity that caused Him to come down from heaven; He saw that people were deprived of His glory, and He was moved by their misfortune. We must likewise be moved by our neighbor's suffering and share his sorrow. O Saint Paul, how sensitive you were on this point! O Savior, You who filled that Apostle with Your Spirit and compassion, help us to say with him, *Quis infirmatur, et ego non infirmor?* Is anyone sick and I am not sick along with him?<sup>5</sup>

"And how can I commiserate with his illness, if not by participating in it together in Our Lord, who is our head? All of us make up a mystical body, but we're all members of one another. It has never been heard that a member, not even among animals, was insensitive to the suffering of another member, or that one part of a person's body may be bruised, wounded, or injured and the other parts don't feel it. That's impossible. Every part of us is in such sympathy with one another and so interconnected that the pain of one is the pain of the other. Since Christians are members of the same body and members of one another, with even greater reason should they sympa-

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<sup>5</sup>Cf. 2 Cor 11:29. (NAB)

thize with one another. *Quoi!* To be a Christian and to see our brother suffering without weeping with him, without being sick with him! That's to be lacking in charity; it's being a caricature of a Christian; it's inhuman; it's to be worse than animals.

“Another effect of charity is to rejoice with those who rejoice. It causes us to enter into their joy. Our Lord intended by His teachings to unite us in one mind and in joy as well as in sorrow; it's His desire that we share one another's feelings. Saint John's Gospel relates that the blessed Precursor said, speaking of himself and of Jesus Christ, that the Bridegroom's friend is very happy to hear his voice. ‘My joy,’ he said, ‘is complete; he must increase and I must decrease.’<sup>6</sup> In the same way, let's rejoice when we hear the voice of our neighbor who rejoices, for he represents Our Lord to us; let's rejoice at his successes, happy that he surpasses us in the honor and esteem of the world, in talent, grace, and virtue. That's how we should share his feelings of joy.

“Let's likewise share in the things that sadden him; let's do through virtue what worldly people often do through human respect. When they're going to see someone who's sad because he has lost his father, his wife, or a relative, what do they do? They usually wear black; if they have feathers, flowers, or others signs of cheerfulness on them, they remove them and go dressed in mourning; when they get there, they have a sad expression and, going up to the bereaved person, they say to him, ‘Alas! I can't tell you how sorry I am for your loss; I share it with you; I'm really devastated by it; I'm here to mingle my tears with yours,’ and other similar words that show how they share this sorrow.

“Where did this custom originate? You know better than I that good Christian ceremonies are ancient, beginning with the Gospel and the Epistles of Saint Paul. The first Christians had the custom of visiting one another, sympathizing with and consoling one another. Those duties of friendship have come down to us and have a Christian foundation; that's what they did, and we still do it. Nothing similar is done among the Turks or the Indians, or even among the

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<sup>6</sup>Cf. Jn 3:29-30. (NAB)

Jews; they uncover their heads only to greet one another. Originally, then, these things were gestures of charity; unfortunately, they've been cut off from their source. The way they're practiced now is usually an abuse of them because they're done to impress others, to put on airs through self-interest or from natural affection, and not because of unity of spirit and the feeling the Son of God came to establish in His Church, by which the faithful, as the members of Jesus Christ and having the same spirit He did, are joyful or sad with the joy or the sadness of their brothers and sisters. In line with that, we should consider the misfortunes of others as our own.

“Those are five or six effects of charity, and here's another: to be the first to show respect to the other. Why? Because otherwise it seems that we're avoiding one another, acting the gentleman or the nobleman, or being aloof. This closes a person's heart, whereas the contrary opens and expands it. Humility is a genuine effect of charity; when we meet someone, it causes us to be the first to show the person honor and respect and, by this means, wins his affection. Who doesn't like a humble person? When a ferocious lion, ready to devour another animal that might try to resist him, sees it subdued, and, so to speak, humbled at his feet, he immediately calms down. What can we do but love a person who humbles himself? A Missioner who gets down on his knees before Bishops or Pastors, like a valley that draws moisture from the mountains, receives their blessing and benevolence. And if we practice respect among ourselves, we also practice humiliation because, since humility is the daughter of love, it promotes union and charity.

“The last effect of charity is the expression of our affection. We have to let one another see that we love each other sincerely. Being the first to show respect accomplishes this by offering cordially to be of service or by doing something pleasing for one another. 'I'd really like to show you how much I appreciate you!' And, after saying it with our lips, we should confirm it by deeds: to be of service to each and every one and actually make ourselves all to all. Having charity in our heart and words isn't everything; it has to be put into action; then it's perfect and becomes productive because it generates love in the hearts of those who practice it; it wins over everyone.

“When we practice all these acts, namely, (1) doing to others the good we’d reasonably want them to do to us; (2) never contradicting anyone and finding everything good in Our Lord; (3) bearing with one another without grumbling; (4) weeping with those who weep; (5) rejoicing with those who rejoice; (6) being the first to show respect to the other; (7) showing affection for them and cheerfully helping them; in a word, becoming all to all in order to win over everyone to Jesus Christ, what are we doing when we practice these things? We’re taking the place of Our Lord, who practiced them first. He took the last place; let’s do the same; he came to show His love for us and provided us ahead of time with His blessings. In the same way, let’s be the first to show our affection for our neighbor, not at the wrong time or indiscreetly, but appropriately, with moderation and in the proper way. In like manner, do all the other acts in their time and place, provided that, as the Rule states, they’re never contrary to the Law of God or to our Rules and Constitutions, for charity can’t allow that. Besides all that, let’s do good always and everywhere, as the occasions arise—which will be quite often; and the more we do this in the Spirit of Our Lord, the more pleasing we’ll be in His eyes. Lastly, Messieurs, if God is granting Missioners this grace, what do you think of such a Company? Their life is a life of love; it’s the life of angels, the life of the blessed. If God grants us this grace of loving one another, it’s a heavenly and earthly paradise. It’s been said that we live like children, but people will say, ‘Like the blessed and the angels live together.’

“O Savior, You who came to carry out this law of loving our neighbor as ourselves, You who practiced it so perfectly toward us, not only in our human way but in an incomparable manner, be, Lord, Your own thanks for calling us to this state of life and of continually loving our neighbor, yes, called to this love by state of life and by profession, actually practicing it or disposed to do so, even to the point of leaving every other occupation in order to be engaged in works of charity. Religious are said to be in a state of perfection; we’re not religious, but we can say that we’re in a state of charity because we’re constantly engaged in the actual practice of love or are disposed to be so.

“O Savior, how happy I am to be in a state of love for the neighbor, a state that, of itself, calls out to You, entreats You and offers You unceasingly what I am doing on behalf of others! Grant me the grace of being aware of my happiness and of truly loving this blessed state so that I may do my part to see that this virtue may become evident in the Company now, tomorrow, and always. Amen.”

**208. - HOW TO BENEFIT FROM CALUMNIES**  
(Common Rules, Chap. II, Art. 13)

June 6, 1659

*If Divine Providence ever allows a house or member of the Congregation, or the Congregation itself, to be subjected to, and tested by, slander or persecution, we are to be extra careful to avoid any retaliation, verbal abuse, or complaint against the persecutors or slanderers. We should even praise and bless God, and joyfully thank Him for it as an opportunity for great good, coming down from the Father of Lights. We should even pray sincerely to Him for those who harm us and, if the opportunity and possibility present themselves, should willingly help them, remembering that Christ commanded us, and all the faithful, to do this: “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, and pray for persecutors and slanderers.<sup>1</sup> And to get us to do this more willingly and more easily He said that we would be blessed in doing so and that we should be joyful and glad about it since our reward is great in heaven. And, more importantly, He was gracious enough to be the first to act in this way toward others so as to be a model for us. Afterward the Apostles, disciples, and numberless Christians followed His example.*

“This article, Messieurs, the thirteenth regarding Gospel teachings, helps us to understand what God is asking of us when any per-

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Conference 208. - Manuscript of Conferences.

<sup>1</sup>Cf. Mt 5:44. (NAB)



secution arises against us, and calumny attacks this Little Company in general, its houses, or the individuals that compose it.

“We’ll divide this talk into two points: the first will cover the reasons obliging us to give ourselves to Our Lord Jesus Christ, that He may be pleased to grant us the grace to benefit from calumnies and persecutions; in the second point we’ll give the means to achieve this goal.

“In order to establish firmly what I have to say to you in this little talk, we have to lay down as a foundation the fact that, if we’re faithful to God, the Company in general will never lack calumnies and persecutions, nor will the houses, nor individuals. *Omnes qui pie volunt vivere in Christo Jesu persecutionem patientur.*<sup>2</sup> *Omnes*—all, without exception. From this I give as the first reason that one of the greatest misfortunes that could happen to this Little Company would be if Divine Providence acted differently toward it and if Our Lord didn’t purge it by suffering and bombard it with vexations. O Messieurs, what a great misfortune if it has no punishments, if God doesn’t put it to the test! On the contrary, what a consolation if God judges us worthy of suffering and gives us the grace to suffer properly, since we have good reason to believe that suffering is an effect of the Divine Goodness in our regard, a consequence of the willingness He’s had from all eternity to save us and a sign that God is with the Company, that He’s pleased with it, and that He’s served faithfully in it. Yes, Messieurs, when a Company is persecuted and calumniated it’s a sign of its fidelity; and if we don’t have this sign, if everything smiles on us, if the world applauds us, let’s be afraid, Messieurs, let’s be afraid.

“Oh, if God were pleased that we should be firmly established in the observance of our Rules, thoroughly convinced of the teachings of Jesus Christ, really disabused and disillusioned by those of the world, if we were totally faithful to carrying out the functions of our Institute, we wouldn’t lack persecutions, and calumnies would come from everywhere to bombard us and help us to grow more and more in the holiness God asks of us. *Eh!* Isn’t it a great misfortune

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<sup>2</sup>*All who want to live religiously in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.* Cf. 2 Tim 3:12. (NAB)

that this isn't the case? Don't we have good reason to think we're doing nothing for His honor and are useless in His service? That's what we should deplore, and fear that the Company may be in God's bad graces, since He refuses it the grace He gives to those who serve Him faithfully.

"I said that calumnies and persecutions are graces with which God favors those who serve Him faithfully; and that's my second reason. I'm well aware that God isn't the author of calumnies or persecutions, but it's certain that they never occur without His permission; *non est malum in civitate quod non fecerit Dominus*.<sup>3</sup> There's no evil in the cities, in the country, in the houses, or in individuals that God doesn't cause—that is, that He doesn't permit—for very valid reasons, even though we may not know what they are. Theologians explain in various ways this permission of God concerning sin. In our situation, calumnies and persecutions, in so far as they're trials and exercises in patience and forbearance, are the very work of God, who wills, by these vexations, to detach His servants from anything that can hinder them from going to Him. That's His plan; *non est malum in civitate quod non fecerit Dominus*. And when His Divine Goodness is pleased to test us, to send us occasions of suffering, we'll have to lift our hearts to heaven to adore and praise the holy and ever adorable guidance of God over the Company, to receive calumnies and persecutions with joy as favors He grants us, and say with a full heart, 'Come, dear calumny; come, lovable persecution; come, dear crosses sent from heaven; I intend to make good use of your visit to me on behalf of God.' Poor human nature will suffer and grumble, but no matter; we have to suffer, and suffer joyously whatever God wills that we suffer.

"O Messieurs, if we had a lively faith, if we considered those connections with the eye of a Christian, not as vexations that come to us from others but as graces God is giving us, and if it should please His Goodness to clear our minds of the clouds of worldly maxims, which prevent faith from conveying its teachings to the depths of our souls, we'd have very different views and sentiments; and even if it were question of suffering insults and persecutions, we'd consider it a

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<sup>3</sup>*There is no evil in a city that the Lord has not caused.* Cf. Am 3:6 (NAB)

great happiness and a blessed state to be calumniated and persecuted. And isn't it, in fact, a happiness and a blessed state?

“‘*Quoi*,’ you’ll say to me, ‘being calumniated and persecuted is to be blessed! When people say that the Company does nothing worthwhile, is useless to God’s Church, is filled with ignorance and everything else, what more? If we go from insignificance to perversity, if we’re not content to say that we’re poor men without learning or talent, that we’re useless and lazy and if people go so far as to cast aspersions on our customs, if they say that Missioners are worthless people, and similar things, won’t it be a great misfortune for the Company to be disparaged in that way?’ No, Messieurs, no, that’s a happiness and a blessed state; it’s Jesus Christ who says it: *Beati qui persecutionem patiuntur propter justitiam*.<sup>4</sup> Note those words: *propter justitiam*, that is, doing good and being faithful to God.

“When a Company, a house, or individuals give people reason to speak or act against it, we have to yield beneath the avenging hand of God, who leaves nothing unpunished and sooner or later chastises those who transgress His holy Law. In that case, Messieurs, the vexations suffered on the part of the world come from an irritated God; they’re the effects of His justice, and those to whom these things happen have good reason to weep rather than rejoice, since they gave rise to those misfortunes they suffer on the part of others, who are only the agents of God’s justice. But, when calumny attacks those who serve God faithfully, and He gives the devil free rein to assail them, as He allowed him to afflict His servant Job, that’s a great happiness and a blessed state, since it’s a means God uses to sanctify them more and more.

“When the doctor orders a remedy to get rid of unhealthy body fluids, that’s called purging, and when a gardener lops off the live branches of a fruit-bearing tree, that’s also a purging called pruning, with the difference that the doctor purges to remove what’s bad, and the gardener prunes and cuts back the live branches of the tree so it will produce more fruit and fewer branches. In the same way, when God sends a Company persecutions, and it’s held in contempt and shame because its conduct isn’t what it should be,

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<sup>4</sup>*Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness.* Cf. Mt 5:10. (NAB)

that's a purge; there may be excess and bad will in this on the part of others, but God, like a good doctor, intends by it to flush the unhealthy fluids from this body and reestablish this Company and that house in good order. That's a grace God gives them, even though they may not be in the blessed state about which we're speaking.

"If, however, another Company suffers on the part of others, without having given them any reason to persecute and calumniate it, the vexation it suffers isn't an effect or consequence of its disorders; it's like the gardener who cuts deeply so that the tree may have more fruit than leaves. This Company has two degrees of virtue, God wants to raise it to four; it has four, He wants to raise it to six; and to do so, He uses the knife of calumny and persecution. That's a blessed state, or the possession of one of the Beatitudes of the Gospel, for, by the expression 'Beatitude of the Gospel,' we mean the state or establishment of a soul in one of the principal teachings of Jesus Christ, in line with which it performs heroic acts of virtue, despite all the difficulties and vexations it experiences; it joyfully praises God instead of giving in to aversion and hatred of those who persecute it; and instead of becoming discouraged, it remains loyal and constant in fidelity to His service. This state is called Christian or Evangelical Beatitude, that is, the establishment of a Christian's happiness and a beatitude already begun that will be complete in heaven because the possession of that state in this life is followed by eternal happiness. *Beati qui persecutionem patiuntur propter justitiam, quoniam ipsorum est regnum caelorum.*<sup>5</sup>

"If, from opposites, contrary consequences may be drawn, won't it be permissible to say, 'How unfortunate the Companies and houses that live tranquilly and have all that can be hoped for!' Yes, Messieurs, hold as a maxim that a Company that suffers nothing and is not tried by persecution is close to its ruin, and that, when everything goes right for it and it has whatever it can hope for, that's when all is not well in it.

"In view of these truths, let's be ready and waiting for the opportunities God will present to us to practice patience, and consider it a

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<sup>5</sup> *Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Mt 5:10. (NAB)*

great favor if it pleases His Goodness that we be calumniated and persecuted. But suffering for the sake of justice isn't everything, we also have to suffer in the spirit with which Our Lord suffered. So, let's see how we'll have to act when we're calumniated and persecuted—even when a stranglehold is used against us—and that's my second point.

“First and foremost, we have to be prepared early on to accept this grace of meeting with the disfavor of the world by a faithful use of the little opportunities God provides us every day—confrontations, harsh words, contradictions, grumbling—we have to serve our apprenticeship in these less painful things in order to steel ourselves against bigger and rougher attacks; for, what likelihood is there that someone who becomes worried, is discouraged, or loses his temper for such trifling matters will remain steadfast and determined to put up with more severe attacks?

“Let's examine ourselves, Messieurs, and see what use we make of the daily opportunities His Divine Providence allows to come to us. If we behave in a cowardly manner in this, how could we have the patience to put up with great sufferings? If we can't tolerate a harsh word and someone looking askance at us now, how will we accept with a serene countenance—or even with joy—calumnies, shame, and persecutions? So then, Messieurs, let's discipline ourselves in this matter and be cured of our sensitivity in minor encounters, so that God may grant us the grace of being steadfast and joyful in the greatest and most annoying ones.

“Second, when we experience calumnies and persecutions, we should practice carefully what our Rule lays down for us; it speaks clearly: Keep our mouths closed, it states, so as not to allow to escape any word of slander, impatience, and recrimination against those who calumniate and persecute us. *Obmutui et non aperui os meum, quoniam tu fecisti.*<sup>6</sup> Isn't it only right to keep silent, since it's God who's sending us these visits? Isn't it reasonable to accept this cross with submission, since it's His good pleasure? Shouldn't we

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<sup>6</sup>*I was silent and did not open my mouth because you were the one who did this.* Ps 39:10. (NAB)

even praise and thank Him for the persecutions that attack us, since He permits them for our own sanctification?

“Third, it’s also not enough to keep our mouths closed to words of impatience and complaint against those who persecute and calumniate us; we shouldn’t even defend ourselves, either by word or in writing. ‘*Quoi*,’ someone will say to me, ‘won’t we be allowed to justify ourselves and disabuse those whom calumny might have prejudiced against us?’ No, Messieurs, I can say nothing else to you except what’s according to the spirit of the Gospel: patience and silence! These are elements of the Christian religion; we have to adhere to that. ‘But some Companies in the Church act differently; they write, or have someone write, vindications and manifestos to justify their conduct and to preserve their reputation with the people; shall we blame them for that?’ Not at all, we’ll just hold fast to the Gospel and simply try to imitate Our Lord. ‘*Eh quoi!* Don’t others follow the Gospel and Our Lord?’ Yes, they do, but they do it one way and we another; we all tend toward the same goal by different ways. There were various states in the brief mortal life of Our Lord; and this same life, in line with these diverse states, also has several attractions; all these states are holy and sanctifying; all are adorable and easy to imitate, each in its own way. The Companies in the Church of God consider Our Lord in different ways, according to the different attractions of grace and the lights and views He’s pleased to give them—this one in one state, that one in another—and in this way they honor and imitate Him in various ways.

“Now, it pleased Him in His infinite goodness and mercy to give us no other views or attractions but His life of suffering, calumny, and contempt. We should go no further, and imitate Him in His lowliness and disgrace, in the outrages and persecutions He endured and in the way He endured them, that is, patiently and silently, and even joyfully and ardently.

“‘But that will be like passing sentence against us; our silence will be a tacit conviction, after which it won’t be necessary to think about doing good for people.’ We’re mistaken, Messieurs, if we base the outcome of our little works on worldly esteem; that’s attaching ourselves to the shadow and leaving the body behind. The

esteem and reputation we're talking about is simply a radiance that's the reflection of a life that's good and holy; its foundation and support is virtue, which can't be taken from us by calumnies or persecutions, if we remain faithful to God and benefit from them.

"Calumny can indeed eclipse the radiance of virtue for a time, but the virtue remains the same and will recover that luster when God is pleased to dispel the clouds preventing it from revealing itself to human eyes. So, let's not worry about that. God wouldn't allow His servants to be calumniated and persecuted if the persecutions and calumnies made them useless for His service. Like children, let's follow our good Father, Jesus Christ, despised, ridiculed, and persecuted; let's not dwell on the maxims of the world, which are always false; He's waiting and listening to observe what we'll say and what we'll do in time of persecution. Until now, we've suffered very few things; God has spared us because He knows our weakness. Oh, if only He were pleased to make us worthy of suffering something for His service and to really put us to the test and sift us! For I think it's necessary to draw some blood to diminish that heat I note in the Company; we have almost everything we desire; we need some vexation that will make us trust in God, be detached from ourselves, and filled with the joy that accompanies those who suffer. *Omne gaudium existimate, fratres mei, cum in tentationes varias incideritis.*<sup>7</sup> Who will establish us in that perfect joy, *omne gaudium*, that is, in the source of true joy? That is, that every cause of joy is accumulated and enclosed in an afflicted and persecuted soul, and puts it in a blessed state.

"O Savior of our souls, You who have called us to practice Your teachings and to imitate Your wretched, despised life, put in us the dispositions needed to suffer, in the way You wish, the persecutions it pleases You to send us. Establish us in that blessed state You promised afflicted and persecuted persons. Grant that we may remain steadfast in persecution, without fleeing or trying to evade the attacks of the world. I ask this of You by the merit of Your own sufferings."

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<sup>7</sup>*Consider it all joy, my brothers, when you encounter various trials.* Jas 1:2. (NAB)

209. - THE NEED TO RATION WINE AT MEALS

[1659]

One day, as the late frosts had frozen the wheat and the vines, the saint, speaking to his men, concluded his talk with the following words:

“We should groan under the burden of the poor and suffer with those who suffer, otherwise we’re not disciples of Jesus Christ. But what else shall we do? From time to time, the inhabitants of a besieged town check the food supplies they have. ‘How much wheat do we have?’ they say. ‘We have this much. How many mouths to feed? We have this many.’ And, based on that, they ration the bread each one should have, saying, ‘On two livres a day we can go so far.’ And when they see that the siege is going on longer and the food supply is dwindling, they reduce the bread to one livre, to ten ounces, then to six, and to four in order to hold out longer and prevent being overcome by famine. And what do they do at sea when a ship happens to be storm-tossed and immobilized for a long time in some corner of the world? They count the hardtack and check the water supply, and, if there isn’t enough to get to the place to which they intend to go, they distribute less; and the more they delay, the more they cut down the portions. Now, if town leaders and ships’ captains act like that, and if wisdom itself requires that they take such precautions because otherwise they might die, why won’t we do something similar? Do you think the townspeople aren’t cutting back on their regular fare, and that the best houses, seeing that the grape harvests are over for the year, aren’t using their wine sparingly for fear that none will be found easily next year? Yesterday, some upper class people who live in the city and who came here to this house, told me that most of the houses have stopped entirely providing wine to the servants. ‘Look after yourselves,’ they tell them, ‘there’s no more wine in this house except for the master.’

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Conference 209. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XXIV, sect. II, p. 356. Abelly does not give the year, but states that “the frost had damaged the wheat and the vines.” These words bring to mind the year 1659.



“All that, my dear confreres, caused us to reflect on what we had to do, and yesterday I assembled the senior priests of the Company to ask their advice; in the end, we thought it appropriate to limit ourselves to a demi-setier a meal for this year. This will be hard for some, who think they need to drink a little more wine; but, since they’re used to submitting to the orders of Providence and to controlling their appetites, they’ll make good use of this difficulty, as they do for other mortifications, about which they don’t complain. There may be others who’ll complain about this because they’re attached to their own gratification—carnal, sensual men, inclined to their own pleasures, unwilling to be deprived of any of them and who grumble about everything that’s not to their liking. O Savior, preserve us from this spirit of sensuality.”

**210. - MORAL THEOLOGY, PREACHING, CATECHIZING,  
AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE SACRAMENTS**

August 5, 1659

“Today, Messieurs, we’re not going to have Repetition, but we’ll talk about something else that’s very useful for the Company and that we agreed upon among ourselves; so then, we’ll postpone to another time Repetition of Prayer, which, as you know, is one of the most necessary means we have for exciting one another to devotion. We have good reason to thank God for having given this grace to the Company, and we can say that no other Community has ever had this practice except our own.

“What I have to say to you, Messieurs, is that, as you see that there’s a seminary at Saint-Sulpice, at Saint-Nicolas, and at the Bons-Enfants, we should try to have one at Saint-Lazare—I mean to practice here the same things being done at those places, so that each individual may be taught what’s done in the seminaries and

that, when he's assigned to it, he'll know the proper way of proceeding in order to succeed in this area. I think most of the men here present have never had practice in all of those exercises; that's why, since we have a little time remaining between now and the ordination retreat, we'll make good use of it for this purpose.

"We usually practice here things we have in common with seminaries, such as Repetition of Prayer and the conferences on some topic of devotion, which we use for our discussion one day a week. With regard to chant and moral theology, which are also taught in seminaries, these, by the grace of God, are taught here, too, but maybe not in the same way. As for preaching and catechizing, you know we give very special attention to them; it has always been the custom of the Company, even from its origin, to take some time after the missions to work on preaching; and if we've failed in that, it's been due to my wretchedness. I ask God to forgive me for it, wretched man that I am. Blessed be God!

"So then, we get practice in some of the things that are done in the seminaries, but there are others in which we don't, like administration of the Sacraments, explanation of the method of preaching and catechizing, and moral theology, which is actually taught here, but *lato modo*—more spread out. Add to this the rubrics of the breviary and the missal. The late good M. Bourdoise was the first whom God inspired to open a seminary to have all the rubrics taught there. Before him that was unknown; there was no special place where they were taught. After a man did his theology, philosophy, some basic study, and a little Latin, he would go to a parish and administer the Sacraments in his own way; that's what caused such great diversity. By the mercy of God, however, we see just the opposite today. And to tell the truth, Messieurs, if we found ourselves obliged to baptize someone, I don't know whether many of us might not be very embarrassed. The other day I asked someone in the Company how he'd act in a certain circumstance. 'Frankly, Monsieur,' he said, 'I don't know how I'd proceed.' As for me, even though I've been a Pastor, I must admit that I'd have a hard time with that right now. This is what has led us to determine to de-

vote the time remaining to us between now and the ordination retreat to do all the exercises done in a seminary.

“So, we’ll be working on moral theology, simple preaching, catechizing, and the administration of the Sacraments; and since I’m afraid we won’t have enough time for rubrics and chant, we can leave them aside.

“For the moral theology matter, we’ll use the *Entretiens des Ordinands*,<sup>1</sup> especially since we’re close to the time of ordination. It will be learned by heart and explained briefly, not *disputativo modo*, but *instructivo*.<sup>2</sup> I can tell you that, in the beginning of the Company, only the *Entretiens* we have were used. The Bishops of Boulogne and Alet,<sup>3</sup> M. Olier,<sup>4</sup> and a few other persons met for several days to see what would be most necessary for the ordinands; then, they wrote these *Entretiens*, which we have; they were found adequate, and no other materials have ever been used. In the past, I even asked some Doctors of the Sorbonne if a man who comprehended these *Entretiens* well could hear confessions in the villages and elsewhere; I was told that the person would be competent to hear confessions even in Paris, yes, in Paris. That’s why a copy of the *Entretiens* is given to theology students and priests in the seminary—I mean to those who have been there for at least two months, for, as far as the others are concerned, they have to work at taking on its spirit and detaching themselves from the world.

“I ask M. Cruoly,<sup>5</sup> who’s teaching moral theology, but not in the way we’re saying, although he does very well otherwise, to

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<sup>1</sup>The table of contents of MS. 85 in the library of Beaune and in the Bibliothèque Municipale of Lyons, entitled *Entretiens des Ordinands sur les matières de devotion*, corresponds fairly exactly with the outline for the *Entretiens des Ordinands* of Saint-Lazare found in Abelly (*op. cit.*, bk. II, chap. II, sect. III, pp. 219ff.). There is a strong probability that this is the version used at Saint-Lazare by Saint Vincent. Another copy is found in the Sainte-Geneviève Library in Paris (MS. 2946). At least one volume of *Entretiens*, entitled, *Un portrait du prêtre: Les retraites de dix jours pour les ordinands* was published by Gérard Carroll and Irénée Noye (Paris, 2004).

<sup>2</sup>Not in an argumentative way, but an instructive one.

<sup>3</sup>François Perrochel, Bishop of Boulogne (cf. XI, 255, n. 13), and Nicolas Pavillon, Bishop of Alet (cf. XI, 235-36, n. 5).

<sup>4</sup>Jean-Jacques Olier (cf. XI, 350, n. 1).

<sup>5</sup>Donat Crowley (Saint Vincent spells his name *Cruoly*), born in Cork (Ireland) on July 24, 1623, entered the Congregation of the Mission on May 9, 1643, took his vows in November 1645, and was ordained a priest in 1650. He was among the group of Missioners sent to Picardy in 1651

give himself to God to drill the students and priests in the seminary briefly on these *Entretiens*, and explain to them the words or concepts they don't understand. One of them—or half of one—could be taken each day. This study will be useful in educating those who aren't prepared. I heard in the past that a person who really understood the *Institutes*<sup>6</sup> would have a smattering of everything that concerns jurisprudence and could use it as a rule until he was more advanced. Likewise, a person who has a good grasp of the *Entretiens* would already have a firm foundation and, not to say, would be competent enough to teach in academies.

“As for the administration of the Sacraments, I'm going to ask M. Admirault,<sup>7</sup> who has been living at the Bons-Enfants and has read these materials extensively, to be responsible for this. I haven't yet spoken to him about it; nevertheless, I think he'll be able to do it, despite his ailments; for, it's mostly a question of practice and of not saying too much.

“For preaching, when the Company was just beginning we used to get together, and the Bishops of Bologne and Alet, together with Abbé Olier, were also present. We would propose a topic relating to a virtue or vice; each one would take pen and paper and write down the motive and reason for avoiding the vice or adopting the virtue, and then we'd try to find the definition and means. Lastly, we'd gather together everything that had been written down and we'd prepare a talk on it. All that was done without any books; each of us worked from his own knowledge. After M. Portail had collected from everyone all that had been said during that time, and what was said since then in other conferences given in the Company, he devised an easy method for giving helpful sermons and for the grand

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for the relief of the people reduced to destitution by the war. Later, he was named Director of Students and theology professor at Saint-Lazare (1653-54), and was sent after that to Le Mans as Superior, returning to Saint-Lazare in 1657 to teach moral theology. Crowley was also Superior in Richelieu (1660-61), at Saint-Charles (1662-64), Montauban (1664-65), Agen (1665-66), and Saint-Brieuc (1667-70). Sent to Le Mans again in 1676, he was Superior there (1687-90), after which there is no trace of him.

<sup>6</sup>The *Institutes* of Justinian I, the Byzantine Emperor (527-65). It was a general textbook of law.

<sup>7</sup>Charles Admirault (cf. XI, 177, n. 4).

catechism instructions,<sup>8</sup> and added something of his own.<sup>9</sup> He'll explain it; and because he has a speech impediment, and, moreover, M. Alméras isn't always able to speak because of his illness, which obliges him to have the special diet of which you are aware, they'll help one another.

"The time we can use for theology will be from eight to ten in the morning; the explanation of the method of preaching, catechizing, and administering the Sacraments will be after Vespers each evening. So, we'll do two things: (1) administration of the Sacraments; and (2) explanation of the method of preaching; or else we'll practice teaching the little catechism.

"So that's what we'll try to do, Messieurs; and even though we may perhaps know these things already, nevertheless it's good to refresh our memory on them. Then, too, perhaps we don't know everything we should. If the occasion presented itself where it would be necessary to enlighten a Huguenot<sup>10</sup> on the difficulties he might put forward to us, we'd find this very hard—at least I would because I'm a poor, wretched, fourth level student. If I were to meet a minister who presented his difficulties and objections to me, I must confess that I'd really be at a loss. Let me tell you on this point that one time I was giving a mission with M. de la Salle,<sup>11</sup> a great Missioner. The late Bishop of Beauvais<sup>12</sup> used to say about him that he had

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<sup>8</sup>The "grand catechism" instruction was given from the pulpit in the afternoon, concluding the day the mission was given. It was directed to all the faithful and was the central moment of the mission. The "little catechism" was held at two o'clock in the afternoon and was geared toward the children, using a simple question and answer method. This method of catechesis was the one adopted by most of the Missioners of that time.

<sup>9</sup>In a 1712 circular letter, the Superior General Jean Bonnet wrote of Antoine Portail's work. "In 1652-53, he (Saint Vincent) had some lectures given at Saint-Lazare, at which he assisted as often as he could, and had someone put together everything he himself, M. Portail, his first companion, and the other older Missioners felt was most suitable to make our manner of preaching uniformly sound, intelligible, and fluent. The late M. Portail collected them into a rather large volume, which we have in this house. In 1666, however, the late M. Alméras. . . , thinking that this collection . . . was too wordy and that few people would have occasion to read it, prepared this abridged little method of preaching."

<sup>10</sup>A member of the Reformed Church in France (cf. XI, 15, n. 1).

<sup>11</sup>Jean de la Salle (cf. XI, 107, n. 4).

<sup>12</sup>Augustin Potier, Seigneur de Blancmesnil, was consecrated Bishop of Beauvais on September 17, 1617, in Rome, and renewed his diocese with the help of Saint Vincent and Adrien Bourdoise. He brought the Ursuline nuns to Beauvais and Clermont, had missions given in which

never met a man better at reasoning. When that good Father was in Villiers-le-Bel, he met a woman who asked him to hear her confession, but first she asked him to solve a problem she was having—I think it concerned the reality of the Blessed Sacrament or Communion under both species. Since he had studied only a little philosophy and something else, he found it very difficult. When this was brought to our attention, we gave some conferences on these topics, and God granted us the grace to provide an answer to all the problems that might be proposed to us. That good Father had received grace from God to convince people of anything he wished. If His Divine Goodness were pleased to grant us this grace, Messieurs, how happy we'd be! It's one thing to give conferences on preaching and catechizing, but what's most important is practice, which we'll be doing, with the help of God.

“I recall what M. Chrétien<sup>13</sup> wrote me about the Huguenots who are holding their synod and, at the same time, about the blessing God is pleased to give to Catholics to refute them. He says some very consoling things about this, which I'm going to have read in the refectory. So then, the Huguenots meet every year to hold their Synod; there are about 80 of them—sometimes up to 120. Every day during their meeting one of them preaches on some point of controversy. The Bishop of Cahors,<sup>14</sup> who couldn't take any action against them because he had no jurisdiction in that diocese, went there nevertheless, because it was the See of his Coadjutor<sup>15</sup> and made use of the authority of the Vicar-General of his Coadjutor, whom he asked to accompany him. He brought there some priests

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he himself took part, established a seminary in his episcopal palace, and multiplied the Confraternities of Charity. He became Grand Almoner of the Queen and was a member of the Council of Conscience. Named Prime Minister at the death of Louis XIII (1643), he was going to receive the Cardinal's hat when Mazarin's influence prevented this. He died on June 20, 1650.

<sup>13</sup>Jean Chrétien (cf. *XI*, 158, n. 14).

<sup>14</sup>Alain de Solminihac.

<sup>15</sup>Nicolas Sevin, Bishop of Sarlat and then Coadjutor Bishop with right of succession to Alain de Solminihac, who chose him.

to give the mission. They also had with them a good shoemaker,<sup>16</sup> whom you've seen here, and who follows them. God has given him extraordinary graces for converting heretics. After the Missioners preach, he gives a conference on controversies and is going to challenge the ministers at the end of their Synod.

"Don't you admire the zeal of all those good persons, Messieurs, who, in order to understand the controversies, are so assiduous and punctual in attending the weekly conferences given in Paris? This shoemaker is one of them. The Duchess d'Aiguillon sent him to her estates to help her subjects hold fast to their religion. He had a shop in Paris; the Duchess asked him how much he earned annually, and when he replied 400 livres, she offered him that much to go to work in Aiguillon, which he accepted, and had his brother take over his shop. God is pleased to give him so much grace that he challenges the ministers every day, and they don't dare to confront him. That's why people call him the 'minister chaser.' M. des Isles,<sup>17</sup> who has studied philosophy and whom we've seen working very well with him here, goes with him. Together, they challenge the ministers, with the result that the ministers, who used to attack us in the past, are seeing themselves today attacked by us and even by persons who have studied nothing but Scripture. These are gratuitous graces, proper to priests, which God is giving to these laymen. Because of the progress that good shoemaker is making, they call him, as I said before, the 'minister chaser' in the entire region.

"We've gone way off the point, Messieurs. Where are we? Let's get back to where we were, please. We had left off by saying we were going to discuss the method of preaching and catechizing, but we wouldn't be doing much if we weren't practicing it; and we certainly have a greater obligation to do this, since very important opportunities present themselves to the Company, obliging us to

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<sup>16</sup>Perhaps Claude Leglay, "a simple artisan living by his trade," so adept at debate "that it was felt he ought to abandon his workshop to dedicate himself entirely to disputation." (Cf. Frédéric Monier, *Vie de Jean-Jacques Olier* [Paris: Poussielgue, 1914], vol. I, p. 399.)

<sup>17</sup>Nicolas des Isles, author of *L'Apologie des disputes et du procédé des catholiques*, Paris, 1656.

use not only priests who are already formed, but even those who are still not well-enough prepared for this ministry. So, we're going to strive to become competent to teach these things to those who will be entrusted to us by the Bishops. But you'll either make mistakes or you won't. You'll make some, you tell me, because you're not as great a preacher as others who have a talent for preaching.

“The Blessed Bishop of Geneva asked that, after his death, his body be given to a surgeon for anatomical studies to be done on it so that, he said, as it was good for nothing during his lifetime, at least it might be useful for something after his death. *Eh bien!* Your faults will serve to correct others and prevent them from falling into them, either to show preaching in its perfection—or at least so your embarrassment will be useful to you for something else. Believe me, only pride alone can make you look for excuses.

“You know there's nothing that brings out better the beauty of a painting, its colors, and the various subjects treated in it—in short, the beauty of the colors—than shading; and in music, discords are blended in to make it harmonious! In the same way, faults will serve to show preaching in its splendor. If there's someone to whom God has given a special talent, fine, we should strive to imitate him. All of us—priests and students—will give ourselves to Our Lord to preach. I'm speaking of the older priests because, for the rest of you, my confreres who are philosophers, your time has not yet come. We'll give prepared sermons to those who can't write them, or who might not have time to do it, so they can memorize them. We're going to do this to look at each man's special talent and to see for what he's suited. No one will be excused from this exercise; and, take my word for it, only pride can prompt someone to try to be dispensed from it. So then, we all have to do our part to see that this exercise is carried out. I'm well aware that, because of M. Portail's difficulty in speaking, he won't be able to do this; M. Alméras, because of his infirmity; M. Bécu, because of his hands—but not because of his head, for he has a very fine one—and M. Bourdet,<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Étienne Bourdet (cf. XI. 106, n. 3).



because of his frail condition; but for everyone else, yes. And I, poor keeper of pigs that I am, will go first—not in the pulpit, for there’s no way I could get up there, but during a conference, when I’m dealing with some point of Rule or some other topic.

“But when shall we begin? Today? No, not today, but tomorrow. For that reason, the students and priests from the Seminary can take a break so they can get a better start; even the senior priests can do so, if they wish. So, tomorrow at eight-thirty. And for that purpose, I’m going to ask M. Alméras to give copies of the *Entretiens* to the students and priests in the seminary. We’ll meet for this in the Saint-Lazare hall. In the afternoon, after Vespers, we’ll begin practice for the administration of the Sacraments, etc. We’ll do the sermons during dinner and supper; for this reason, we’ll begin supper half an hour earlier because of the retreatants. We’ll see if it will be well for the Abbots<sup>19</sup> to be present.

“That, my dear confreres, is what we’ll be doing between now and the ordination retreat. What remains but to humble ourselves profoundly before God? For it’s to the humble that He gives His grace. But what shall we do in order to succeed? Humble ourselves, Messieurs, humble ourselves, and then ask God for His grace, for everything depends on His goodness and mercy, without which we can do nothing. For that intention, I ask our Brothers to hear Mass, and the priests to offer the Holy Sacrifice. That’s what we’re going to do.”

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<sup>19</sup>Louis de Chandénier (cf. XI, 157, n. 11) and his brother Claude were lodging at Saint-Lazare.

211. - THE FIVE CHARACTERISTIC VIRTUES  
(Common Rules, Chap. II, Art. 14)

August 22, 1659

*We should follow, as far as possible, all the Gospel teaching already mentioned, since it is so holy and very practical. But some of it, in fact, has more application to us, particularly when it emphasizes simplicity, humility, gentleness, mortification and zeal for souls. The Congregation should pay special attention to developing and living up to these five virtues so that they may be, as it were, the faculties of the soul of the whole Congregation, and that everything each one of us does may always be inspired by them.*

“This, my dear confreres, is the subject of our conference. Please put on your birettas; it will be better for me to leave my head uncovered.

“Continuing with our method, we’ll divide the subject into three points, which are ordinarily those used in our sermons. In the first one, we’ll look at the motives and reasons we have to give ourselves to God to renew in us our love for the practice of the Gospel teachings, in line with what was said to you about them when we spoke to you awhile ago. In the second point, we’ll show which Rules and teachings are most helpful and best suited to our vocation. In the third, we’ll talk about the means; all for the greater glory of God and the sanctification of our souls.

“The first motive or reason we have for giving ourselves to God to observe the Gospel teachings, my very dear confreres, is that their author is Our Lord Jesus Christ. Coming from heaven to announce the Will of God His Father and to teach people what they had to do to be the most pleasing to Him, He told them that this was the aim of the Gospel teachings. So, the Son of God, coming from heaven to lead us to His Father and to inform us what He was asking of us to be most pleasing to Him, announced this teaching to us. By that you see, brothers, that He is their author; and that’s the first reason.

“The second is that He himself observed them; that He did so was apparent in the eyes of heaven and earth, and everyone who had the happiness of being with Him during His mortal life saw that He always observed the Gospel teachings. That was His goal, His glory, and His honor, and thus we infer that, since we should have no other intention than to follow Our Lord and to conform ourselves entirely to Him, that alone is capable of leading us to the practice of the Evangelical Counsels.

“The third reason is drawn from the fact that a creature. . . . I made a mistake in what I just said; I should have said that the motives are drawn from the holiness and usefulness of the Rules and the Gospel teachings. That they’re very holy I infer, first of all, from the fact that the Saint of Saints practiced them himself, and, second, that this is drawn from the nature of holiness. That they’re also very useful speaks for itself.

“So then, the motives should be taken from the nature of holiness and the usefulness of the teachings. Let’s take a look at that, please. What is holiness? It’s the retrenchment from earthly things and distancing ourselves from them, and is, at the same time, an attachment to God and union with the Divine Will. I think holiness consists in that. And what can distance us from earth and attach us to heaven like the Gospel teachings? For all of them are intended to detach us from possessions, pleasures, honors, sensuality, and our own satisfactions; they all aim at that; that’s their purpose. So, to say that someone abides by the Gospel teachings is to say that he or she is holy because holiness, as we’ve just seen, consists in lessening our attachment for the things of earth, and in union with God, with the result that it’s inconceivable for a person to observe the Gospel teachings and not be detached from earth and united to heaven.

“The second motive, usefulness, is drawn from the practice of the Gospel teachings. What do persons who begin to practice them do? They detach themselves from three powerful enemies: the first is the passion to have possessions; the second is the passion to enjoy one’s pleasures; and the third is the passion to be free. That, my dear confreres, is the spirit of the world, which reigns today with such

absolute authority that we can say that *totus mundus in hoc positus*,<sup>1</sup> the entire concern of worldly people is to have possessions and pleasure and to do their own will. That's what they seek, that's what they run after. They imagine that happiness in this world consists in accumulating wealth, enjoying pleasures, and living as they please. But, alas, who doesn't realize the contrary and who doesn't know that the person who allows himself to be ruled by his passions is a slave of them? Scripture says that whoever serves sin is the slave of that sin: *a quo quis superatus est hujus et servus est*,<sup>2</sup> and whoever is the slave of sin is a slave of the devil. A person in such a state—I mean someone who hasn't mastered his passions—can and should consider himself a child of the devil. On the contrary, those detached from a love for worldly possessions, from the greedy desire for pleasures, and from their own will become the children of God and enjoy perfect freedom; for that's to be found in the love of God alone. Those are the persons who are free, brothers, who have no laws, who fly, who go to the right and to the left; once again, who fly, who can't be stopped, and who are never slaves of the devil or of their passions. Oh, blessed freedom of the children of God!

*“Mais quoi!* Is anything as useful as freedom? The teaching states that freedom should be bought at the price of gold and silver and that we should sacrifice everything to possess it. Now, my dear confreres, this is clearly seen in the practice of the Evangelical Counsels. These teachings are reduced to three points: love of poverty, mortification of one's pleasures, and submission to God's Will. They place a person in a state of Christian liberty. A while ago you were slaves of your passions; attachment to wealth, pleasures, and your own will had become your master; now these teachings have made you free. Neither the world with its charms, nor the flesh with its pleasures, nor the devil with his illusions can hold you captive because the love of poverty, mortification of your pleasures, and submission to the Will of God carry you through. That's the strength and power of the Gospel teachings, among which—because

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<sup>1</sup>*The entire world is in this power.* Cf. 1 Jn 5:19. (NAB)

<sup>2</sup>Cf. 2 Pt 2:19. (NAB)

there are many of them—I'm choosing mainly those most fitting for Missioners. And what are they? I've always thought and believed that they were simplicity, humility, gentleness, mortification, and zeal.

“First, simplicity, which consists in doing everything for love of God and having no other aim in all our actions but His glory. That, strictly speaking, is simplicity. All the acts of this virtue consist in saying things simply, without duplicity or subtlety, being straightforward, with no evasion or subterfuge. So then, simplicity means doing everything for love of God, rejecting any admixture, because simplicity implies the absence of any composition. That's why, since there's no composition to be found in God, we say that He's pure act and a very simple being. All admixture, then, must be banished so as to have in view only God alone. Now, my dear confreres, if anyone in the world should have this virtue, it's Missioners, for our whole life is spent in practicing acts of charity, either toward God or toward our neighbor. And for both one and the other, we must proceed simply, with the result that, if these are things we have to do which concern God and depend on us, we have to avoid all subtlety, for God is pleased with simple souls, and communicates His graces only to them. If the things concern our neighbor, since we have to assist our neighbor corporally and spiritually, *bon Dieu*, how careful we must be not to appear wily, clever, crafty, and, above all, never to say a word that has a double meaning! Ah, how far that should be from a Missioner!

“It seems that, at this time, God has willed that a Company should have this virtue because the world is awash in duplicity. Today we hardly see anyone who says what he thinks; the world is so corrupt that all we see everywhere is artifice and deceit, and that goes—shall I say it—even through the convent grille. Now, if there has ever been a Community that should profess simplicity, it's ours; for note this well, brothers, duplicity is the plague of the Missioner. Duplicity robs him of his spirit; the venom and poison of the Mission is a lack of sincerity and simplicity in the eyes of God and others. So then, the virtue of simplicity, my dear confreres, simplicity, my dear confreres, ah, how beautiful it is!

“Sometimes at the Tuesday Conference, which is composed of secular priests, talks are given that discuss the spirit of that same group; most of them—almost all—used to say that the spirit of simplicity was easily perceived there. That’s true, and anyone who sees how they act would say that simplicity reigns there, for each man relates simply and before God his thoughts on the topic that has been proposed. And if *propter quod unum tale, et illud magis tale*,<sup>3</sup> with what greater reason aren’t we, the creators of that group, obliged to have the virtue of simplicity? Shame on the Mission, farewell to its spirit, if it doesn’t have the spirit of simplicity! Shall I tell you what a gentleman told me? ‘You see, Monsieur,’ he said to me, ‘when I speak, I say things as they are; if some circumstance demands silence, I keep quiet.’ Now, what’s that, if not the practice of this virtue of simplicity? That gentleman is one of the finest men I know in his social class; he just returned from the Venetian Embassy. ‘If I have to speak,’ he told me, ‘I say something, if I know it; otherwise, I keep silent.’ And that’s how a Venetian Ambassador speaks, a man who had been responsible for negotiating with all the important persons. Simplicity! Ah, how admirable this virtue is! O my God, give it to us.

“The second teaching is humility; for, it doesn’t suffice to be simple in order to be pleasing to God, we must also be humble. So then, humility, which consists in emptying ourselves completely before God, overcoming ourselves in order to place God in our heart, not seeking the esteem and good opinion of others, and struggling constantly against any impulse of vanity. Ambition causes a person to establish himself, to seek to become well known so that people will say, ‘Look at him!’ Humility causes us to empty ourselves of self so that God alone may be manifest, to whom glory may be given. Humility bespeaks the love of being despised and not putting ourselves forward, with each of us considering himself a poor wretch. It always says ‘Honor and glory to God alone, who is the Being of Beings!’ It imprints in us these sentiments: ‘I renounce honor, I renounce glory, in a word, I renounce anything that can

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<sup>3</sup>Whoever gives a thing its existence possesses this existence to its highest degree.

make me vain; for, alas, I'm nothing but dust and corruption! My God, only You alone should reign; and if there were in me something that might not be in You, my God, I would willingly divest myself of it to give it to you and to annihilate myself in my inmost being.' Those are the various affections of the humble man and ones Missioners should have; but the light makes us see clearly the contrary of not wishing to be esteemed and to be known.

"That's the second teaching absolutely necessary for Missioners; for, I ask you, how could a proud person adjust to poverty? Our purpose is to serve the poor, uncultured common people; now, if we don't adapt ourselves to them, in no way will we do any good for them. The means of doing it, however, is humility because, through humility, we annihilate ourselves and establish God as the Sovereign Being. *Factus sum sicut jumentum apud te.*<sup>4</sup> The humble person considers himself a beast of burden before God. But *durus est hic sermo.*<sup>5</sup> That's true, yet I'll say that this state is proper to the Mission; and, if that's not the case, we have reason to fear that we don't have the spirit of a true Missioner.

"The third teaching is gentleness, which concerns both the interior and the exterior, inside and outside the house; gentleness among ourselves and in bearing with our neighbor; for you see, my dear confreres—and I think someone said this in the sermon—a Missioner needs forbearance with regard to outsiders. The poor people whose confessions we hear are so coarse, so ignorant, so obtuse—not to say so stupid—that they don't know how many gods there are or how many persons in God. Make them say it fifty times and in the end you'll find them as ignorant as they were in the beginning. If someone isn't gentle enough to put up with their boorishness, what will he be able to do? Not a thing; on the contrary, he'll discourage those poor people who, on seeing that, will be put off and will never be willing to return to learn the things necessary for salvation. So then, forbearance.

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<sup>4</sup>*I was like a brute beast in your presence.* Cf. Ps 73:22. (NAB)

<sup>5</sup>*This saying is hard.* Cf. Jn 6:60. (NAB)

“Speaking of this, I remember that, when I was hearing someone’s confession (we can talk about what we’ve heard, even in confession, my dear confreres, especially when the persons concerned are dead and people don’t, and can’t, know about whom we’re speaking), this person said to me, ‘That’s fine, Monsieur, go on.’ She thought I didn’t hear her; she tugged my surplice and said again, ‘Go on, Monsieur, go ahead, what you’re saying is fine.’ I assure you she wasn’t giving a thought to what I was saying but rather to her little game.

“What forbearance do we have to have in that? And if a Missioner has none, what will he do in such a circumstance? Someone has written me that our men are working very successfully in the mountains of the kingdom of Naples and that those persons are uncouth and surly; it’s bandit country. Now, how can we do good among such people without this virtue? So then, gentleness and forbearance are necessary among ourselves and for our service to the neighbor. O Savior, isn’t Your forbearance with Your Apostles, who murmured among themselves and fought over the first places, a beautiful example for us? Ah, brothers, what forbearance in Our Lord, who saw that they were going to abandon Him, that the first among them was going to deny Him, and that the unfortunate Judas was going to betray Him! After such an example, what Missioner wouldn’t be willing to work to acquire this virtue?

“Those then, my dear confreres, are the three Gospel teachings most in conformity with our state. The first is simplicity, which concerns God. The second is humility, which concerns our submission; by it we become a holocaust to God, to whom we owe all honor, and in whose presence we must efface ourselves and act in such a way that He may take possession of us. The third is gentleness in order to put up with our neighbor’s failings. The first concerns God; the second, ourselves; and the third, our neighbor.

“But, the means of having these virtues is mortification, which gets rid of anything that can prevent us from acquiring them. And, in fact, if the spirit of mortification doesn’t animate us, how are we going to live together? Won’t there always be something to criticize? Isn’t there always something that offends us in the various



situations in which we encounter one another? If we aren't mortified, we'll be perpetually nitpicking. Having this virtue is so necessary that we can't live—I repeat—we can't live with one another if our interior and exterior senses aren't mortified; and, not only is this necessary among ourselves, but also with regard to the people, where there's so much to endure. When we go to give a mission, we don't know where we'll be staying or what we'll be doing. Things may be very different from what we planned, since Providence often upsets our plans. Who, then, doesn't see that mortification is indispensable for a Missioner in dealing not only with the poor common people, but also with retreatants, ordinands, galley convicts, and slaves? For, if we're not mortified, how can we put up with what has to be endured in these various ministries? How can Missioners like poor M. Le Vacher,<sup>6</sup> of whom we hear no news, who's in the midst of poor slaves in danger from the plague, and most likely, his brother<sup>7</sup> as well, how can they see the sufferings endured by the people entrusted to them by Providence without feeling them themselves? Let's not deceive ourselves, my dear confreres, Missioners must be mortified.

“The fifth teaching is zeal, consisting in a pure desire to become pleasing to God and helpful to our neighbor: zeal to spread the kingdom of God and zeal to procure the salvation of our neighbor. Is there anything in the world more perfect? If love of God is a fire, zeal is its flame; if love is a sun, zeal is its ray. Zeal is unconditional in the love of God. Now, brothers, how are we going to have this spirit of simplicity, humility, and gentleness, if we don't have mortification, which makes us find the good in everything? And how will we have mortification without zeal, which prompts us to rise above all sorts of difficulties, not only by the power of reason, but also by that of grace, which helps us to find pleasure in suffering—yes, pleasure. Wretched man that I am, I know this and don't do it. Oh, come now, brothers, does the Company have this spirit? Is the spirit of simplicity easily perceived in our dealings with outsiders? Can that be said? And do those who observe the Missioners see the spirit of simplicity in them?

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<sup>6</sup>Philippe Le Vacher (cf. **XI**, 261, n. 5).

<sup>7</sup>Jean Le Vacher (cf. **XI**, 151, n. 1).

What can be said is that it's apparent in some; but I don't know whether it's obvious that François, Jean, or Claude are all simple, humble, gentle, mortified, and zealous. Let's examine our conscience; do we have these virtues? And has this love of appearing just as we are taken root in our hearts? Do we ask God often for His grace to efface ourselves, to bear with our neighbor, to mortify ourselves, etc.? When the opportunity to mortify our interior and exterior senses arises, do we do it? Do we experience that within ourselves? Oh, what a happiness if we do! If we don't, let's admit that we're in the wrong and say that we're not Missioners; for, true Missioners are simple, humble, mortified, and filled with ardor for their work. I have reason to believe that many do have this spirit, if not in everything, at least in part. If we examine ourselves, perhaps each individual will realize that he's at the second level in this. *Or sus*, blessed be God! Enough for the past! Let's take renewed resolutions to acquire this spirit, which is our spirit; for the spirit of the Mission is a spirit of simplicity, humility, gentleness, mortification, and zeal. Do we have it or don't we?

“ ‘But, Monsieur, what can we do to acquire it?’ These five virtues should be like the faculties of the soul of the entire Congregation. Just as the soul knows by the intellect, determines by the will, and remembers by the memory, so a Missioner should act only by means of these virtues. For example, there's a question of doing one thing or the other; I have to preach; then I must do it, but simply and for God—no fanfare, no embellishments. Fine! We can speak whatever way we like, provided our sermons are given in the spirit of simplicity. ‘But our sermons will embarrass us.’ Ah, a true Missioner immediately says, ‘I welcome this embarrassment; give me some in order to subdue my pride,’ for—understand this clearly—to want to do otherwise is to try to show off and to act like a braggart. Doing things simply is the nature of our spirit; the excellence of the Mission will be judged by its simplicity, humility, etc. It's by that, my dear confreres, that we should judge ourselves, by that we should love one another; if I have to do something, that's my standard of acting; and, to put it in a nutshell, everything God asks of us in the Gospel teachings is found in these five virtues.

“O Lord, how beautiful that is, and how pleasing the Mission will be to You if its spirit is such that it considers everything in the spirit of simplicity, humility, gentleness, mortification and zeal! How, Lord, do You judge the blessed if not on that! Ah, simplicity, which has no other view than God’s view, which refuses any other motive than God and what is apparent! In line with that, the Rule states that we have to sprinkle our actions with these virtues, especially simplicity, now that we’re practicing preaching. That’s going well, by the grace of God, and I’ve been consoled by it and thank Him lovingly; nevertheless, I think it’s good to show gentleness, gentleness I say, with regard to ourselves and to our listeners. We’ve failed in that. So, let’s be gentle in our sermons. And mortification must be apparent in leaving aside the things that serve only to make people think highly of us. Let’s get rid of all that, let’s preach Jesus Christ and let all our actions tend toward God, who is a Spirit of simplicity.

“Let each and every one of us strive to enclose ourselves in these five virtues, like snails in their shells, and act in such a way that all our actions savor of these virtues. The man who acts in this way will be a true Missioner; the one who acts otherwise—such as myself, wretched man, who am nothing but dust and filth—won’t be like him.

“O Savior Lord my God, You brought this teaching from heaven to earth, recommended it to people, and taught it to Your Apostles. Among the counsels You gave them, You said that this teaching is like the edifice of Christianity and anything that isn’t part of it is built on sand. Fill us with that spirit, Lord my God, You who have indicated that spirit to this Little Company, a spirit that’s so necessary in order to correspond to its vocation. You are the only author of it, and, I dare say, Lord, that, whether or not we possess it depends only on You; for we are burning with the desire to have it. Dispose our hearts to receive this spirit. You, Lord, are the one who raised up this Company; You have given it its start. There’s some progress in the Company, my dear confreres; these five virtues seem to be in it, if not to the degree to which Our Lord, the Apostles, and the first Christians had them, at least it’s a beginning that will

continue, provided we strive to conform all our actions to those Gospel teachings. The purpose for which we're Missioners, Messieurs, is to be very simple, humble, gentle, mortified, and zealous for the glory of God. That's what we should ask of Him and should hope for from His Divine Goodness. And if we find it apropos to make meditation all together tomorrow morning on this subject, I hope we'll receive great consolation from it. May God grant us this grace!"

**212. - TEACHINGS CONTRARY TO THOSE OF THE GOSPEL.**  
(Common Rules, Chap. II, Art. 15)

August 29, 1659

"My very dear confreres, we've come to the fifteenth article of the second chapter of our Rule, which still concerns the Evangelical Counsels.

"This article speaks of the vices that contend against the five virtues summarizing the Gospel teachings which we discussed last Friday and which are the perfection of the Missioner's spirit. Even though we should do our utmost to observe all these Gospel teachings, which are very holy and useful, some among them are, nevertheless, more proper to us than others, namely, the ones that recommend particularly simplicity, humility, gentleness, mortification, and zeal for souls. The Congregation, therefore, will strive in a very special way to see that these five virtues may be, so to speak, the faculties of the soul of the whole Congregation, and that the actions of each one of us may be always animated by them. Now, this brings us to the opposite of these virtues, what is contrary to them, that is, the vices that contend against these Gospel teachings.

*Satan is always trying to divert us from living up to this teaching by suggesting his own, which is the exact opposite. Each one of us,*

*then, should be fully aware of this, and completely ready to oppose and overcome all those things. This applies especially to those values which conflict more obviously with our Congregation, such as: (1) mere human prudence; (2) the desire for publicity; (3) always wanting everyone to give in to us and see things our way; (4) the pursuit of self-gratification in everything; (5) attaching no great importance to either God's honor or the salvation of others.*

“In line with that, my dear confreres, we now have to speak about teachings contrary to Gospel teachings. We'll summarize the vices connected with them and show how they battle against the perfection of the spirit of a Missioner. We've mentioned in what these virtues of the Gospel teachings consist and how they make up our spirit. We've said, I repeat, that these five virtues and these teachings are opposed to those false teachings of the world, against which we must wage war. So, we'll divide our talk into three points: in the first, we'll look at the reasons we have to give ourselves to God to combat the teachings opposed to those of the Gospel; in the second, we'll explain the Rule and point out its enemies; in the third, we'll look for the means and weapons to destroy them. I have good reason to hope that God will bless our efforts.

“The first reason we have to give ourselves to God to fight and hold our ground against these vices is that the devil is the author of them, says the Rule, and that these teachings are false, since it's that evil spirit which has produced them and is the father of them. On the contrary, the teachings that make up our spirit are holy, since Our Lord is the author of them; this is also what the Rule states. And, in fact, since all good comes from God, so all evil comes from the devil and our corrupt nature, which puts his teachings in opposition to those of the Gospel. The Gospel teaching states, ‘Blessed are the poor because the kingdom of God belongs to them.’<sup>1</sup> The demon's maxim preaches the contrary; the devil doesn't teach that the poor are blessed; he says, ‘You must have possessions, since life is hard, and woe to the person who doesn't strive to make his fortune!’ The Gospel says we should be gentle and kind, and the devil says we

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<sup>1</sup>Mt 5:3. (NAB)

shouldn't yield to anyone, and anyone who damages our reputation should be considered our enemy. We have to avenge ourselves and hold firm; if we're attacked by word or in writing, we're bound to defend ourselves. Our honor and reputation are at stake if we keep silence on these occasions. Those are maxims, but where do they come from? We don't find them in Scripture or in what the Son of God has commanded us; they must, however, come from somewhere; it's neither from the Gospel nor from God; so the devil must be their author.

“The second reason we have to give ourselves to God to brace ourselves against those false teachings and to stand fast against them is that the devil uses us and takes up arms within us to make us embrace his teachings and abandon those of Our Lord Jesus Christ. You know that, although original sin is taken away by Baptism, this *fomes peccati*<sup>2</sup> stays with us; we have within ourselves our concupiscence that stirs up the love and desire to have possessions, to gratify ourselves, and to do our own will. All that is born with us and will never leave us, unless it's through the virtues that make up the spirit of the Mission. Since the devil is the author of these false teachings of which our Rule speaks, and since he finds in us weapons to destroy us, we have to give ourselves to God in the right way to brace ourselves and stand fast against these vices that try to destroy the empire Jesus Christ has established within us. Those are the evils.

“Assuming this to be true, let's see what these adversaries are, please. The first is human prudence; the second, our desire for publicity and to acquire a good reputation and the esteem of others; the third is our passion to have everyone submit to our judgment; the fourth is to seek our own satisfaction in all things; and the fifth is a lack of sensitivity for the glory of God and the salvation of our neighbor.

“Human prudence is opposed to simplicity. Simplicity causes a person never to use duplicity, to speak as he thinks, always to consider God, and never himself, in divine things, and to be mindful of God in the acts of religion and charity he practices. Now, human

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<sup>2</sup>Tinder from which sin is ignited, popularly called inclination to sin.

prudence is just the opposite. What is human prudence? A serious pursuit of illicit means for self-advancement and for attaining our expectations; a constant desire and effort to satisfy the inclinations of our corrupt nature; and, in fact, we see this in persons who live according to the prudence of the flesh. For example, what does someone who doesn't think of God think about? He's usually seeks his own satisfaction and follows his own inclinations. Where do your inclinations lead you? To get the best of others. What's that person trying to achieve? To be filled with knowledge through fine collections and similar things in order to have people admire him. Alas! It's not being simple when we seek our own satisfaction in everything, eager to see and hear new things, to find out everything that's going on inside and outside the house, to gratify our taste in eating and drinking, to have exclusive friendships (I don't think there seems to be too much of that in the Company, thank God!), and, lastly, to strive to ingratiate ourselves with this person and that. All that, my dear confreres, is a tragedy, a tragedy. What does human prudence mean? It means to make a human choice. Now, all that is directly opposed to the virtue of simplicity, which has God alone in view in all our actions, whether it's saying or attending Mass, hearing confessions, or reconciling enemies. Simplicity always has God in view in those things, whereas prudence of the flesh, on the contrary, seeks itself always and everywhere, causing us to use indirect means to attain the goal we've proposed to ourselves. Oh, how dangerous is this human prudence! God grant that it may never be found in the Company!

“So that's the first kind of human prudence. There's another that's not so exacting: when we try to resolve divine matters by human ones. Take someone who wants to enter a religious Community. What dangerous prudence it is when he tries to reach a decision about this by human means! That's why we should have a very special devotion to resolving human matters by divine ones, even though nature is opposed to this and contradicts it. *Ut quid perditio haec?*<sup>23</sup> Someone has just made retreat in order to choose a state in

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<sup>23</sup>Why this waste? Cf. Mt 26:8. (NAB)

life; you see one man going to the Jesuits, another to the Carthusians. Going to the Jesuits, *mais quoi!* Isn't the Mission a holy Company, where a man can work out his salvation as well as somewhere else? Human prudence! I remember that one of the finest men of the time, a lawyer in the Council, consulted me regarding his vocation. He had struggled with the desire to become either a Carthusian or a Missioner. I felt flattered; nevertheless, God gave me the grace never to talk to him about becoming a Missioner. He went to the Carthusians. '*Quoi!*' I would say to him, 'God is calling you to the Carthusians; then go where God calls you, Monsieur.' That didn't prevent me from feeling flattered, but I still kept saying to him, 'Go where God is calling you, Monsieur.' True, I do think he was right in remaining in the world for a time to tie up his business affairs and make his final decision. Let's act in such a way, Messieurs, that God may have advisers in this Company who consider the strength of a calling, and who judge according to His spirit and not according to the flesh.

"So then, it's against this human prudence that we have to struggle, using the weapons our Rule furnishes us, namely, simplicity, which resolves human matters by divine ones and not divine by human ones.

"The second vice and the second adversary we have to combat is the desire to distinguish ourselves in the eyes of others, a vice totally opposed to the virtue of humility, so necessary for Missioners. If, by some misfortune, some were to allow themselves to become involved in important matters, men like that would change the Company for the worst. So then, humility, love of our own abasement, wanting everyone to know us and to be aware of our faults—to love all that and to rejoice in it is to be a perfect Missioner. But to love the contrary is to lack the spirit of the Mission, which is to be unconcerned about ourselves and not worry about what people say. Let them tell whatever tales they like, let them say that we're ignorant men, low-class people, scoundrels, if you like; we have to accept all that, brothers, in the spirit of holy humility. Alas, what did people not say of the Apostles! What calumnies did not blacken their reputation! Did they return insult for insult on that account?



On the contrary, they used those occasions as so many opportunities for merit. Ah, we're not Apostles but sinners, ciphers of sin; let's humble ourselves, and that's it.

“ ‘But are we not to defend ourselves?’ Fear not, God will defend us. ‘But, Monsieur, is it such a great wrong to say a few words in reply?’ Ah, God forbid! It's the spirit of envy that makes one want to appear as a good casuist, a good confessor, a fine preacher. Ah, brothers, let's esteem others but humble ourselves and keep God alone in view in our actions, remembering what Our Lord said to His disciples, ‘Rejoice, not because of those brilliant deeds you're doing in the sight of others, but because your names are written in the book of life.’<sup>4</sup> I ask you, what good will it do you to have the good opinion of others? What profit and advantage will you gain from that reputation? What is that human honor? It's a certain mental image that vanishes almost as quickly as it appears. Certainly, my dear confreres, if we seek to be esteemed, we're greatly deceived; those who run after honor usually find only shame; and experience shows clearly enough that, if people praise you, they do it either through spite or through flattery, saying just the opposite of what they think. After all, the world is made up of some good people and some bad. The good will put a good interpretation on your actions, but the bad ones, almost infinite in number, will scoff at them. Thus, in seeking honor, you'll find contempt and shame.

“Ah, we're so poor and wretched as to want honor! And what is it? A puff of smoke that's in the mind, which dissipates in a flash. Most people don't care about us, and yet we become worshipers of esteem. That's being senseless, crazy, like those who think they're Popes or Kings; it's madness, sheer daydreaming. Let's fight against that; let's take up arms to destroy this enemy; let's be united to the Son of God, who fought pride in a frightful way. It's a little hard on nature, but let's hold fast and ask God for His enlightenment in order to know ourselves, and we'll root out this cursed passion. So then, let's wage war against pride, my dear confreres; it's

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<sup>4</sup>Cf. Lk 10:20. (NAB)

an enemy we'll find here, outside, in town and country; in a word, it follows us everywhere; but we'll be victorious over it if we're grounded in holy humility. That's the second Gospel teaching and the second virtue that makes up the spirit of the Mission.

“The other adversary is the passion of wanting everyone to submit his judgment and will to ours. That's contrary to gentleness, for we usually see that those who want everything to be done in accord with their judgment, and that everything they want should be done in the time and manner they wish, are rude, violent, angry, and imperious people, and that's totally opposed to gentleness. On the contrary, gentle persons don't hold to their own opinion, condescending to the will of others and never pushing to have their will done, like those other people we just mentioned.

“So then, wanting everyone to submit his judgment and will to ours is a vice opposed to gentleness. O Savior of my soul, what vice do I not have? Savior of my soul, forgive me for them, and especially for the faults I've committed against that teaching that recommends submission of judgment. Grant me the grace, Lord, that, during the Council meeting we have for house business, I may report things as they are, without passion, and with no desire to be followed but in the proper spirit. If I say something, let it be in order to give more enlightenment and so that the truth may be known by others rather than by me. This is the grace I ask of You, Lord.

“This passion, Messieurs, comes partly from pride and partly from the desire for self-satisfaction. We're at a Council meeting; naturally, we'd like our opinion to be followed; we're annoyed that others attain their goal; we want to carry the day; we think we have more convincing reasons than others do. If we act according to nature, that leads to contradicting everything and to holding to our own opinion, but if we act according to the virtue of a good Missioner, we submit our own opinion and yield to others, preferring their sentiments to our own. Ah, how happy we'd be if we behaved like that! We'd have the satisfaction that Our Lord was presiding over our affairs. Grant us also the grace, my God, that, in all things, we may not wish to be served or obeyed as if we were ruling with an iron hand, or that everything should be done accord-

ing to our own will on all occasions. I mean when what we want is not specifically a Commandment of God or of the Church or one of our Rules; for then it's not so much our own will that we want but the Will of God himself, which is very reasonable to obey and to obey on all occasions.

“The fourth enemy is the pursuit of our own satisfaction in everything. Savior of my soul! What's that? Isn't it true, Messieurs, that we seek self, without even thinking about it? We flatter ourselves and don't oppose nature, which has no other aim than its own satisfaction. In the name of God, my dear confreres, remember that we have to combat this vice by mortification, which doesn't seek its pleasures from either the external or interior senses. Let's love this; otherwise we'll never be content in our vocation. There are some men here, you see, who have a passion for seeing, hearing, and knowing everything that goes on in the house and outside. Let's mortify that; let's not fail to do so. Alas! We've left everything for God; why, then, do we seek ourselves, as we do? There are few men in the Company who are tormented by this passion to see, hear, and know the news; there are few of them; and I ask the Company to thank God for that; but, since there are some, we should mortify that. We have to be generous in struggling against this enemy who's trying to place an obstacle in the way of God's graces.

“Fifth: the last enemy is insensitivity regarding the affairs of God and of our neighbor. This vice causes the insensitive man to feel no love or attraction for what concerns his salvation. That's why Saint Bernard considers this passion a sign of reprobation. We certainly go to church to pray, sing, say Mass, and perform the other liturgical functions, but all these functions are performed without feeling, tastelessly, and without devotion. What's the cause of this callousness? We haven't been carrying out the ceremonies with a view to their purpose, which is to stir the people to devotion. We aren't moved when we strike our breast at Mass. Insensitivity, brothers, insensitivity! Let's be zealous in edifying the people, making them see how the Word of God should be treated, by treating it properly ourselves. For, take my word for it, they act respectfully in Church and take the Word of God into account if they see that we ourselves esteem it. Ah, my dear confreres! If we're faithful to performing the

ceremonies and prayers, we'll receive this sensitivity from God, which will help us to inspire one another to devotion, and we'll take pleasure in these ceremonies. But if, on the contrary, we lack this sensitivity, we'll fail to edify our neighbor. Why did Saint Francis pray with his arms extended? Why did he prostrate himself with his face to the ground before going into the pulpit? He prepares himself in this way, his body language moves the people, this action delights everyone, and God in His goodness gives such great efficacy to his preaching that everyone leaves there edified. Ah, my dear confreres, let's enter into this spirit, for that's what animates us, and, by this means, we'll be preserved from being callous!

“Insensitivity also causes us to be unmoved by the physical and spiritual miseries of our neighbor; we lack charity and zeal and don't sense offenses against God. Eh, let's not be like those Missioners who aren't zealous! If we send them to give a mission, they go; if they have to work with ordinands, they do it; it's the same for retreatants; but how do they do it? Where's their zeal? That zeal is assailed by callousness, so let's strive to be animated by the spirit of fervor; let's perform all the ministries of our Institute and be zealous in doing them courageously and fervently; let's have compassion on the many souls that are perishing and not allow our laziness and insensitivity to be the cause of their loss.

“Those, my dear confreres, are the five enemies we have to combat, of which the first, as you've seen, is prudence of the flesh; the second is a wish to appear to be someone in the eyes of others; the third is the desire to have everyone always submit to our judgment and will; the fourth is to seek our own satisfaction in everything; and the fifth is insensitivity for the glory of God and the salvation of our neighbor. Brothers, let's work courageously to destroy these enemies; let's arm ourselves with simplicity and candor; let's give ourselves to God to acquire gentleness, humility, mortification, and zeal for souls; let's abide by them and envelop ourselves in these five virtues like snails in their shells. Ah, these virtues will preserve us from all disastrous happenings; we'll go everywhere with them and manage to overcome everything! Without them, we'll be Missioners in appearance only.

“So then, courage, brothers! Let’s wage war against these enemies, but let’s look at the means to be victorious in this. The first one is to get right to the heart of things and is common to all that we do. It consists in asking Our Lord for the weapons we need to fight against these five enemies and, to do it more effectively, to ask Him very earnestly for them, for He’s the only one who can set us free and give us the peace enjoyed by righteous souls. This grace depends on His goodness and mercy; that’s why we have to ask Him for it.

“The Rule provides a means for us, namely, to keep watch over ourselves and not to allow the evil spirit to catch us unawares. Is that in the spirit of the Mission? Is it far removed from it? Don’t ever do anything contrary to simplicity; what will also be a big help to us is to examine ourselves in order to discern the illusions of the devil.

“So then, my dear confreres, be on the watch; be constantly on the watch and with the appropriate prudence. Do nothing on your own initiative but always with the advice of the Superior or the Director, or, if they’re not available, of one of the good senior confreres; always do that; otherwise, the demon will deceive you. O Savior, we’re talking, then, about combating the enemy of Your Cross. Please give us strength to destroy him and to have You triumph in our hearts.

“You’ve seen, brothers, the reasons we have to give ourselves to God to struggle against the enemies of the Company. The first is that it’s the evil spirit who has stirred up these vices; the second is that he’s even more powerful because he’s armed and takes advantage of our weakness, so opposed to the Gospel teachings. You said it, Lord, that our corrupt nature was the source of all our misfortunes.

“Since that’s true, my dear confreres, we’ll wage war against those enemies and that prudence of the flesh, *inimica mors*,<sup>5</sup> which causes death. After that, against what else shall we do battle? That spirit of desiring honor, which is the greatest of all follies. Chasing butterflies! ‘Oh, but I do a good job hearing confessions.’ What’s left of that? ‘Ah, he gave a good sermon.’ What’s left of that? ‘He’s done well with catechizing; he’s a great casuist and a fine theologian.’ What’s left of that? Smoke. What else? Smoke, and that’s all. Ah, let’s do battle against all that!

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<sup>5</sup>Cf. 1 Cor 15:26. (NAB)

“On the other hand, we have to combat the passion of wanting our own judgment to prevail. If we go up against that, if we have it before our eyes, if we give that to God in order to taste those Gospel truths, what spiritual men we’ll become, and the Company will soon become like Jesus Christ, linked with the company of the Apostles! That being the case, I say, let’s give ourselves to God to overcome these vices. Down with pride! Down with human prudence! Shame on seeking our own satisfactions! Shame on any attachment to our own judgment! Shame on duplicity!

“So then, let’s be determined to fight generously and say boldly, ‘Long live simplicity in the Mission! Long live mortification and zeal for souls!’ Let’s be filled with that spirit of ardor and stir ourselves up to join battle. Even though the devil is the author of those false teachings, let’s not be afraid; for, as Saint Augustine says, *latrare potest, mordere non potest*.<sup>6</sup> He may very well bark and make noise, but he can never bite and harm you, if you’re unwilling. We certainly see that people who are simple, humble, gentle, mortified, and zealous for souls scoff at all his efforts because *mordere non potest nisi violentem*.<sup>7</sup> Eh, if we’re simple, humble, and mortified, we have nothing to fear, and victory will be ours. So let’s be very courageous.

“Savior of our souls, these are Your teachings we’re embracing, and the devil is trying to make us abandon them. My Savior, it’s to Your advantage for us to be the victors, since we’re fighting against Your enemy. Come to our aid. We protest that we’ll take up arms as long as we can. But what can we do without Your help? Lord, who, by the eternal decree You proclaimed to raise up a Company that is to make profession of imitating You, have associated us to Your mission, grant that this poor, insignificant Company of the Mission may be conformed to Your teachings, both as a body and in each of its members, that it may be filled with and grow in simplicity, humility, mortification, and zeal for the salvation of our neighbor, in order to be more and more pleasing in the eyes of Your Divine Majesty. This is the grace we humbly ask of You, Lord.”

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<sup>6</sup>*He can bark, he cannot bite.*

<sup>7</sup>*He cannot bite unless allowed.*

213. - PRAYING THE DIVINE OFFICE

September 26, 1659

“My dear confreres, I had asked M. Almérás to see that the chanting of the psalms be the topic of this evening’s conference because of a certain disorder that’s apparent in praying the Divine Office. I’m not speaking of Sundays and feast days, when it’s our custom to chant High Mass and Vespers, but only about Matins, the Little Hours,<sup>1</sup> and Vespers, which we pray in choir on weekdays. We begin Prime one way and Terce another; a high tone predominates on one side, a low tone on the other. Seeing all that, I said to myself, ‘*Mon Dieu*, that’s disgraceful, especially in this house, which should be the standard for the others for praying the Office!’ Now, as I was thinking about that, M. Portail came to see me. ‘We’ll talk about this shortly,’ I said to him, ‘in the conference.’ And, after reading the Rule to see what it said about this, I thought it might be very useful matter for us in a conference today, and I hope God will give it His blessing.

“So then, we’re going to speak about the Rule that deals with the Divine Office. Here it is: *We should take the greatest care to pray the Divine Office properly. We pray it in the Roman rite and in common, in a middle tone of voice, even when on missions. We do not sing it so as to leave more time for helping others. Exceptions to this would be houses where we are bound to Gregorian Chant because of obligations accepted, or students preparing to receive orders, or seminaries for diocesan students, and other suchlike commitments. No matter in what place or at what time we pray the canonical hours, we should remember the reverence, attention, and devotion with which we should do so, since we know for certain that we are at that moment praising God in our celebration, and therefore sharing in the role of angels.*<sup>2</sup>

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**Conference 213.** - Manuscript of Conferences.

<sup>1</sup>Prior to the reform of the Roman Breviary, what today are called Mid-morning, Mid-day, and Mid-afternoon prayer in the Divine Office of the Roman Rite were called Terce, Sext, and None. Vatican Council II, in its reform of the Liturgy of the Hours, dropped Prime from the Little Hours.

<sup>2</sup>Common Rules. Chap. X, Art. 5.

“That, my very dear confreres, is the Rule that concerns the Office. It’s not the one that immediately follows what we started in the preceding conferences, but the Providence of God has allowed it this way to remedy the faults committed in it. That’s what made me think it would be opportune to speak to you according to the little method we observe and which applies to all the topics we discuss. We’ll divide this one into three points: in the first, we’ll look at the motives we have to give ourselves to God to pray and chant the Divine Office; in the second, how it should be done; and in the third, the means to remedy the failings we commit in this, and what should be done in the future to pray it well.

“The first motive we have, brothers, to give ourselves to God to pray the Divine Office well is what the Rule tells us: that it’s very important for us to carry out this duty properly and to chant God’s praises in a fitting manner. I’m afraid we don’t understand clearly what the praises of God are and the dignity of them. Now, the praises of God are not as small a matter as we may think. Do you know, my dear confreres, that the first act of religion is to praise God. Let’s go further; it even takes precedence over sacrifice. There’s a teaching that states, *prius est esse quam operari*: a thing must exist before it can operate, and it must exist before being sustained: *prius est esse quam sustentari*. We have to acknowledge the essence and existence of God and have some knowledge of His perfections before offering Him a sacrifice; that’s only natural; for, I ask you, to whom do you offer presents? To important persons, to Princes, to Kings; they’re the ones to whom you pay your respects. This is so true that God observed the same order in the Incarnation. When the angel went to greet the Blessed Virgin, he began by acknowledging that she was filled with graces from heaven: *Ave, gratia plena*;<sup>3</sup> you are showered and filled with God’s favors, Madame; *Ave, gratia plena*. So then, he acknowledges her and praises her as being full of grace. And what does he offer her next? This beautiful gift of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. The Holy Spirit, taking the most pure blood of the Blessed Virgin, formed a body with it, then God created a soul in

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<sup>3</sup>Cf. Lk 1:28. (NAB)



order to give life to this body; and immediately the Word is united to this soul and body by a marvelous union. In this way, the Holy Spirit brought about the ineffable Mystery of the Incarnation. Praise preceded sacrifice.

“This way of acting on the part of God shows us how we should conduct ourselves. First, the ambassador is sent; then, once the Virgin gives her consent, the effect immediately follows. Thus, the first act of religion is to acknowledge God in accordance with the attributes and perfections He possesses. Now, since it’s true that the first act of religion is to pray and chant the Divine Office well, you see, Messieurs, that we have to give ourselves to God to assure that the chant is what it should be. I make you yourselves the judges of that, and I call you to judge it in the inner recesses of your hearts. So then, that has to be our goal, namely, to perform this act with the greatest perfection possible. Alas! We prepare ourselves for the Sacrifice, and that’s how it should be, but we also need preparation for the praises of God, since they are a sacrifice; *sacrificium laudis honorificabit me*.<sup>4</sup> This is the way by which we arrive at the salvation of His Son: *et illic iter quo ostendam illi salutare Dei*.<sup>5</sup> And, in fact, is there anything more touching and pleasing than the holy desires and loving sentiments to be drawn from the seven Penitential Psalms? <sup>6</sup> Each verse—what am I saying—every word of each verse is like so many shafts of love of God which His Goodness shoots into a soul, piercing the heart so lovingly that it yearns unceasingly for God. Yes, brothers, one verse—no more is needed—is capable of sanctifying a soul, when it is tasted and savored with the devotion God asks.

“The second motive we have to give ourselves to God in order to pray and chant the Divine Office well is the offense against God, the sin we commit, when we don’t pray it in the manner our Rule prescribes. We might say that there’s something of the animal in the

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<sup>4</sup>*The sacrifice of praise will honor me.* Cf. Ps 50:23. (NAB)

<sup>5</sup>*And in that place is the journey by which I will reveal to him the salvation of God.* Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>A group of seven psalms especially suitable for the use of penitents and considered, at least from the sixth century, as forming a class by themselves. In the *New American Bible* these are Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143.

attitude of a poor man who takes his place in choir, without reflecting on what he's saying, and who, though he should be performing this action with respect, since he's speaking to God, does it, nevertheless, like a dumb animal. Is there any greater sin than that of treating God this way in His presence? You know, my dear confreres, what casuists say about this, namely, that the Office must be prayed *digne, attente et devote*.<sup>7</sup> So, what sin does the person who acts otherwise commit? You know in how many ways we offend God in praying the Office. And this must be true, since Saint Chrysostom says that God prefers the barking of dogs to the praises of a man who doesn't pray them properly. God prefers the barking of a dog! Of a dog! Ah, brothers, it must really be a serious sin not to carry out this duty properly! Yes, the man who's negligent in his efforts to pray the Office should consider himself a dog, since, being endowed with reason, he performs such a holy action in a way that's worse than animal-like.

“The third motive for praying our Office well, Messieurs, is that this is to begin to do what we'll be doing in heaven: *Eritis sicut angeli*.<sup>8</sup> If we have that happiness of possessing this glory, we'll be like the angels. ‘And will the saints be doing what the angels do?’ Yes, like them, they'll be engaged in singing eternally the praises of God. Just look at those twenty-four elders in the Apocalypse, *Et viginti quatuor seniores ceciderunt coram Agno, habentes singuli cytharas, et cantabant canticum novum*.<sup>9</sup> So, the saints praise God in heaven with the angels; and we'll be eternally engaged in singing the praises of God, saying, ‘Holy, holy, holy is the God of hosts!’ So then, to pray the Divine Office properly is to imitate them here on earth. If this weren't the case, how would so many Orders have been allowed to have no other mission in the Church than to sing the praises of God? The Carthusians, the Benedictines, and several others have as their main purpose to pray and chant the Office in order to draw down on earth the blessings of heaven and to establish a

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<sup>7</sup>Worthily, attentively, and devoutly.

<sup>8</sup>You will be like the angels.

<sup>9</sup>And the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb with their harps, and they sang a new hymn. Cf. Rv 5:8-9. (NAB)

connection between the Church Militant and the Church Triumphant. And, in fact, how could so many foundations be made and so many Chapters established, which have no other duty but to chant the praises of God? Why would so many Kings, Princes, Lords, and other high-ranking persons have founded so many monasteries and Communities, except with a view to establish in the Church men who would praise God unceasingly? So then, that's the third and final motive I'm advancing.

“But, according to our Rule, what do we have to observe? You know that intention, diligence, and devotion are required. That's quite a few things, and there are a number of others, which would take a lot of time to explain.

“‘But, Monsieur, tell us what should be done.’ First of all, each individual should realize that the Office we pray should be the Roman Office because of the different places where we live; in Paris, the Roman is used, and the same in the other houses because of the seminaries and the ordinands from various dioceses who come to us, apart from the fact that we're obliged to go, now to one area, now to another, and it would be difficult to change the breviary each time. That's why we use the Roman one.

“The Rule states furthermore that we should pray it together. And, in fact, the Company has done this from its infancy, and those who have been here since that time know that it was customary to pray Matins, the Little Hours, and Vespers together. Each individual knows also that this is the practice in the other houses. When I hear the praises of God chanted in the spirit Our Lord asks of us, I'm more touched, you see, than I am by any other act of piety. So then, it's customary to pray it together in all our houses. In Richelieu there's an order for that, and it's the same in Saint-Méen and Cahors. In a word, the same thing is done everywhere. The Rule goes on to state that even when we're giving missions we should pray the Office in common. Why is that? Experience has shown that, when it wasn't recited in common, many men got behind, and some were still saying Prime in the evening; they even had to leave meals and absent themselves from community exercises to go to pray their office, which they had omitted at its proper time. Add to

that the haste with which it was prayed, and the lack of devotion they brought to it, along with a number of other drawbacks that would take too long for me to explain to you. And because, just as one candle doesn't give off as much light as several of them together, so we don't have as much fervor and devotion when we say our Office alone as when several of us come together to pray. I must confess that there's a sort of special blessing when we pray it like that. Now, the diligence we should have consists in pondering the words and the meaning of each word, reciting it calmly, and not running ahead. Anyone who tries to go fast would put himself in danger of not satisfying his obligations in any way and would scandalize those who might hear him.

"The way to pray it well is to observe the pauses and pronounce the words devoutly and distinctly. We're certainly touched when it's prayed in common. That's why you see the priests who come here on Tuesdays, and are waiting for the conference to begin, getting together in twos to pray the Office and, from what they've told me, they realize that there's a very special blessing in this. That's also why we've set down this practice, even during missions.

"Now, my dear confreres, we're guilty of what I've just mentioned. What did I say, that everyone was guilty! There's some excuse for everyone; I, wretched man, am the only one who has sinned for not having seen that this Rule was in vigor among us. I'm the only one answerable before God for all the sins and failings committed in the divine service because, in my wretchedness, I wasn't steadfast in seeing that things were observed according to what the Rule prescribed. Pray to Our Lord for me, Messieurs, that He may forgive me. But how has this happened? I repeat, it's because of my negligence, and I'm very well aware that, if God didn't have pity on me, and if He treated me according to my sins, I'd have to suffer torments in hell on that account. Let's tell the truth: at Saint-Lazare we don't keep that Rule at all; it seems as if it isn't made for us; off we go, some in this direction, some in the other, to say our Office in private—as if we weren't obliged to say it in common. Who's guilty of that, Messieurs? It's this miserable man, who would get down on his knees if he could—you'll excuse my infirmi-

ties. So then, we've fallen. *Or sus*, may the Divine Majesty be pleased to put us back on our feet again!

“The second thing to be observed is to pray the Office *media voce sine cantu*;<sup>10</sup> that's what the Rule states, so as not to oblige Missioners to have a perpetual choir, as is done at Notre-Dame, in the other Chapters, and in many religious Orders. Our manner of praying the Office isn't a new invention; you have the Capuchins, the Minims, and a few other Communities that recite it *media voce*, and that's what we should do. That's what the Rule states, to recite it *media voce sine cantu*, in a low voice, so as to have time to devote to the ministries of the Mission. We have to make an exception for those houses founded with the obligation to pray it in choir and who are even obliged to chant it. Saint-Lazare used to be bound to this; the monks who came before us used to chant the Divine Office every day; but, when we replaced them, we had the Archbishop's permission to pray it *media voce sine cantu*, on condition, however, that we would sing the High Mass and Vespers on Sundays and feast days. So, with the obligation to pray it in this manner, we accepted the Saint-Lazare house. A few others, which I don't recall right now, have the same obligations.

“There are some other houses obliged to chant the Office, such as Richelieu, where we have the parish, and Cahors, and in Agde, where they're obliged to chant it because of the office of Pastor that they hold. Add to that a few others houses, like Saint-Méen, where they're obliged to pray the Office together and to chant High Mass, not only on Sundays and feast days but on several other days, because of foundations.<sup>11</sup> I almost forgot to tell you that in some other houses, because of seminaries and the ordinands received there, we're obliged to chant the Office sometimes in order to teach them. Well, in the other places where we're obligated to pray the Office in choir and to sing High Masses and Vespers, we still go to a room to pray the Office all together. Those, Messieurs, are our obligations. So, in this house we chant it on certain days; apart from that, we

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<sup>10</sup>*In a moderate voice, without singing.*

<sup>11</sup>A reference to the contract of foundation, which obliged the community to chant the Office on certain days for the intention of the benefactor who provided the funds.

should pray it together, and even when we're giving missions. Now, if, according to our Rule, we're obliged to pray it all together in a room or oratory, as is done in Richelieu and in other houses where there's no foundation to chant it in choir, why shouldn't we, who are obliged to pray it all together, and especially in this house or in church, why, I ask, shouldn't we pray it in those places rather than privately in our own rooms? We certainly aren't keeping that Rule at all, brothers.

“The means to remedy this disorder (because it has reached that point) is to consider the sin we're committing. It's not a small one, because we give those in other houses cause for not keeping this Rule, when they see that it's not being observed in this house, which should be the standard and model for the others. That's what has always made me stand firm and which should oblige us, as far as in us lies, in seeing that this practice is observed among us; otherwise, farewell to the Rule! Would you believe that there are persons who have complained of being made to go to the Office and have asked to be dispensed from it? That didn't come from any senior priest but from a seminarian, who said to his director, because he had been at it for an entire week, ‘Monsieur, you're making me spend too much time for the Office; please give me an exemption from it.’ Consider, please, where that leads. Consider also that, if we don't rectify this disorder, the Office will no longer be prayed in common during missions; and the consequence of that will be that, because it wasn't prayed at the proper times, we won't be ready to go to the confessionals, excusing ourselves on the grounds that we haven't prayed our Office. Lastly, consider the source of all that. I don't think there's anyone, Messieurs, who doesn't see that this must come from a dissipated person who doesn't love his vocation. That's true, and I think that, if not all of us, at least most of the Company are of the same opinion about that as I am.

“But let's see what human nature and the devil have to say: ‘Well, Monsieur, things have been that way for twenty years; don't you know that the time limit has passed and this has become a custom? *Oui-da*, Monsieur, the custom has now been introduced into Saint-Lazare of no longer going to choir, except for those in the

seminary.’ To that, Messieurs, in part I bow my head and am ashamed before God for the little attention I’ve given to maintaining that ancient practice, but I will say that we never place a time limit on anything contrary to divine things, though indeed we can set a statute of limitations for human things. Furthermore, there’s no time limit on this, since from time to time we’ve recommended attendance at Divine Office; that does away with the prescription you mention. What also hinders the prescription is that there are some in the Company who have always been present for the Office. God bless those men! God bless them, since they have prevented this prescription until Providence provided the opportunity to rectify the failings that have slipped into the Company and has permitted that there be devout persons who have been there! That’s why, as long as there are some who uphold the law or a custom, it can’t be said that it’s been abrogated. Now, there have been persons in the Company who have upheld it, consequently, it’s a weak argument to say that this custom is no longer in vigor. Furthermore, when the Superior gives an order against those who are in violation of this practice, and when the Rules are renewed from time to time, no custom can prevail against that. I add the following: theologians think there will be no excuse before God and men for the person who, entering a Community and knowing its Rules and practices, doesn’t observe them because there’s a custom to the contrary. Having vowed them, he’s bound to observe them, and he’s inexcusable if he doesn’t.

“‘Oh, what will be said of me if I go to the Office from now on? Oh, but, Monsieur, I’d have a hard time doing this. I say my Office all by myself, Monsieur. I’m well aware that we should be in Church, but there are enough men who go.’ My dear confreres, there’s not much difference in praying it privately or in public, and I assure you that it’s just as hard praying it either way; for, please tell me, aren’t we supposed to pray it attentively and devoutly and observe the pauses when we say it privately? I assure you that I’ve never seen nor read a single theologian who doesn’t set down these conditions for praying it well. All respectable persons observe the pauses in order to nourish the spirit; to do the contrary is a sin. Do

you know what certain persons do? They mumble the first word; articulate poorly the second; then rush along any way you like. Do you call that singing God's praises, Messieurs?

“ ‘But, Monsieur, it takes time to get from my room to the choir.’ Eh, *mon Dieu!* Where does that lead? Eh, Savior of my soul! We see Chapters that don't have their houses as close to the church, and they go to Matins, then return home, then go next to the Little Hours, to High Mass and Vespers, going and returning continually; and we, we would complain! I'll say to our shame that there are eleven or twelve Canons of Notre-Dame who always go to Matins at midnight and never miss, unless they're sick. Canons of Notre-Dame, leaders of a Chapter composed of very high-ranking persons, get up at midnight! M. de Ventadour, the Duc de Ventadour,<sup>12</sup> has always risen to go to Matins at midnight. An English Prince, named . . . I don't remember his name, it's . . . leads this kind of life. M. de Parfait does the same. In a word, there are twelve of them who never fail to be there, except when they're not well. *O Sauveur!* We see men of the world, who are very well off, so zealous as to rise at midnight in order to sing the praises of God, and we complain about going during the day from our room to the church! Brothers, see how far that leads, see how far our wretchedness is taking us!

“ ‘But, Monsieur, I'm not well.’ The sick should be treated as sick persons; the yoke of Our Lord is easy and should be adjusted to the possibilities of each individual.

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<sup>12</sup>Henri de Levis, duc de Ventadour, Peer of France, Prince de Maubisson and Comte de la Voulte. After having fought successfully against the Huguenots of Languedoc, he sought to extend the kingdom of God by means other than arms. In 1630 he established the Company of the Blessed Sacrament, together with Bro. Philippe d'Angoumois, Capuchin; Jean Sulfren, S. J.; Charles de Condren of the Oratory; Henri de Pichery, the day-to-day steward of the King; and other important persons. Ventadour received subdiaconate on September 22, 1641, and, having ceded his titles of Duke and Peer to his brother Charles, accepted a canonry at Notre-Dame, Paris, in 1650. The proposed Congregation of Missionaries for the Indies never materialized. As Saint Vincent states in this conference, the very devout and mortified Duke rose regularly at midnight to recite Matins. He died on October 14, 1680, at the age of eighty-four. All that remains of his writings is a letter against the Jansenists. (Cf. *Le duc et la duchesse de Ventadour: un grand amour chrétien au dix-septième siècle* [Paris, 1889]; Raoul Allier, *La Compagnie du Très-Saint-Sacrament de l'autel à Marseille* [Paris: Champion, 1909], pp. 10ff.)



“ ‘But, Monsieur, I’m an Officer of the house.’ It’s only right that those men should be excused from it; sometimes they have to leave God for God; that’s all right for them.

“To absent themselves from the divine service, others will say, ‘Monsieur, I’m writing a sermon.’ Do you know that the best means for preparing this sermon is to be present for the Office? That’s where you’ll come up with some holy thoughts.

“ ‘I’m a student.’ We’ll see about these. Apart from the Jesuits, I don’t think there’s any religious Order or Community where those who are studying and are in Holy Orders and, consequently, are bound to pray the Office, are dispensed from going to choir. I know that the students with the Capuchins go to it; I don’t know if the same is done everywhere else. The best means to study well, say the Capuchins, is to take part in the Office.

“ ‘Ah, but, Monsieur, I have this problem.’ It’s up to each one of us to acknowledge before God if he can or cannot do it, and, after examining himself, to present the matter to the Superior, saying to him, ‘Monsieur, please excuse me from Matins for ten days, two weeks, or a month.’ Then it will be up to the Superior to examine conscientiously the excuse being given him. The person must then explain what is hindering him; and it’s up to the Superior to consider before God if he should dispense the person; and the one who’s planning to ask for this dispensation should first place himself before God and say to himself, ‘If I were at the hour of death, would I be asking for this dispensation? Or, am I indifferent as to what the Superior will tell me? Does whatever thing I have to do equal what I ought to do?’ But remember that nothing should be proposed without examining it previously before God and recognizing that it’s just; for you know that the weakness of Superiors who grant dispensations without good reason doesn’t excuse us before God. Saint Bernard calls that ‘freedom to sin.’ Notice that at times the Rule obliges us to do something under pain of mortal sin, when it has its basis in Scripture, or when something is ordered by virtue of holy obedience, or when, by a man’s bad example, he leads others to do likewise. For example, as a senior priest in the house, I might want to be dispensed, with no good reason, from

several of my Rules, but I reflect that others, following my example, will ask for the same thing. I'm guilty before God, by my bad example, of not observing the Rules. In a word, we're bound to keep the Rule, and anyone who fails in this, and has recourse to the Superior to be dispensed without good reason, always sins when there is scandal and deliberate contempt, according to the theologians, either of the Rules or of the Superior's observance of the Rule. So let's not mollify ourselves that our Rules don't bind under pain of sin.

"So, Messieurs, the time has come when God, who does all things with weight, number, and measure, has made the truth known to us. I was asleep but God, in His mercy, has awakened me and opened my eyes to see how important it is to be steadfast in seeing that the Rule is observed. The time has come, then, for us to acknowledge that we're bound to pray our Office in the way we've mentioned. Isn't this right? I make you the judges of that and call you to it in the inner recesses of your hearts. So then, let's pray our Office together, but let's do it in the choir. How happy will those be who begin tomorrow, and how miserable will those be who criticize such a holy practice! Let's get on with it, but with no regrets, no delay. I think that each and every one of us want to save ourselves and have a great desire to practice the Rule recommending the Office to us.

"Since this is one of the most important means for our sanctification, we'll give ourselves to God to use it. *Hodie si vocem ejus audieritis*.<sup>13</sup> Since you hear the voice of God knocking at your hearts, saying that it's the custom of the entire Company to pray the Office in common, let's give ourselves to Him from now on to witness to Him our desire to render Him this honor. *Hodie si vocem ejus audieritis*. Let's delay no longer. Let's remember to have that *in capite, in spiritu*,<sup>14</sup> that the priest is bound to pray the praises of God.

"Do you know, my dear confreres, that most priests—including ourselves—don't know how to chant because we haven't made it our priority to sing the praises of God, while others have preserved that

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<sup>13</sup>If today you hear his voice. Cf. Ps 95:7. (NAB)

<sup>14</sup>In head and in spirit.

blessing of following the teachings of their fathers? That's obvious in villages where they took the trouble to get good schoolmasters. Almost all the children know chant; and that has passed from father to son. The lay people and the peasants have preserved this blessing since God has restored order to His Office, willing that it be chanted in a devout manner. To my shame I have to say that, when I was a parish priest, I didn't know how I should go about it; I'd hear those peasants intoning the psalms without missing a single note and I admired them. Then I'd say to myself, 'You, who are their spiritual father, don't know how to do that,' and it distressed me. How shameful for priests, my dear confreres, that God has allowed the poor common people to retain the chant—God, who has such joy and pleasure, if I dare speak in this way, when people sing His praises!

"I entreat you, by the pleasure God takes in the Office we pray, to be present at it and to be punctual; I also entreat you to do this because of the inconveniences you know may arise, and they're very great ones. Eh, how do we know what might happen if only the seminary knew how to chant and it became necessary to put it elsewhere and form it apart, as the Jesuits and Capuchins do? Who would keep the Rule, Messieurs? To avoid religious houses having more subjects than they could feed, the Pope has ordered in Italy that no novice may enter an Order or monastery without his permission. Even the Jesuits go to His Holiness and say, 'This man is presenting himself; does Your Holiness approve of our accepting him?' If a similar measure were imposed in France, Messieurs, either by order of the Pope or by some other order (Wasn't it the Emperor Maurice<sup>15</sup> who forbade accepting soldiers into religious Orders?), who, I repeat, would pray the Office?

"I have nothing else to say to you, except that—just let me say this once more—tomorrow at meditation let's enter into the inner recesses of our hearts in order to place ourselves in the presence of God, and, in His sight, examine if it's not right for us to observe this practice. I beg the whole Company to ask this earnestly of God, with the perfect confidence we should have that He will grant us

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<sup>15</sup>An outstanding General and emperor (582-602), one of the most important rulers who shaped the early Byzantine Empire.

this favor. No one, then, should dispense himself from the Office without permission from the Superior, who is bound to examine the matter very closely. Ah! I don't think there's anyone here who won't sacrifice himself most willingly to chant and pray the praises that are, so to speak, part of glory. God listens with joy and pleasure to the praises we give Him. Well then! Let's all be animated with the spirit we need to begin tomorrow to sing the praises of God. This will be our prayer to Him."

**214. - ILLUSIONS AND GENUINE INSPIRATIONS**  
(Common Rules, Chap. II, Art. 16)

October 17, 1659

"My dear confreres, this is the sixteenth article concerning Gospel teachings, which we have to discuss, and here's the text: *The evil spirit often disguises himself as an angel of light, and now and then tricks us with his illusions. All of us must be ever alert for these tricks and should pay particular attention to learning how to recognize and overcome them. Experience has shown that the most effective and surest remedy in such cases is to discuss them as soon as possible with those appointed by God for this. So, if anyone feels himself troubled by ideas which seem to be in some way misleading, or upset by acute anxiety or temptation, he should tell his Superior, or a Director appointed for this, as soon as possible so that the matter can be competently dealt with. And he should accept with approval, as coming from God's hand, whatever solution is suggested, and put it into practice with confidence and respect. Above all, he should take care not to discuss it in any way with anyone else, whether a member of the Congregation or not. Experience has shown that this worsens the problem, causes similar trouble for others, and can, in the long run, even do serious damage in the whole Congregation.*

“So then, my very dear confreres, this is the topic we have to consider. We’ll try to explain this article the way we did in previous conferences. First, we’ll look at the reasons we have for giving ourselves to God to discern the spirit of light from that of darkness, the good angel from the evil one, and genuine inspirations from false illusions. That’s the first point. In the second, we’ll speak about illusions, their nature and causes, and the principal ones found in the Company. Lastly, we’ll give the signs for distinguishing genuine inspirations from false ones; and, if we have time, we’ll look at how we should act in order to contend against the illusions of the evil spirit.

“The first reason, brothers, is that everything is at stake—I mean, our eternal happiness or unhappiness, our salvation or damnation, aiming at distinguishing genuine inspirations from deceptive ones, embracing the good and shunning the evil ones. To put it in a nutshell, our main concern is to realize the importance of discerning the teachings of Jesus Christ from those of the devil. All the misfortune that has come into the world through our first father, stripped of holiness and deprived of the innocent state in which he had been created, causing human nature to be subject today to all God’s justice and to the ills that must be suffered—all this comes from deceptive inspirations, yes, my dear confreres, deceptive inspirations. And to help you realize the truth of this, please listen to the language the spirit of darkness used with our first parents:<sup>1</sup> ‘Why, why don’t you eat the fruit of life?’ said the malicious spirit. ‘We’ve been forbidden to do so.’ ‘Ah! no, it’s not that at all, you’re mistaken: the real reason is that, if you eat it, *eritis sicut dii*,<sup>2</sup> you’ll become like gods, and, in addition, you’ll have knowledge of good and evil.’

“All the miseries we have to endure proceed from these deceptive inspirations, deceptive inspirations, which are supposed to help us understand all of the world’s insights. Don’t think this is as minor a matter as you imagine, my dear confreres, because it’s no small sin to have reduced everyone to suffering such violent, continual evils, of

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Gn 3:1-24. (NAB)

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Gn 3:5. (NAB)

which the very thought is horrifying and makes one prefer death to such a miserable life. O Messieurs! O my dear confreres! Who will give us the grace to discern clearly between good and evil, the snares and tricks of the evil spirit and, finally, the adversities into which poor human nature has fallen through illusions?

“The second motive is that deceptive insights usually assail people who have withdrawn from the world more than they do others. The devil makes little effort to attract people of the world to his side; he has only to suggest to them what he wants, and he’s obeyed immediately; he has himself worshiped by them because of the hope he gives them that they’ll enjoy the pleasures they seek; he has a hold on them, manipulates them, lets them run where they please, and allows them to give themselves to this to their heart’s content, certain that they’ll always be subject to him and will respect his orders. Those, however, who have left the world in order to live with Jesus Christ are more subject to illusions. In fact, we should keep in mind that, while Our Lord conversed with people and was in recollection with His Father, He wasn’t tempted; but, when He withdrew into the desert and began to practice greater penance than before, it was then that the evil spirit tempted Him and was brazen enough to test Him three different times. In accordance with that, as God has given us the grace of withdrawing us from worldly concerns, we have reason to believe that we’re more exposed to illusions than people of the world. That, my dear confreres, is the second motive.

“The third is, strictly speaking, that it’s devout persons, who live in the spirit and in a spiritual way, who should know how to discern deceptive inspirations from authentic ones, as much for their own good, as for the consolation of our neighbor. They have received the insights the Holy Spirit communicates to those who give themselves to Him and are aware of having the intelligence and even the experience to help souls who are prone to do things that lead to their downfall. Alas! How many persons do we see, and how many have past centuries seen, who have enlightened an infinite number of souls, even though they weren’t called to the priesthood, whose very role is to be the light of the world! If that’s the case, Messieurs—which we should in no way doubt—how much more are

we priests obliged to inform ourselves of these things and to learn which ones are genuine insights, so we can free from deception those who walk in darkness, and console souls plagued by false illusions! And if we don't do it, we're guilty before God of as many souls who perish by our fault, because our priestly character obliges us to that; and if the laws of God were lost, we would have to reestablish them. People have the right to ask this of us because we're their legislators and their teachers. That's why we must know how to discern genuine inspirations. This gives you three reasons. Assuming all this to be true, let's see what illusion is.

"Illusion can actually be understood in various ways. Lawyers are accustomed to use this word in their pleas; that's why it's said that they're illusory and deceptive. Now, it's not in this sense that our Rule understands it; it understands it as a false light, a misleading inspiration that the devil plants in the imagination, whose images go to the understanding, and the influences and reflections pass to the will. That's the way and the sense in which we should understand our Rule on this.

"'But what are you saying, Monsieur? "A false light," you say. *Quoi!* They make things look different from what they are! You're saying that what's as white as a swan is as black as a crow, and what's black as a crow is as white as a swan!' Yes, I'm saying that a false light that the devil produces in the imagination represents to it elements different from the reality of the things they're supposed to show. So, these images enter into the imagination, rise to the understanding, and are finally reflected on the will; the result is that this angel of darkness makes what is black appear white, and what is only a lie to be truth.

"'But what are you saying, Monsieur? That's very strange! Is it found elsewhere?' Yes indeed, nature itself has its illusions. Persons who have been to Montmirail have seen a tree trunk changed into stone. But how does that happen? I don't know by what power the wood bonds with the stone, but there's a transformation of one into the other, so that what used to be wood appears to be stone. The wood is still there, it's wood; but what's happening? Your eyes say that it's wood, and the moss that surrounds it, the distinguishing

features, and the veins that appear tell you that it's wood, but touching it tells you that it's stone. That's an illusion, my dear confreres. What does nature do? A tree is cut, a slip is grafted on to it, and, when it has taken, a wild stock is transformed into a tree, so that what was previously an apple tree is today a pear tree. What's that? It's an illusion. I met a man who had a certain pointed awl, which, as he pressed it down, would retract; that man would stick it down his throat, and everyone, seeing him put it in his mouth, would cry out, 'Pull it out, pull it out.' Even though the point seemed to go down into his throat, it really didn't; and in this way that man fooled everyone. Strictly speaking, what is eloquence? An illusion, which makes good appear bad, and bad good, causing people to take truth for falsehood and falsehood for truth, and, by some intricacy and order of words, flatters and charms the listener at the same time as it tricks him.

"Now, my dear confreres, if there are so many illusions in the world, judge whether the author of lies, the devil, who transforms himself into an angel of light, as Saint Paul says,<sup>3</sup> can't do them. If human beings, whose knowledge is very slight and limited, can easily fool one another, what, I ask you, might not the evil spirit do, who knows everything and is skillful enough to make objects appear in as many different ways as he pleases? Do you want to know what the evil spirit is in our regard? He's nothing but illusion and deception. Crafty as he is, he persuades us that we'll be happy if we achieve this or that; he deludes us into believing that to be applauded for our success in preaching is even for the glory of God and that we should make a name for ourselves in a province. Ah, Savior! How many snares, how many deceptions, how many tricks our enemy uses to bring to ruin the creatures You have redeemed by Your Precious Blood!

" 'But, Monsieur,' you'll say to me, 'the devil is well aware of this; and haven't people been able to identify the elements and tricks of the illusions the evil spirit uses?' Eh, who could do that? Remember, however, that, when we fall into sin, illusions are there

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<sup>3</sup>Cf. 2 Cor 11:14. (NAB)



because, in committing sin, we're abandoning the Sovereign Good to run after an imaginary one.

"*Ah, mon Sauveur!* How many pitfalls there are for us! How many inspirations we need to evade the deceits of the demons! Oh, if the first man, whom God had admitted into His holiness, fell into the trap with the first step he took; if the angels, who were created as so many lights, were overshadowed and fell into the trap, and, after being defeated in battle by Saint Michael for being unwilling to obey God's orders, were thrown into hell, who, my dear confreres, should not be afraid after falls like those? And who will be exempt from them?"

"'But, Monsieur, how does he do it?' He knows the tendencies that contribute to arousing this or that passion; he knows how to stir them up; and so, by the false inspirations he plants in our mind, he causes us to fall. He knows all our moods; he knows our personal and private actions; he sees the ones that can give a bad light; he knows how to put those tendencies together and from them to create an impression, which passes from the imagination to the understanding and from there presents itself to the will, prompting it to give its consent. But how does he do that? Or is that all he does? He tempts us, from another angle, using creatures as so many traps to make us slip up. You know the story of Saint Anthony<sup>4</sup> and how he was tempted by the image of indecent creatures the devil would form in his imagination, pictures of certain very beautiful women, who appeared completely nude. The devil also has the trick of forming certain bodies in the air, so that when the creature sees these objects, he very often lets himself be carried away. Let's add to this bad dreams, which, often enough, are the work of the devil.

"On this point, I'm going to tell you again a story I've often told you; it's about Pope Clement VIII, whom I had the honor of seeing. You know the problems that arose in France regarding Henry IV.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Saint Anthony of Egypt, hermit (251-356).

<sup>5</sup>Although baptized a Catholic at birth, Henry of Navarre was brought up as a Calvinist (Huguenot) by his mother, Jeanne d'Albret, but made profession of the Catholic faith in 1572 on the evening of the Saint Bartholomew Day Massacre to marry Marguerite de Valois and to avoid the rigorous treatment of her brother, King Charles IX, whose prisoner he was. However, he reverted to his original religion as soon as he was free. He inherited the throne of France in 1589, but the religious right prevented his ascension to it. On July 25, 1593, at Saint-Denis, he abjured Calvinism once again, realizing that this was necessary to gain acceptance from the Pope and

This Prince had been a heretic and relapsed into heresy, obliging his subjects to renounce the obedience they would have rendered him if he hadn't declared himself, for the second time, an enemy of the Catholic religion. Feeling bound by conscience to retract his errors, and seeing that the people were refusing to submit to his laws, this King immediately contacted Rome in order to seek reconciliation. The Pope said that he had relapsed into heresy and, consequently, it was unlikely that he had changed, and that it was the desire to reign, rather than the desire to be converted, that was urging him to seek reconciliation. On hearing that, the King sent his ambassadors back; the Pope refused, as previously; however, fearing that the King would send his ambassadors back a third time, he fasted and prayed in order to know whether he should dispense the people whom he had forbidden to submit to the King as long as the latter remained obstinate. Finally, after doing a great deal of penance and mortification, and having prayers offered for this intention, he decided to accept him for penance and to oblige his subjects to render him obedience. Some days later, this holy man was called during the night before the tribunal of God, where he was reproached for having exposed God's people to a repulsive man and ordering Catholics to submit to a murderer. This vision tormented him, and it was said that he experienced the same sufferings Saint Jerome was supposed to have felt when he was flogged. This holy Pope, finding himself in this state and fearing he had given in too easily to the King, sent for some holy persons to get their advice. None of them satisfied him, however, until his confessor, Cardinal Tolet,<sup>6</sup> told him that what was tormenting him was an illusion, and that once he had acted with all the prudence required by the affair in question, and had done everything with advice and many prayers, he should

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from his people. Received in Paris in 1594, he was crowned King of France at Chartres on February 27. After two years of hesitation, Clement VIII (1592-1605) consented to absolve him, and Henry IV never wavered again. (Cf. Abbé Antoine Degert, *Le Cardinal d'Ossat, évêque de Rennes et de Bayeux* (1537-1604) [Paris: Lecoffre, 1894]).

<sup>6</sup>Francisco Cardinal de Toledo, S.J., his confessor. Born in Córdoba on October 4, 1532, Toledo died in Rome on September 14, 1596. He was a brilliant philosophy professor at the Roman College and carried out successfully various diplomatic missions. He wrote several treatises on philosophy and theology and was especially renowned for a work on casuistry, often republished: *Instructio sacerdotum ac de septem peccatis* (Rome, 1601). It was reissued in 1604, 1608, 1633, and several times later, under the title *Summa casuum conscientiae absolutissima*.

remain at peace and believe that everything that happened was according to God's Will. That relieved him of his anxiety.

"So then, what had happened? The Pope was under an illusion; the devil tried to upset him, not only during the day, by making creatures appear in a succession of images, but even during sleep. Illusion, then, doesn't occur only in the first or second way, but also in the third, that is, during sleep. That's why we're going to examine these illusions, even the ones that occur when we're asleep.

"There's another illusion, of extraordinary things, a false light. Someone will come to you saying he has an urge and hears something like an interior voice crying out to him incessantly that he should leave his wife. What would you call that, brothers? It's sheer folly. When we hear such bizarre ideas, that's when we need insights from heaven, so we can give helpful advice to people like that when they come to us. We also need these insights to advise those who have lofty ideas about living a life out of the ordinary and would like to change their state or rank. So then, we have to be informed, theoretically and practically, about the nature and diversity of illusions so as never to fail in this and to avoid the traps and pitfalls of the devil, with the help of God.

"But what signs will we have for recognizing these false insights? To save time, I'll mention only three or four. The first is to discern whether it's a genuine inspiration or whether it's an illusion, by considering the substance of the thing and all the circumstances surrounding it. For example, a man wants to leave his wife; if it's with her consent and for some good purpose, that's fine! The Church allows this in certain cases. Someone wants to enter a Community; we have to see whether it's against the Commandments of God and the Church or contrary to the laws of the State.

"Another sign for discerning an illusion is if there's something superstitious in it. You'll know that there's superstition involved in this or that thing if it has to be done so many times, at such and such a time, saying certain words, mixing certain herbs together, and doing it in the presence of certain persons of a particular rank and age. If so, we can conclude: all that's an illusion.

"The third sign is when these illusions nag and upset us and make us uneasy. The reason for this is that the Spirit of God never

upsets us: *Non in commotione Dominus*.<sup>7</sup> So, when someone comes complaining to us, telling us his pains, sufferings, and inspirations, and we see that he reacts to them with anxiety, bitterness, and impatience, we can conclude that it's an illusion, for God's Spirit is a spirit of peace, a gentle inspiration that slips in without any commotion. *Non in commotione Dominus*. Everything He does is always followed by calmness and gentleness; and, because He's the God of peace and union, He can't tolerate any disturbance or division. If, by the ministry of angels, He sometimes communicates a favor to us, it will be easy to recognize that this insight comes from Him if it slips sweetly into our soul, prompting us to seek the greater glory of God. That, my dear confreres, is a common standard, but one that makes it easy to discern genuine inspirations from false ones.

“Fourth and lastly, if we sense this within ourselves, or if our Superior or our confessor notices it, it would be an illusion, a false light, to be unwilling to submit this insight to them, or to accept what they tell us regarding it, for the Spirit of God leads into submission those He inspires; the spirit of the Gospel is a spirit of obedience; to refuse to obey is to resist the Will of God. *Or sus*, take, for example, a matter of importance that arises and that concerns us; what should be done? We have to seek advice. If the person receives the advice given him gently, calmly, and serenely, and accepts it, that's a sign that there's no illusion in what he's doing and adopting.

“These four signs are very common; but, after thinking about whether there are any others—in the past I've heard other people talk about this—I felt that these sufficed, or that any other ones were similar to them.

“*Eh quoi*, Monsieur! You're saying that the devil sets traps to do harm, that he tries to prevent us from following our Rules, that he's always lying in wait; what do you think of that? Those, my dear confreres, are false insights. Why is it that we don't show up to pray the Office? What's the source of that individualism of some members of the Company, causing them to place so little value on

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<sup>7</sup>The Lord was not in the earthquake. Cf. 1 Kgs 19:11. (NAB)

the practices and advice they're given? Whose work is this? Who's the author of it? Isn't it the evil spirit, who puts into our minds the false insights and imaginary reasons with which we flatter ourselves in order to dispense ourselves from our obligations? *Ah! mon Sauveur! Ah! mon Sauveur! Ah! mon Sauveur!* How many snares the demon lays out for us, and who will give us the grace of avoiding them?

“But what can we do to protect ourselves from illusions and to help those who are assailed by them? The first means, you see, is that a supernatural enlightenment from God is necessary in order to discern true insights from false ones. We must ask this of God. ‘But I'm a Brother, I don't understand what an illusion is. You've made me a priest; I don't realize the dignity of this; I don't recognize the insights concerning this; I don't know how to help my neighbor, who's being tried by illusions, if You, my God, don't give me genuine insights to discern the false ones. That's the grace we ask of You, Lord.’

“Second, we mustn't be too curious in trying to discern those false lights because curiosity makes us mull over our actions and examine them in various ways. When the devil sees this desperate effort to understand, he takes the occasion to disturb a poor soul and to twist it until it falls into the trap. God usually punishes with illusions those who want to know about miracles and to probe into things that should be kept hidden from them. Ah, Messieurs! Ah, Brothers! Let's flee all curiosity and think only about humbling ourselves, have no esteem for ourselves, believe ourselves unworthy of seeing the light of day, convince ourselves that we merit being abandoned by everyone, and see in ourselves only reasons for the exercise of God's justice. A person like that is not subject to illusions. We must, then, humble ourselves before God, see only poverty and wretchedness in ourselves, reject all thoughts opposed to that, and rid ourselves of all individualism and every desire to be successful in all our actions. Then we'll have discernment of deceptive insights. But, what is it if we seek the contrary? It's subtle pride, my dear confreres. If we examine ourselves closely and think of ourselves as children of Adam, children of anger and malediction,

how fortunate we are! Humility, then, and not only with regard to ourselves, but let's propose it to the persons with whom we have the honor of coming in contact. Humility, wanting to know *ad sobrietatem*,<sup>8</sup> wanting to do what God wants us to do and, after all the sins we've committed, being astounded that His Goodness puts up with us. Alas, brothers, if we don't know ourselves, it's because we don't examine ourselves!

"Are you really aware that we're worse than the demons? Yes, worse than the demons! For, if God had given them one-tenth of the graces He's given us, *mon Dieu*, what use would they not have made of them? Ah! What wretched men you are! You've been redeemed by the Precious Blood of an incarnate God, you have actual graces to live the life of Jesus Christ, and yet you've scorned them! What punishment do you not deserve?

"*Sus donc!* Let's look very carefully into ourselves; and when we've done all we should, let's conclude that we're useless servants, yes, useless servants; let's remember that, after our actions have been carefully examined with regard to their essence, their qualities, and their circumstances, we'll see that we've done nothing worthwhile in our entire life. If we want to see this truth more deeply, let's look at how we made our meditation this morning, how we prayed the Little Hours, how we spent the morning, and so on for the rest of the day. Let's go back to other days, please, and examine all our actions before God and how we carried them out.

"I don't know how it is with others, but for myself I know that I deserve to be punished; I know you're good, that you love God, that you're sincere, and that you walk rightly before His Divine Majesty; but in myself, alas, I see nothing but what merits punishment. All my actions are nothing but sins, and that's what makes me fear God's judgments. I could say much more about this, but, frankly, I'd get too involved. Be that as it may, let's say that, after we've carried out our Rules exactly, we're useless servants; let's have no doubt about that, for it's the Son of God himself who said it.

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<sup>8</sup>Reasonably.

“*Or sus*, what are we going to do about all this, except to give ourselves to God that He may be pleased to put in our hands the weapons to combat the evil spirit. If we’ve fallen, if we have any illusion, let’s run to God and remain at peace. But let’s never reveal these things to anyone except to those who have the grace for that, namely, the Superior or the spiritual father of the house. Our Rules say that, if we knew the evil we do by telling a third or a fourth party, we’d certainly never reveal anything to anyone other than to those God has appointed for that. Would you believe, Messieurs, that those evils affect the entire Company! Just as our good actions are a credit to the whole body of the Community because of the union that exists between the members and their head, it’s the same for all the harm those bad communications do to the entire Company. Oh! Isn’t it a great pity to see in a Community persons who complain and find fault with everything! ‘Ah! What’s this? What’s that? What good is that? Eh! Has anyone ever done that?’ What good can come from it? A man shares these bad feelings with others: that one tells someone else; that makes two of them; then it goes from that second man to a third; and in this way the entire Community becomes infected with this poison. Someone says, ‘There’s a Brother who does such and such; there’s a priest, there’s an Officer,’ etc. Where will that end, my dear confreres, except with the ruination of a Company? Ah! If it pleases God to rectify this disorder, and if today we take the resolution to give ourselves to His Divine Goodness and never to reveal our troubles to anyone but those whom He places over us, O Brothers, O Messieurs, how happy we’ll be! Not that there aren’t any virtuous senior confreres here, but, for the man who submits himself to his Superior there’s no likelihood of error, since he’s doing God’s Will. ‘It’s not you,’ He says, ‘who decided to do that, it’s I who have commanded it of you through your Superior.’ And I assure you that, if you have recourse to him, you’ll never go wrong. Let’s act like that, asking God to instruct the Company about the things we just mentioned and to give us the weapons appropriate for fighting illusions. That’s the grace we’ll ask of Him.”

215. - INFORMING SUPERIORS  
OF THE SERIOUS FAULTS  
AND TEMPTATIONS OF THE NEIGHBOR  
(Common Rules, Chap. II, Art. 16 and 17)

[October 24, 1659]

“My dear confreres, this evening’s talk will be on part of the Rule that was explained last Friday, October [17],<sup>1</sup> but which was done too superficially or was omitted, and on the article that follows. So, here’s the article: *The evil spirit often disguises himself as an angel of light, and now and then tricks us by his illusions. All of us must be ever alert for these tricks and should pay particular attention to learning how to recognize and overcome them.* That was explained when speaking to you about illusions. The article continues: *Experience has shown that the most effective and surest remedy in such cases is to discuss them as soon as possible with those appointed by God for this. So, if anyone feels himself troubled by ideas which seem to be in some way misleading, or upset by acute anxiety or temptation, he should tell his Superior, or a Director appointed for this, as soon as possible, so that the matter can be competently dealt with. And he should accept with approval, as coming from God’s hand, whatever solution is suggested, and put it into practice with confidence and respect. Above all, he should take care not to discuss it in any way with anyone else, whether a member of the Congregation or not. Experience has shown that this worsens the problem, causes similar trouble for others, and can, in the long run, even do serious damage in the whole Congregation.*

“*O mon Sauveur*, how true that is! Here’s the following article, which we should take with the one before it because of the connection between them. It’s Art. 17: *God has told everyone to*

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**Conference 215.** - Manuscript of Conferences. This conference is undated, but the content establishes the date positively for us, despite a slight difficulty explained in note 1.

<sup>1</sup>The manuscript has *October 24*. This is an error, for the conference on illusions was given on Friday, October 17. The date of the conference given here, about informing Superiors, should be October 24, the following Friday. On the Friday after that, October 31, the conference was on holiness, as indicated in the list of conferences given by M. Vincent at Saint-Lazare (cf. Appendix 2).



*help others as members of the same mystical body. We, then, in the Congregation should help one another. So, if anyone is aware of someone else being greatly troubled by temptation, or of having been guilty of a serious fault, it will be his responsibility, promptly and in the best way possible, to see that effective remedies be suitably applied at the right time by the Superior. He must, of course, act from love and in the most practical way. Each one should accept it gratefully, as a means of spiritual progress, if his defects are pointed out to the Superior in a spirit of love by someone who has noticed them outside of confession.*

“As you see, this article is closely connected with the preceding one, which we recently explained in part; for I neglected to speak to you at that time about the openness of heart we should have in order to disclose properly to the Superior our illusions, faults, and interior sufferings; in a word, to make our Communication to him. That’s what we have to say now, along with the other matter, which is to inform the Superior when we see someone undergo some temptation, or fall into some serious fault, and to accept that others inform the Superior of our own faults.

“So, the first of these Rules speaks about the Communication; the other recommends informing the Superior of the faults we’ve noted in our confrere. One of these articles mentions communicating our difficulties and telling our faults to the Superior; the other says that, in case (it’s true that the expression *in case* isn’t there, but it’s just as if it were), in case someone might not make known his faults to the Superior, one of his confreres, animated with zeal and charity for the good of the Company and of the individual, should inform the Superior of it, so that he might remedy it, as a good father and not as a judge. Oh, may God preserve us from that!

“So then, both articles are aimed at informing the Superior of the state of the members of the Company and give the same reasons obliging us to give ourselves to God to carry out what is recommended to us by the first of these articles, namely, to mention our difficulties, temptations, and faults to the Superior. They also oblige us to give ourselves to God to do what is recommended by the second article, that is, to inform the Superior of the difficulties,

temptations, and serious faults of our neighbor. Here are the reasons—not all of them (for how can we mention all of them?)—but a few of them .

“The first reason or motive obliging us to make ourselves clearly known and to disclose our faults is that this is the intention of the Church, which practiced it for four or five hundred years. The Christians, who were striving for holiness, feeling that it wasn’t enough to tell their faults privately to the Bishop, declared them publicly before everyone, and this continued until about the year 500. At that time, it happened that a woman who had committed a fault accused herself publicly of it, and a deacon took the opportunity to try to do something harmful, so this practice was discontinued. But, whatever the case, we see and read that this was the practice of the saints; for who doesn’t know what the Magdalen did, when she came to cast herself at the feet of Our Lord like a wretched sinner? What did Saint Paul not say of himself! And what did Saint Augustine not write in his *Confessions*! And so many others! In line with that, many religious Communities have retained that praiseworthy practice of accusing oneself publicly and asking to be reminded of one’s faults. By the mercy of God, that’s what’s done here in this house at Chapter, if not by everyone, at least by most of us; perhaps one or two men don’t do it, at least not so often. Several also really open their heart during the Communication, as I’ve been told, and so much progress has been made in this that all of you know that many men, before making their Communication, ask the Company to pray for them, that God may be pleased to grant them the grace of seeing their faults clearly, of making them known, and of really putting into practice the advice or admonition given them to correct themselves. What a great reason to praise and thank God for this grace He has given to the Company! From it stems the other grace of being admonished by someone in a spirit of charity. May Our Lord be pleased to continue it and to increase it more and more!

“The second reason or motive is that the practice and custom of religious Communities and Anchorites was that, as soon as someone became aware of a temptation, no matter what it was, he went and told the Superior. Saint Dorotheus did this often, and even

though, while he was on his way, he had thoughts about not doing it, he overcame those thoughts and went and told the Superior everything. The companions of Saint Francis also did this, and many other persons as well. It's even a custom of the Company, by the grace of God, if not for everyone, at least for the majority. God grant that those who practice it may continue, and that those who don't yet do so may be given this grace!

“Another reason obliging us to do this is that anyone who doesn't do it and doesn't make known his faults, or is unwilling to accept that someone tell the Superior about them, receives no help; if the poor Superior isn't aware of them, how can he remedy them? If he doesn't, the guilty party remains always in his sad state and goes from bad to worse; he's like a sick person who might be unwilling to make known his ailment; as a result, he grows worse, and, in the end, he dies. So, if the person in question doesn't make known his faults, or if someone doesn't mention them to the Superior, who is the spiritual physician for this, he remains in that state; for, these faults lead to others, and, consequently, he commits many of them; and God grant that he doesn't end up dying in this wretched, pitiful state!

“Yet another reason is that this is the only way the Superior can govern a Company well and remedy the faults and failings an individual commits. The man who doesn't make known his faults or is unwilling to have them made known, will grow hardened and, as it were, paralyzed, by trying to guide himself in his own way. Oh, what a bad thing that is! O my Savior, You know this! So, each man ought to give himself to God to continue this holy practice of making himself known, if he's already doing it, or to start right now, if he hasn't yet done so; for, if the Superior isn't informed, what will the Company become? Whom will he send to give missions? If the faults committed in it aren't made known, whom will he send to Italy, to Poland, to Barbary, or even to the Indies? If he's not informed of the faults committed in it, how will he be able to rectify them? Otherwise, *mon Sauveur*, what disorder will exist! But if, in a spirit of humility and charity, we're faithful in informing him of them, he'll strive to correct them, to the consolation of everyone,

the good of the individual, and the edification of all those with whom he lives.

“A further reason is that the illusions, temptations, and sad state of a soul can’t be kept to oneself too long. If, when a person is tempted against faith, purity, etc., he doesn’t speak to someone about it or make it known, he creates within himself a mass, a corruption, like someone who has an abscess and pus in his body. This grows and goes to his brain. That’s why physicians or surgeons who visit a patient see if there’s any pus in the wound. If there is, they plunge a lancet into it up to the handle to draw the pus out—if we can speak in this way, for a lancet has no handle.

“Speaking of this, I must tell you what a surgeon told me. He was a fine man, learned, skillful, and upright. I’m talking about M. Juif.<sup>2</sup> He and some physicians were called to the bedside of a sick doctor, and he was asked to give his opinion. They were wondering if the patient had an abscess somewhere in his body. Some of them said yes; the others, no. M. Juif assured them that there was an abscess in the mesentery, and that it had to be lanced. So, they had a large, long lancet brought in; he himself lanced the abscess, for he was very skilled, and the pus flowed out of it; they asked for some bowls; the patient felt better immediately and shortly after was completely cured.

“Now, let’s go back to where we were and say that illusions are certain corruptions of the spirit, a kind of pus, such as a weakness for women or an inclination to some other failing; if it’s not made known, sooner or later the person will die. In this regard, I recall that one day someone came to see me (it was in this very courtyard) and said to me, ‘O Monsieur! I’m so happy to see you because I have something to tell you! I think that if I hadn’t run into you, I would have died of grief because my desire to see you and to tell you something was so great.’ Now, let’s make the application of this and say that anyone who doesn’t tell the Superior his faults, emotional distress, or temptations suffers a great deal; and if he doesn’t tell the Superior, he has to tell someone else; but who would

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<sup>2</sup>François Juif, a noted surgeon, died in Paris on July 23, 1643, at the age of sixty-six.

that be? Some malcontent, for he can always find one, or, if it's to someone else, he'll share his troubles with him and contaminate him. It takes only one scabby sheep to infect another, who, in his turn, infects a third, and in this way the entire flock is tainted.

“‘Oh, but what will the Superior say if I talk to him about some trouble, temptation, or fault?’ Saint Dorotheus sometimes had that thought, saying to himself, ‘Where are you going? To find a Superior. What will you say to him? This and that. But what will he say? No matter, we still have to go.’

“‘Oh, but the Superior won't have any better thoughts to tell me than such and such, which I know as well as he does and which I'll accept.’ I reply that your thoughts are human thoughts, but the thoughts and advice of the Superior are thoughts and advice from God. Hasn't God said, *Qui vos audit me audit?*<sup>3</sup> ‘But he doesn't know any more about that than I do!’ Didn't God make the animals talk?

“‘But he's a sinner like me and maybe even a worse one!’ A hundred times worse, if you wish; but he holds the place of Our Lord God, who said formerly of the priests of the Old Law, ‘Do what they tell you, even though you must not do what they do.’<sup>4</sup> No, no, the Superior isn't sinless. O wretched man that I am; I commit only too many faults! So, we have to be faithful in telling our faults clearly and in making the Communication well, for, otherwise, the evil will remain and even grow worse, as each one of you knows so well.

“I, personally, have remarked that those who don't live an orderly life never admonish anyone and are very little concerned about their own growth in holiness and that of their confreres. But I also noted that those who live an orderly life work seriously at growing in holiness and reflect on the necessity and need of letting the Superior know of the failings of their confreres so that they may be admonished; they're also exact about informing the Superior of them; and that's the way to see that the Company gets on well. So then, if, until the present, anyone hasn't done this, let him do it now.

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<sup>3</sup>*Whoever listens to you listens to me.* Cf. Lk 10:16. (NAB)

<sup>4</sup>Mt 23:3. (NAB)

O Savior of my soul, how much more perfect the Company would become, if we mentioned our faults, troubles, and temptations to the Superior and not to other persons!

“One of the keenest sufferings I’ve had lately has been to learn that someone in the Company has gone to open his heart to a third and a fourth party. *O Dieu!* What a wrong! May God forgive him!

“Certain objections may be made to me concerning that: ‘*Quoi!* You’re saying, Monsieur, that we should inform the Superior of any serious faults committed by an individual; isn’t that contrary to the Gospel teaching Our Lord gave us that fraternal correction should be made *inter te et ipsum solum?*’<sup>5</sup> My answer is no. That was the objection made by a Paris Theologian, who had become a Franciscan in Rome, against the Jesuits, who had put this article in their Rules. He criticized it and held that it wasn’t right and was contrary to what Our Lord had taught us: *Si peccaverit frater tuus, corripe inter te et ipsum solum.*<sup>6</sup> After the Jesuits had summoned their chief Theologians and most competent men, they maintained that it was. They did so in the presence of Gregory XIII,<sup>7</sup> who also decided in their favor.

“ ‘But it’s very hard to go to a Superior and tell him someone else’s faults; I’ll offend that person; the Superior will treat him badly and look askance at him.’ My reply is that this information is given to the Superior, not as to a judge, but as to a good father, who will know the most suitable time, place, and occasion to do this with charity and cordiality.

“ ‘But the Superior or Director will tell this to others.’ *O Dieu!* O Savior of my soul! O, God forbid! Isn’t he obliged to secrecy? What punishment would he not deserve? A curse, if he does!

“Let’s speak now of how to act in all this. Careful consideration must be given to the man who gives the admonition, the person he admonishes, and about what and how the admonition should be given.

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<sup>5</sup>*Between you and him alone.* Cf. Mt 18:15. (NAB)

<sup>6</sup>*If your brother sins, tell him his fault between you and him alone.* Cf. Mt 18:15. (NAB)

<sup>7</sup>Supreme Pontiff (1572-85).

“The first mentioned should place himself before God and ask Him to give him the grace to know clearly:

“(1) If there is a fault and what it is, before deciding to inform the Superior. We have to be very sure not to do it through natural inclination or aversion. *O Dieu!* What a wrong that would be!

“(2) If the matter is really true and if there are any witnesses; for, if there’s any doubt, no admonition should be given.

“(3) If it’s of any consequence; for, if it’s only a trifle, the Superior shouldn’t be informed; it has to be something of importance, and the Company or the guilty party should be able to benefit from the word of advice.

“(4) If the guilty man has fallen once, twice, three times, or more often.

“(5) If he feels any aversion for the one he’s thinking of having admonished; for, despite that, if it’s an important matter, he has to give the warning, but he should add, ‘Please get information from someone else about this because I feel some aversion for that person.’

“If we act in this way, can it be hurtful? I make you yourselves the judges of that.

“As for the person who is admonished, he should receive the advice in a spirit of humility and charity.

“‘Oh, but what if there’s some detail that’s not true?’ It suffices that the substance of the matter be true. The one who’s admonished should rejoice to see himself accused, if he’s innocent; if he’s completely innocent, *O Dieu*, what a consolation! I’ve had experience of that.

“With regard to the Superior, he should act, not as a judge but as a good father, with gentleness and cordiality, *in spiritu lenitatis*.<sup>8</sup>

“‘But the guilty man did this or that, and even such and such.’ Oh! The Superior should think, ‘I’ve done many other things.’ ‘But it’s a serious fault.’ ‘If I had been tempted as strongly, I would certainly have given in to it and done worse than he did.’

“O my Savior, You who will accuse me of all my harshness, and who know there’s almost no temptation to which I haven’t yielded,

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<sup>8</sup>*In a spirit of gentleness.*

forgive me, grant me and the other Superiors the grace of listening carefully to admonitions and to give them in Your spirit. What good reason I have to humble myself for having failed so much in this, and to ask pardon of You and of the whole Company for it! I'd like to be able to get down on my knees to do this, but my infirmity prevents me. So, bear with me, my dear confreres, since I am an abomination, and pray to God for me."

**216. - THE VOWS**  
(Common Rules, Chap. II, Art. 18)

[November 7, 1659]

"My dear confreres, the eighteenth article of the second chapter of our Rules, on the last of the Gospel teachings, reads as follows:

*Our Lord came into the world to reestablish the reign of His Father in all persons. He won them back from the devil who had led them astray by the cunning deceit of a greedy desire for wealth, honor, and pleasure. Our loving Savior thought it right to fight His enemy with the opposite weapons: poverty, chastity, and obedience, which He continued to do right up to His death. The little Congregation of the Mission came into existence in the Church to work for the salvation of people, especially the rural poor. This is why it has judged that no weapons would be more powerful or more suitable than those which Eternal Wisdom so tellingly and effectively used. Every confrere, therefore, should keep to such poverty, chastity, and obedience faithfully and persistently, as understood in our Congregation. And in order that each one might persevere until death in*

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**Conference 216.** - Manuscript of Conferences. This conference and those following it are undated in the manuscript. Since they continue the explanation of the Common Rules at the paragraph where the conference on October 24, 1659, ended, and since, moreover, the third conference on poverty is, as its contents clearly indicate, from the end of November or December 1659, it is easy for us to assign them a specific date. The list of conferences given at Saint-Lazare informs us that, on October 31, the conference dealt with holiness and, on December 26, on the faults committed during the past year. Seven Fridays occur between these two dates, and to position there the conferences on the vows is natural, since there are seven of them, and Saint Vincent was unable to give them in 1660.



*observing these virtues more certainly, easily, and meritoriously, he should try to the best of his ability to carry out what is prescribed about them in the following chapters.*

“That, Messieurs, is the subject of this evening’s conference. I think everyone readily understands what the Rule is stating: that when Our Lord, who was sent here below by His Father to carry out a mission and to convert souls, saw that honor, pleasure, and possessions had done such great damage in the world and that the evil spirit had made use of the drive for possessions, avarice, and the immoderate desire for wealth in order to ruin souls and attract them to himself, He willed to make use of contrary weapons to snatch them from his hands and to draw them to God His Father, namely through poverty, chastity, and obedience. So, the [Congregation of the] Mission, seeing that the world is being lost through the drive for pleasures, wealth, and honors, and drawn toward the mission of Our Lord, to which He has done us the honor of calling us to continue what He did, has realized that we can do nothing better than to adopt the means Our Blessed Savior used; and that’s what the Company has done.

“It would take too long to tell you today why the Company has to struggle against these three enemies; furthermore, this topic is often the subject of our meditations. Our duty right now is to tell you the reasons the Company has for thanking God for the grace He has granted it of having called it to this state of continuing the mission His Son had begun, and of using the same weapons, namely, poverty, chastity, and obedience, to destroy in ourselves, first of all, these three enemies: the love of possessions, pleasures, and honors. We’ll then be in a better state to be able to contend against them in others during the missions, by means of the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and to devote ourselves for the rest of our life to the salvation of the poor country people.

“No mention is made in our Rules of these three vows because no Company has ever taken them into account in its Common Rules in the way ours does. It remains, then, to see the reasons we have to praise and thank God for the grace He has given us of being in this state; it will be like a preamble for speaking about what follows:

poverty, chastity, and obedience. So then, the first point will be the reasons we have to thank God for being in the state to which He sent His Son Our Lord Jesus Christ; and the second, what this state is.

“The first reason we have for thanking God for the state in which He has placed us, by His mercy, is that it’s the state in which He placed His own Son, who himself has said, *Pauperibus evangelizare misit me*.<sup>1</sup> What cause for great consolation to be in that state! See what good reason we have to thank God for it! To evangelize poor persons as Our Lord did, and in the way Our Lord did it, using the same weapons, contending with the passions and desires of having possessions, pleasures, and honors! It’s true that Our Lord didn’t have these faults or passions, but He practiced admirably and to a high degree the virtues contrary to these faults, desires, and passions, namely, poverty, chastity, and obedience. *O Dieu!* To what heights did He raise the practice of this virtue. To be born poor, to have lived poor, and to have died poor! As for purity and chastity, they were admirable in Him. As for obedience, He died for that: *Factus obediens usque ad mortem*.<sup>2</sup> *O Dieu!* Don’t we have good grounds for thanking God for our being in this state! Perhaps I’ve never done this myself, wretched man that I am! Perhaps none of us has. So you see that we have good grounds for doing so, at least from now on.

“I’m not going to ask myself here if Our Lord made those vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Saint Thomas says that He didn’t; for, to make vows is to make a promise to someone greater than ourselves. Now, Our Lord is equal to God His Father, so He couldn’t make vows to Him. However, I heard an important person, who was virtuous and learned (it was the late Father General of the Oratory),<sup>3</sup> say that Our Lord had made vows, not as God, but as man. He based this on the words of the Psalmist, *Vota quae distinxerunt labia mea adimplebo*,<sup>4</sup> for the psalm in which these

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<sup>1</sup>*He sent me to preach the Good News to the poor.* Cf. Lk 4:18. (NAB)

<sup>2</sup>*Becoming obedient to death.* Cf. Phil 2:8. (NAB)

<sup>3</sup>Charles de Condren (cf. XI, 119, n. 5)

<sup>4</sup>*I will fulfill the vows my lips pronounced.* Cf. Ps 66:13-14. (NAB)

words are found speaks entirely of Our Lord, and therefore of the fulfillment of those vows He had made of offering and presenting himself to God His Father to do His Holy Will in all things, to redeem human beings, to become incarnate, to work at their salvation, and, finally, to die for them. He accomplished and fulfilled all these promises; so what objection is there to say and to feel certain that Our Lord made vows and fulfilled them perfectly?

“As for the Apostles, no one says that they didn’t make them either, but they certainly lived them. *Ecce nos reliquimus omnia.*<sup>5</sup> We can say that for poverty. What greater poverty is there than to have left everything and to have kept nothing for themselves! As for purity and chastity, didn’t Saint Peter leave his wife? And for obedience, didn’t all of them live in submission? *O mon Sauveur*, what a consolation for us to be, like them, in that state!

“We make a distinction of states. It’s said that Bishops and religious are in a state of perfection. The former are in a state of acquired holiness, or which should have been acquired, for Our Lord, who chose them in order to help others to become holy, wants them to be holy and to acquire holiness. Saint Cyprian says of them, *Qui episcopatum desiderat martyrium desiderat*,<sup>6</sup> which shows that they must be holy and be in a state of acquired holiness. Religious are not in a state of acquired holiness, but in one to be acquired. How is that? It’s because religious are in a state in which everything, such as their Holy Rules, Constitutions, vows, the Sacraments, readings, etc., inclines them to holiness. Now, don’t we have all that? The laity and people living in the world don’t have it; on the contrary, they have to be involved in many affairs, such as caring for their family, etc., but we’re in a state of holiness, not yet acquired, but to be acquired, if we make use of the means we have for that. *O Dieu!* Let’s be very careful not to neglect any of these means; we’d do ourselves great harm and would fall from this state. This state of perfection is entered by poverty, chastity, and obedience, for Our Lord said, *Si vis perfectus esse, vade, vende omnia*

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<sup>5</sup>*Behold, we have given up everything.* Cf. Mt 19:27. (NAB)

<sup>6</sup>*Who desires the episcopate, desires martyrdom.*

*quae habes et da pauperibus.*<sup>7</sup> We renounce possessions, pleasures, and honors.

“God has granted us the grace of being in this state. Oh, what good reason we have to thank His Divine Majesty for this! Let’s reflect on ourselves, however, and see if we renounce pleasures, our little satisfactions, and the honor of being successful in our preaching, wanting people to speak well of us, to hold us in consideration, to esteem us as fine preachers, to say that we’re intelligent and have beautiful thoughts. Let’s examine our conscience; we have a witness there which, without saying a word, will make us well aware of who we are in this respect and in other similar ones. If, then, we haven’t really renounced all those things as we should, let’s do it now, let’s renew that firm resolution of giving ourselves to God; let’s renounce possessions, pleasures, and honors for love of Him.

“Besides the consolation we have of being in the state in which Our Lord and the Apostles were, of having renounced everything in order to carry out the mission and to work for the conversion of souls, we distance ourselves from things that usually incline people to what is harmful, such as wealth, the desire to accumulate possessions, etc. What are these possessions? In Madagascar, they’re stones; in Canada, they’re pigs, animals. Now, it’s these vows that distance us from all those things, and from those possessions which cause the loss of so many souls.

“One of the advantages of this state is the peace of mind we enjoy in having, by the vows, renounced everything. The dominant passion in the world is the desire to have possessions, to accumulate things, to enjoy our pleasures, and to be held in esteem so that we can say, ‘I’m the one who has this and that, who enjoys such and such a pleasure, who holds such and such an office.’ And we think we’ll find our peace of mind in that. We’re mistaken; there isn’t any there, but true peace of mind is in total renunciation. What wears lay people out—and, even more, sometimes priests—is the desire to accumulate possessions; they have no peace; but those who have renounced this by the vows enjoy great peace of mind. Those of you

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<sup>7</sup>*If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have, and give to the poor. Cf. Mt 19:21. (NAB)*

who have renounced this as you should, experience this; you see it in others who live their vows perfectly, just as, on the contrary, you see the difficulty of those who don't live them perfectly.

“In addition, these vows are a new Baptism; they bring about in us what Baptism did; for, by Baptism, we were withdrawn from the slavery of Satan, we're made children of God, we have the right to paradise and a share in it. That's what the vows do. Thus, a person who wants to be perfect is not satisfied with having been baptized and, at his Baptism, to have renounced the devil, his works, and his pomps; but, in addition, he sells his possessions, and renounces pleasures and honors. Now, we are in that state, by the mercy of God. Oh, what good reason, then, for thanking Him for this! ‘But,’ says a holy Father, ‘it doesn't suffice to be in a state of perfection and not to tend toward it or work at it.’ Some say that to have made vows and lived them is a continual martyrdom. Saint Bernard says that ‘this state of vows isn't as awful as seeing a pistol ready to be fired, a naked sword ready to strike, lighted fires ready to burn, enraged executioners in a frenzy to mistreat us. They last longer; they're continual. The executioners' torments last a short time in comparison to the entire life of a man who has taken these vows, for which he constantly mortifies himself and destroys self and his own will.’

“Speaking of destruction, however, what does a person do who has pronounced vows? He offers God a holocaust of himself. There was this difference with the ancient sacrifices, namely, that a holocaust was a sacrifice made to God, but where the entire victim was consumed by fire and of which nothing was reserved either for the one for whom the sacrifice was being offered or for the one who offered it. Now, the person who takes vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience gives everything to God, renouncing possessions, pleasures, and honors; this is a perfect holocaust, Messieurs, because the person's understanding is sacrificed to God, as is his judgment and will.

“What can we add to what we've said about our reasons for thanking God for the grace He has given us of having placed us in this state of being consecrated to Him in this way, in order to continue the mission of His Son and of the Apostles? We can add that we'll be seated one day with Him and His Apostles to judge the whole world:

*Sedebitis super sedes duodecim, judicantes duodecim tribus Israel.*<sup>8</sup>  
We should live in this hope that, going to heaven after our death, we won't be as guilty men at the judgment, but as judges of everyone; we'll even judge the angels, as Saint Paul says, *Nescitis quoniam angelos judicabimus*,<sup>9</sup> if we live properly in this state.

“But let's move on and see what this state is to which God has called us. Is it a religious Order? No, it's that of secular priests, who enter the state Our Lord chose for himself, of renouncing possessions, honors, and pleasures. 'You're saying, Monsieur, that it's not a religious Order; yet we live in it as in a religious Order and do the same things—or similar ones—that religious do, and even take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, as is done in religious Orders.' I'm telling you that it's not a religious Order and that we're not religious, for, strictly speaking, only solemn vows constitute a religious Order, and we don't make solemn vows. There are three essential elements necessary to constitute these solemn vows: (1) The Superior must accept them. Now, that's not done here in this house; even though the Superior or someone else in his place is present and hears the words pronounced by the man who takes the vows, he doesn't say a word and makes no response. In short, he doesn't accept them, as is done in a religious Order. (2) Solemn vows were forbidden by Innocent III<sup>10</sup> about 400 years ago, except in an approved religious Order, like that of the four mendicant Orders of Saint Dominic, Saint Francis, and the Carthusians, or others that follow their Rules. Now, our Rules are not taken from those of Saint Francis or from any other Order in the Church, but they're special Rules judged proper for the good government of the Congregation. (3) Nor would it suffice to observe some Rule like that of Saint Dominic, even if this observance had been vowed before a Superior, for this requires the permission of the Pope. So, we do not make solemn vows, and, consequently, we're not religious.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>*You will sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.* Cf. Mt 19:28. (NAB)

<sup>9</sup>*Do you not know that we will judge angels?* Cf. 1 Cor 6:3. (NAB)

<sup>10</sup>Supreme Pontiff (1198-1216).

<sup>11</sup>Saint Vincent states elsewhere that it is not necessary to take solemn vows to be a religious. Does that expression go beyond what is said here, or could the copyist have reproduced his words poorly? Be that as it may, it is better to keep to the documents signed by the saint in which the

“ ‘So then, what do you mean by a simple vow?’ It’s any vow that isn’t included in ordination or an approved religious Order. As for us, even though we’re not religious, we still belong to religious life, not of Saint Francis or of Saint Dominic, but of Saint Peter, and, for greater stability, we’ve added the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Do you think, Messieurs (I’m speaking mainly of priests), that there’s a great difference between us and religious? Like them, we’re bound to live chastity and obedience, and we vowed that at ordination; so that leaves poverty, which vow was added because of the passion and desire for possessions, much greater in the clergy than in lay persons, even though the former have fewer responsibilities than the latter, and no families to look after, or children to provide for. It’s even noted that they’re harder on the poor and have less compassion in seeing to what they need. Experience shows that the heirs of priests and the clergy who have amassed many possessions don’t benefit very long from them; they’re the goods of malediction which usually bring a curse on those who inherit them. A good, virtuous Dean, who had eighty parishes to visit, used to say to me, ‘You see, M. Vincent, one of the things I’ve noticed in my visitations is that the heirs of Pastors who have accumulated a great deal of wealth are not comfortable for very long, and they even visibly lose their vitality.’”

“Fifteen conferences were held here to find the cause of the wretched state of the Church and the clergy, so attached to possessions and the desire to accumulate wealth; we noted that this started with the division of church property, which gave each man his share and portion; for, in the beginning, everything was in common, and each was given only what he needed. Oh, how the Church was flourishing at that time and how virtuous and holy the clergy were! *Eh bien!* Aren’t we all, priests and Brothers as well, in that state? Our needs are met, without our having to be concerned with amassing wealth. Oh, blessed and most rich poverty, which Our Lord practiced so excellently and admirably! *Qui, cum esset dives, propter nos*

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question is treated specifically, as in the case of the letter of February 19, 1655, to Étienne Blatiron. Cf. V, 318-19, and VII, 120.

*egenus factus est.*<sup>12</sup> He didn't have even a stone on which to lay His head; He was poor, not only in His life, but also in His death, dying naked on a cross, with nothing on His body, except perhaps some wretched rag, *propter verenda*;<sup>13</sup> that's taking poverty to the highest point it can attain. And could we see Jesus attached to the Cross in this way and not be devoted to the practice of this virtue?

“ ‘O Monsieur,’ you'll say to me, ‘will we who have taken vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and who, you say, are not religious, have the reward of our vows as religious do?’ Who can doubt that? I'm not going to give you the reasons for this, but I'll simply use a comparison to help you see the truth of it and to assure you of it. You know that children are baptized solemnly, and sometimes also without the solemnity. What do children who are baptized solemnly receive? Doubtless they receive the grace of God, who, from the slaves of Satan that they were, makes them children of God and heirs of heaven. What do children receive who are baptized without solemnity? The same as the others. The ceremony added to solemn Baptism adds nothing to the graces received by a child baptized solemnly; and one who is baptized without solemnity shares in all the same graces as the other. Thus, even though we may not take solemn vows, we receive the same graces that professed religious receive, or similar ones.

“Here's a comparison: when a priest says Mass, we're bound to believe and know that it's Jesus Christ Our Lord himself, the principal and sovereign Priest, who is offering the sacrifice; the priest is only the minister of Our Lord, who makes use of him to perform this action externally. Now, doesn't the assistant who serves the priest, and those who hear Mass, participate, like the priest, in the sacrifice he offers, and which they offer with him, as he himself says in his *Orate, fratres, ut meum ac vestrum sacrificium acceptabile fiat apud Deum Patrem omnipotentem?*<sup>14</sup> No doubt they do participate in it, and more than him, if they have greater charity than the priest. *Actiones sunt suppositorum*; actions are per-

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<sup>12</sup>For your sake He became poor although He was rich. Cf. 2 Cor 8:9. (NAB)

<sup>13</sup>Because of the nakedness.

<sup>14</sup>Pray, brothers, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God the almighty Father.



sonal. It's not the title of priest or religious that makes the actions more pleasing to God and more meritorious, but charity, if they have greater charity than we do. Oh, what a great reason for consolation to be in the Order of Saint Peter! We have the same advantages and graces as religious, granted by our Holy Father, for the Pope was pleased to have the vows made in the Company examined at a meeting of Cardinals for the explanation of the Council of Trent, because of a certain difficulty some persons see in them. He confirmed them, and the Congregation as well. Note that this is the Pope, and he's a holy man.

"A good Theologian, the late M. Duval,<sup>15</sup> often used to tell me that he recognized the infallibility of the Pope in nothing so much as in the confirmation of the Orders in the Church of God and in the canonization of saints.

"I ask the Company to thank God for the institution of the Company, for the vocation of each individual in it, and for our being in this state of religious life of Saint Peter—or rather of Jesus Christ. O my Savior, You waited sixteen hundred years to raise up for yourself a Company that professes expressly that it will continue the mission Your Father sent You to carry out on earth, and which uses the same means You did, making profession of observing poverty, chastity, and obedience. O my Savior, I have never thanked You for this; I do so now for all those present and absent. In Your eternal plans You destined us for this ministry; grant that we may carry it out by Your holy grace! But, O Savior of our souls, look at those whom You are using for the conversion of people and to continue your mission—poor people like us! What a subject of embarrassment for us! O Lord, grant us the grace to make ourselves worthy of this ministry and of our vocation, by struggling generously against this vice of the passion for, and desire of, possessions, pleasures, and honors, by the practice of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and to have always in hand the razor of mortification, so as to succeed better in it and to leave the example of it to posterity! This is the grace we ask of You, Lord."

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<sup>15</sup>André Duval.

217. - POVERTY  
(Common Rules, Chap. III, Art. 1 and 2)

[November 14, 1659]

“My very dear confreres, what has been explained about the Rules until now is contained in two chapters; this is the third one, and it concerns poverty. *Christ Himself, the Lord of all, lived in poverty to such an extent that He had nowhere to lay His head. He formed His Apostles and disciples, His co-workers in His mission, to live in the same sort of way, so that individually they did not own anything. In that way they were freer to combat greed for wealth in a better and more practical way, a greed which is ruining almost the whole world. That is why each confrere must try, weak as he is, to imitate Christ in developing this virtue of poverty. We must all realize that it is the unbreachable rampart by which the Congregation, with the help of God’s grace, will be defended.*

2. *Our ministry on missions could hardly be carried out if we lived in total poverty, since missions are to be given without charge. Nevertheless, we should try to maintain poverty as an ideal and, as far as we can, in practice as well, especially as regards what is set out here.*

3. *Members of the Congregation, individually and collectively, should understand that, following the example of the first Christians, all our belongings are common property and are given out by the Superior to individual members, such as food, clothes, books, furniture, and so on, according to the needs of each. We have all accepted poverty, and so, to avoid any deviation from it, no one may, without the Superior’s permission, dispose of any of this sort of property belonging to the Congregation, or pass it on to others.*

“So, my dear confreres, these are the first articles of this third chapter, which concerns poverty. We’re going to reflect a little on the reasons we have to praise and thank God for having granted us the grace of being in the state in which Our Lord was, He who had such great esteem for poverty and practiced it so well during His en-

ture life. Then we'll mention in what it consists, how the vow we take of it is understood, the difficulties and objections to be found in it, and the particular acts of it we should practice.

“The first reflection we have to make on it—this is in the Rule—is that when Our Lord, the sovereign Lord, the Creator and lawful owner of all things, saw the great disorder caused by the desire and possession of wealth on earth. He willed to correct this by practicing the contrary. He who was so poor that He had nowhere to lay His head, willed that His Apostles and the disciples He had admitted into His company should adopt this practice of poverty, and even the first Christians, of whom it's said that they had nothing of their own, but that all their property was in common. So then, when Our Lord saw the great damage the evil spirit had caused in the world by the possession of riches, which brought about the loss of many, He willed to combat this by applying a remedy that was just the opposite, namely, the practice of poverty.

“In line with that, the Rule tells us to practice poverty, we whom Our Lord has called to do what He came into this world to do, to continue His mission and to work for the conversion of souls. Since its origin, the Company has felt that we had to reach that point, namely, to practice poverty. This poor Company, that was nothing in its beginning, considered that, from then on, or two or three years after that, the better thing was to imitate Our Lord in that respect, in this practice of poverty, chastity, obedience, and stability, and that each man could take private vows, after having prayed fervently for this and having sought advice. Finally, by the mercy of Our Lord, we're observing that practice now, first, of contending against the desire for possessions in ourselves, by the grace of God, and, by that grace, of obtaining the contrary virtue, which is holy poverty. Since, then, being called to do what Our Lord did on earth, I ask you, will we use means other than the ones He used to combat the enemies of His Father's glory: worldly people and those who allow themselves to get carried away by the desires and passion for wealth? By the practice of poverty, it has pleased Our Lord to place us in this state despite our unworthiness. *O mon Sauveur*, what a good reason to thank Him for it!

“That suffices for the reasons; each of you knows them better than I. We’re trying to revive in the Company the spirit of the first Christians, who had nothing of their own.

“Let’s say one other thing. Weren’t we right to embrace the state of poverty and to adopt that holy practice like Our Lord did, seeing that, in order to make us happy, He asks only that? *Beati pauperes spiritu, quoniam ipsorum est regnum caelorum*;<sup>1</sup> blessed are the poor in spirit who have left . . . I don’t know what, but they do it willingly! To them belong the riches of heaven; the kingdom of heaven: *Ipsorum est regnum caelorum*. Once again: *Ipsorum est*; the kingdom of heaven belongs to them; to those who really—and more than just in spirit and affection—have left everything, Our Lord declares that the kingdom of heaven belongs to them. Furthermore, in what does the good pleasure of God consist? He wants all who love Him to love Him without reserve, which happens when they have left everything, just as He loves us without reserve. So then, those who have taken the vow of poverty, who have left everything, who no longer hold on to anything and are attached to nothing, are then obliged to direct their affection and love toward God, for we can’t live without loving. Now, by the vow of poverty, having no more affection and love for created, earthly goods, we’ll have them for the uncreated Good and for heavenly things. The person who takes this vow of poverty no longer clings to anything, neither to possessions, nor honors, nor pleasures; and does that mean that the heart will exist without loving? No, it doesn’t; it then has to direct its affection and love to God. So, the vow of poverty is nothing other than a sovereign, perfect means to really love God. Let’s always place this at the top of the list and make it a priority: that we abandon earthly wealth only to have the riches of heaven, and that we abandon trifles, crumbling, perishable riches, only to have eternal, lasting ones. *O mon Sauveur*, what a happiness!

“But in what does this poverty consist? There are two sorts of poverty; one of which concerns possessions, houses, estates, clothing, etc. Now, of this sort of poverty Our Lord has said, *Qui non*

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<sup>1</sup>*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* Mt 5:3. (NAB)

*renuntiat omnibus quae possidet, non potest meus esse discipulus;*<sup>2</sup> and in another place: *Non est me dignus.*<sup>3</sup> Anyone who does not leave possessions—yes, possessions and clothing—cannot be my disciple in a special and more perfect way. *Eh*, my dear confreres, will we have the title of disciples of Our Lord if we don't abandon and renounce everything, yes, *omnibus*?

“The other sort of poverty—which is much more important—is to renounce not only everything but even ourselves. Did Our Lord do that? Did He renounce His own judgment, His understanding, His Will, His desires, His inclinations, and His passions? Yes, He renounced His understanding and judgment; that's obvious in these words: *Mea doctrina non est mea, sed ejus qui misit me.*<sup>4</sup> I get it from my Father; I get my understanding and judgment from my Father. He renounces the dignity and title He had of being the God-man, together with His Will and judgment; He renounces all this, saying, *Non mea, sed tua voluntas fiat.*<sup>5</sup> What poverty to renounce His own judgment, His Will, His passions, desires, and human inclinations, saying, *Ut jumentum factus sum apud te!*<sup>6</sup> A beast of burden has nothing of its own and belongs entirely to its master; it has no judgment or will of its own. It's as if Our Lord were saying, 'I make use neither of my understanding, nor of my judgment, nor of my own Will, nor of the passions common to human beings; it's as if I didn't have any of them.' If, like Our Lord, we're true children of God, we have to reach that point of renouncing *omnibus*, and have these two sorts of poverty: first of all, renounce what we possess; second, renounce ourselves, our judgment, our will, our inclinations, our desires, and our passions. *Durus est hic sermo.*<sup>7</sup> Yes it is, for nature and for those who live according to their sensuality, but not for those who practice virtue, who strive for holiness,

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<sup>2</sup>Everyone of you who does not renounce all his possessions, cannot be my disciple. Cf. Lk 14:33. (NAB)

<sup>3</sup>He is not worthy of me. Cf. Mt 10:38. (NAB)

<sup>4</sup>My teaching is not my own, but is from the one who sent me. Cf. Jn 7:16. (NAB)

<sup>5</sup>Not my will, but yours be done. Cf. Lk 22:42. (NAB)

<sup>6</sup>I was like a brute beast in your presence. Cf. Ps 73:22. (NAB)

<sup>7</sup>This saying is hard. Cf. Jn 6:60. (NAB)

and who want to become spiritual persons; on the contrary, this passage from Scripture is very pleasing to them.

“So then, the poverty we profess is to give up everything; the saints think that the person elevated to that grace of renouncing everything doesn’t have the right to desire property, honor, and the pleasure of this world; for God is his property, his honor, his pleasure. I’m going to digress here to explain to you the renunciation of property we make in the Company, for we have thought appropriate, since the Company remains always in the ranks of the clergy, to explain our manner of making this vow of poverty, because of certain difficulties that have arisen and because some have said that we could get permission from the Pope, or from the Superior General, to have this vow of poverty annulled. Finally, after having given much thought to this, praying for this intention, consulting many persons, and holding several conferences on it, we sent someone to Rome to ask the Holy Father to approve and confirm the explanation we decided to give to this vow of poverty. Here’s the Brief he sent us on this subject. I asked M. Portail to have it copied, but it was a little too late, through my own fault, since I wasn’t informed about it sooner. It has just been brought to me. So then, here’s the Brief. You see how we strive to weigh everything according to the scales of the sanctuary. And since nothing should be neglected in a matter of such importance, we’ll begin by reading it in Latin. Who knows how to read the Latin of Rome well? Let’s ask the one who made the copy. Read *Alexander, Papa, septimus, ad futuram rei memoriam*. . . .<sup>8</sup> Read it in French for our Brothers; it’s not expressed well enough yet, and it isn’t complete.

“Alexander, Pope, seventh of the name. . . .

“So, my dear confreres, that’s how the vow of poverty is to be understood. As for possessions, those who have money, property, houses, annuities, and simple benefices (for we’re not allowed to have parishes), may retain control of those goods, and the members of the Company may dispose of them in favor of their relatives, but they do not have the use of them; they renounce it by this vow; and

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<sup>8</sup>For this Brief, issued by Pope Alexander VII (1655-67) on September 22, 1655, see **XIIIa**, 417-19.

they give themselves to God, along with their possessions, to be used in good works, as the Brief demands. They will be considerate regarding their relatives in order to assist them according to their needs.

“See how lenient that is. Is there anything to be desired in it? Isn’t it manageable? The capital remains for the relatives. The individual doesn’t have the use of these goods; he doesn’t need them: the Company takes care of what he needs. He uses the revenue from the goods in good works, *pro arbitrato superioris*,<sup>9</sup> says the Pope, or to assist his relatives if they are in need. How does that sound to you, Messieurs? Isn’t it reasonable? We’ve given ourselves to God, we’ve deprived ourselves voluntarily of these goods and have given them up; I leave it to anyone whomsoever to judge whether there’s anything to find fault with in that. Is there anything to be desired, since the question has been so thoroughly examined and sent to the Pope in Rome, who referred it to the Cardinals appointed to deal with important matters? We have the results and the confirmation that has been sent to us.

“If, unfortunately, someone were to leave the Company, by permission of the Pope or the Superior General, he could reclaim possession of his property and his benefices. That’s how this vow and the renunciation of goods are to be understood. Since God has called us to this state of poverty *non nomine tenus*,<sup>10</sup> let’s ask Him for the grace to have its spirit and to keep our vow well.

“*O Sauveur!* How can I speak about that, I who am such a wretched man, who used to have a horse and carriage, who has a room, a fire, a well-curtained bed, and a Brother to look after me. I repeat, I who am so well cared for that I lack nothing! Oh, what scandal I give to the Company by my abuse of the vow of poverty in all those things and other similar ones! I ask pardon of God and of the Company for this, and I also ask it to bear with me in my old age. God grant me the grace to correct myself, now that I have reached this age, and to retrench all those things as far as I can. Get up, brothers (for the whole Company had knelt down while he was making this act of humility).

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<sup>9</sup>At the discretion of the Superior.

<sup>10</sup>Not in name.

“I told you, my dear confreres, that we’d speak about some of the acts and signs of poverty, but it’s too late now; we can save this topic for next Friday; let’s just mention a few objections or difficulties to be encountered in observing this vow. We’ll give only the first one, namely, that, when we’re giving missions in the country and working to continue what Our Lord did here on earth, the Company seems to be doing something contrary to the practice of poverty by eating its own food and not living like those who have made, and do make, profession of real poverty, and who receive from others their food and other necessities. It’s true that we shouldn’t be receiving anything, not even an apple or a grape, but you know the reason, you see it: *Quod gratis accepistis, gratis date*.<sup>11</sup> We’ve received the grace of God for the instruction and conversion of the people; that has cost us nothing, let’s also be careful not to take anything. It’s our custom to give an alms every day, to take nothing for the Masses people ask us to say, and to contribute a little to the collection for the Confraternity of Charity. That seems contrary to the vow of poverty. Now, during the mission, we have to keep at least the spirit of poverty; we make profession of it and we have to make this obvious in the sobriety and frugality of our food and clothing and have *praeparationem animi*<sup>12</sup> to really leave everything, if this were appropriate. So that’s the first difficulty.

“It’s nine o’clock; we have to finish and go to bed. I ask the Company to praise God and to thank Him for having placed it in the state of His Son, of the Apostles, and of the first Christians, who practiced poverty so well and who had nothing of their own, but *omnia erant illis communia*.<sup>13</sup> So, let’s thank Our Lord God for having placed us in this state of the practice of poverty. But how can we do this in a worthy manner? Our Lord himself would have to be His own thanks and enkindle in us a greater love of this state. *O Sauveur*, a thought almost slipped my mind! I ask the priests to say Mass tomorrow and our Brothers to receive Communion on Sunday in thanksgiving that God has placed us in this state of the

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<sup>11</sup> *Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give.* Cf. Mt 10:8. (NAB)

<sup>12</sup> *Preparedness of spirit.*

<sup>13</sup> *They had everything in common.* Cf. Acts 4:32. (NAB)



vow of poverty, and to ask Him over and over to grant us the grace of practicing it well, in the hope that one day we'll receive an abundant reward for this in heaven."

**218. - POVERTY**  
(Common Rules, Chap. III, Art. 3-10)

[November 21, 1659]

"My dear confreres, this evening we're going to continue the third chapter, on poverty. The first time, we spoke about articles 1 and 2: first, of poverty in general, and second, about the fact that we didn't seem to be living in the state of poverty during our missions, for we don't accept anything, whereas poor persons receive their food and other necessities from others. We give to poor persons and to the Charity, and poor persons give nothing. We do not take Mass stipends, and poor priests do. So then, all that seems contrary to the state of poverty. However, that isn't so, for, if we take nothing for our missions, it's because the Company has given itself to God from the beginning to perform all the functions of the mission *gratis*, based on what Our Lord said, *Quod gratis accepistis, gratis date*,<sup>1</sup> and we saw that this was a great means of gathering fruits from a mission among the people, who say, 'These priests are men of God because they take nothing and are so unselfish.' In this way, we easily win them over to God. Because of this state of poverty that we've assumed for love of God, we should be glad during the missions to be sometimes poorly fed and housed. Oh, how happy we'd then be to resemble more closely Our Lord, who was poor and who practiced such great acts of poverty! It's at the time when we don't have what we might need that we should cherish our state of poverty. So much for the first two articles of this chapter.

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**Conference 218.** - Manuscript of Conferences. The manuscript gives no date for this conference; see the citation of Conference 216 for the choice of date assigned here.

<sup>1</sup>*Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give.* Cf. Mt 10:8. (NAB)

“Now, here’s the third: *Members of the Congregation, individually and collectively, should understand that, following the example of the first Christians, all our belongings are common property and are given out by the Superior to individual members, such as food, clothes, books, furniture, and so on, according to the needs of each. We have all accepted poverty, and so, to avoid any deviation from it, no one may, without the Superior’s permission, dispose of any of this sort of property belonging to the Congregation or pass it on to others.*

“My dear confreres, I’m going to divide what I have to say on the above into three points: in the first, we’ll give the reasons we have to thank God constantly for having called us to this state of poverty; in the second, we’ll speak about some kinds of poverty and the faults that are contrary to them. *O Sauveur*, there are only too many of them! In the third point, we’ll give the means to take upon ourselves the practice of poverty; for we shouldn’t be satisfied with just having it in name; we have to do its works and produce acts of it when the opportunity and the occasions arise.

“So then, let’s give—or rather, let’s repeat—some of the reasons obliging us to thank God for the grace that He, in His infinite goodness, has given us of placing us in this state of poverty. I’m going to proceed as the Bishop of Alet used to do. He would repeat one day, two days, three days, four days, even all during Advent, the things he had said and preached to the people, when he deemed them important for their salvation, in order to fix them firmly in their minds. So then, let’s be enlightened with the inspiration by which our obligations to God were made clear to us a week ago and how we should be constantly thanking him for having placed us in the state of poverty assumed by His own Son for our salvation.

“The first thing Our Lord practiced on coming into the world is poverty; and the first thing He taught us is likewise, *Beati pauperes spiritu, quoniam ipsorum est regnum caelorum*;<sup>2</sup> for Our Lord began to do and then to teach.<sup>3</sup> The first thing that comes out of one’s mouth is the one the person has most at heart. Since, then, Our Lord

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<sup>2</sup>*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* Mt 5:3. (NAB)

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Acts 1:1. (NAB)

began His sermons with those words, *Beati pauperes spiritu, quoniam ipsorum est regnum caelorum*, it's a sign that He had great love for poverty and esteemed it highly. Brothers, if we take pains to ponder these words, *Beati pauperes spiritu, quoniam ipsorum est regnum caelorum*, we'll have a high regard for this holy virtue, and those whom God has called to this state would have good reason to say to God, if He were to speak to them of hell and of purgatory, 'O my God, what are you saying to me, who have striven to assume the state of poverty? Didn't You say *Beati pauperes spiritu, quoniam ipsorum est regnum caelorum*?' There's almost certainly something great in the practice of this virtue, since the first words in the sermons of Our Lord were *Beati pauperes spiritu, quoniam ipsorum est regnum caelorum*.

"Have we reflected on the saying, *Nemo potest esse meus discipulus, nisi renuntiaverit omnibus quae possidet*?<sup>4</sup> We all want to be disciples of Our Lord. Now, have you, since the time you were called to serve Him, experienced this love and attachment to holy poverty? That's why we've given ourselves to God to be His disciples, and we can't be His disciples without it, without assuming poverty; if we haven't done it, we can't be disciples of Our Lord unless we do. Moreover, if we haven't done it purely and perfectly enough, let's do it now and give ourselves to God to embrace this state of poverty as perfectly as we can. When we think that, when Our Lord came into the world and willed to make a new world of people who were to serve Him, He began by saying to them, *Beati pauperes spiritu, quoniam ipsorum est regnum caelorum*, we really have to admit that there's something great in poverty. Note particularly these three words: *nemo, nisi, omnibus*. No one (*nemo*) in the world can be a disciple of Our Lord and serve Him, no matter who that person is, unless (*nisi*) he gives up—gives up what—everything (*omnibus*). It's true that this isn't a Commandment but a counsel for one's state of perfection, such as the Apostles assumed it. The first Christians understood this blessed state; it delighted them; they em-

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<sup>4</sup>Everyone of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple. Cf. Lk 14:33. (NAB)

braced it immediately; thus, they all became saints, and why? Because they were poor. *Omnia illis erant communia.*<sup>5</sup>

“*Or sus*, let’s bless God, who has called us and placed us in this blessed state! The reason Our Lord wants us to renounce everything is that, in so doing, we must necessarily love God. The heart tends toward love, just as a stone tends to fall and fire tends to rise as to their center. Saint Augustine says that it’s a misfortune not to have a loving heart. After having loved creatures too much, he loved God, and he praised Him for having detached him from the love of creatures. So then, if God has deprived us of all possessions, it’s so that we might love Him with our whole heart and with all our strength; for He is a jealous God: *Deus zelotes*. There are so many reasons in Him to love Him: His great love and His kindness! Doesn’t He complain that we have abandoned Him, He who is the fountain of living water, to go to those cracked cisterns that can’t hold water and are all muddy? If God were pleased that we should have this spirit of poverty—yes, this spirit of poverty—how perfectly we’d love God! Let’s add to that God’s goodness, which wants to reward, even in this life, the practice of this virtue. Three Evangelists speak of this: Saint Matthew 19; Saint Mark 10; and Saint Luke 18. The first-mentioned says that anyone who leaves father, mother, etc., will have a hundredfold in this world,<sup>6</sup> yes, in this world. In the early days of the Church, these words gave rise to a heresy called Millenarianism.<sup>7</sup> Certain people believed that Our Lord would come into this world after the Judgment and, with Him, those who had left all for His love, and that they would remain in it for a thousand years in the enjoyment of every pleasure. Those poor people! If they had studied things properly, they would have been well aware that those words are not to be understood in that way, as you, who give sermons on this, know better than I.

“But let’s go back to where we were and say that Our Lord doesn’t fail to reward ceaselessly those here on earth who have left all

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<sup>5</sup>*They had everything in common.* Cf. Acts 4:32. (NAB)

<sup>6</sup>Cf. Mt 19:29. (NAB)

<sup>7</sup>This teaching (Millenarianism) is based on a strictly literal interpretation of Rv 20:1-15. (NAB)

for love of Him. Don't you see how many foundations we've already made, how God has provided for all our needs, and how many houses He gives us for the one or two houses that two or three of our men have left! Wretched man that I am, I'm not talking about myself, who am only a poor pig keeper and a peasant, but of other men of whom several may have been Pastors in the villages! Serving as curates! Poor people! The Vicar-General of Amiens has written me that several curates and Pastors have lost everything, that the armies passing through have destroyed everything, and he asks us to take pity on them. We've provided for them. We, I repeat, could be like that, but God has provided by calling us to the Congregation, where we have what we need—and not only here, but also in the other houses, some more, some less—with the result that, if any of us go to Brittany, Poitou, Gascony, or Languedoc, we always find the table laid, even in Italy and as far as Rome. These are our houses; we have a right to them; God proves only too abundantly the truth of these words: *Qui reliquerit patrem etc. centuplum accipiet in hac vita*. Isn't it true that we receive a hundredfold more goods than those we've left? Alas! What have we left behind? A trifle, or very little. As for pleasures, let's save that for another time.

“Three of the Evangelists speak about voluntary poverty: Saint Matthew 19; Saint Mark 10; and Saint Luke 18. Saint Matthew states, : *Omnis qui reliquerit domum vel fratres vel sorores aut patrem aut matrem aut filios aut agros propter nomen meum, centuplum accipiet et vitam aeternam possidebit.*<sup>8</sup> Saint Mark says: *Respondens Jesus ait: amen dico vobis, nemo est qui reliquerit domum aut fratres aut sorores aut patrem aut matrem aut filios aut agros propter me et propter Evangelium, qui non accipiat centies tantum, nunc in tempore hoc: domos et fratres et sorores et matres et filios et agros cum persecutionibus, et in saeculo futuro vitam aeternam.*<sup>9</sup> And in Saint Luke: *Amen dico vobis, nemo est qui*

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<sup>8</sup>And everyone who has given up houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands for the sake of my name will receive a hundred times more, and will inherit eternal life. Mt 19:29. (NAB)

<sup>9</sup>Jesus said, “Amen. I say to you, there is no one who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for my sake and for the sake of the gospel who will not receive a hundred times more now in this present age: houses and brothers and sisters and

*reliquerit domum aut parentes aut fratres aut uxorem aut filios propter regnum Dei, et non recipiat multo plura in hoc tempore, et in saeculo venturo vitam aeternam.*<sup>10</sup>

“You see how Our Lord speaks through these three Evangelists: every person, *omnis* or *nemo est*, without excluding anyone; there’s no one alive who, having left home, parents, etc., will not receive the hundredfold, says Saint Matthew; and Saint Mark adds, in this world, *in tempore hoc*, and even, *cum persecutionibus*, notwithstanding the persecutions experienced by the first Christians in the early Church, when everything was taken from them. Saint Luke adds, *multo plura*, many more things than what they left, they’ll receive more than that: for one father they have left, for one mother, a hundred times as many. Isn’t the Company as much as a father and a mother to us? What can a father and a mother do for their child that the Company doesn’t do for each one of us? It feeds us, clothes us, provides for all our needs. Aren’t we like so many brothers to one another, who have as much, even much more affection and charity than our blood brothers, who usually seek only their own interests?

“Let’s examine our conscience and see in it whether God isn’t doing for us, who have left all for love of Him, what He has promised. Aren’t we sufficiently rewarded? God grant that this may not be our reward, but that it be God himself and the enjoyment of His essence! So then, don’t we have good reason to ask God for this spirit of poverty, which is so much to our advantage? If someone were so wretched as not to feel in his heart this love of holy poverty, he should really be pitied! But let’s move on; the half-hour is already striking. Oh, how shameful of me to have tarried so long! I’ll just read the articles.

“Article 3: *Everyone...should understand that...all our belongings are common property*. So then, we are a community of goods like the Apostles and the first Christians, *omnia illis erant*

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*mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and eternal life in the age to come.*” Mk 10:29-30. (NAB)

<sup>10</sup>*Amen, I say to you, there is no one who has given up house or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God who will not receive (back) an overabundant return in this present age and eternal life in the age to come.* Cf. Lk 18:29-30. (NAB)

*communia*; but, since there might have been great confusion if each person had been able to take these goods at will, the Apostles themselves remedied that at the very beginning by distributing them to each individual according to need; and this was done afterward by the deacons. Thus, a well-regulated Community should have people designated to give each man what he needs. So, here in this house there's one person for each category—senior priests, students, seminarians, even Brothers—who is appointed to look after poverty and is responsible for asking each individual weekly what he needs. Just imagine whether, in the house of great lords, it's customary to ask what each man needs! *O mon Sauveur!* I earnestly recommend that those whose task it is to find out what each man needs carry out their duty meticulously.

“If anyone needs something during the week, as when he's going to the country and can't wait another week, he may and should go to the man responsible for asking about each one's needs, and not to someone else. Therefore, no one is to go to the sewing room or the shoe-repairer's shop. Above all, I recommend that you not go to ask the tailor for a certain cloak or robe, or a cassock made of a particular fabric. Oh, may God preserve us from that, for how far removed that is from the spirit of poverty! If something is really a problem, such as the cold weather for those who are sensitive to it, and the man can't wait another week, he can and should go only to the person designated for that. With regard to books, it's up to the Superior to distribute them or to have them distributed. *O mon Dieu!* What a fault is committed by someone who takes the books he likes, without permission! He's appropriating for himself what is common property. If you need them, ask for them; and give them back when you've finished; someone else may need them as much as you do. Another man is going on a journey, to give a mission; he's paid his expenses and there's some money left over; he gives no account of it and doesn't return it but holds on to it to buy a book; that's acting contrary to poverty. In the name of God, my dear confreres, let him who goes to the country write down what he has spent and, on his return, give an account of it and hand in the rest of the money. Be faithful to that!

“Article 4: *No one either should have anything which the Superior does not know about, or does not authorize, or which he is not prepared to give up at once if the Superior says so, or even hints at it.* So then, no one shall have anything, here or elsewhere, without the knowledge of the Superior. Anyone who might keep some money or books would be doing wrong; he’d be sinning against poverty, unless the Superior gives his permission for that—and he should be very careful about allowing it! Three things are recommended in this article: (1) to have nothing without the knowledge of the Superior; (2) to have nothing unless he permits it; (3) to be ready to give it up at the slightest indication.

“Article 5: *No one should use anything as though it were his own personal property. No one should give away or accept anything, or exchange or lend anything, or go looking elsewhere for something, without the Superior’s permission.* To give something away is to act as a proprietor; you’ve renounced that; to accept something for yourself is also against poverty; it’s not for poor persons to lend or borrow, for people don’t lend them anything willingly.

“Article 6: *No one should take for himself what has been allotted to others or set aside for community use or abandoned. This goes for books as well.* It has happened only too often that, as soon as a person goes to the country and leaves his books or something else in his room, people go in and take what they like. We should deplore the state of those who do such things, which are wrong and contrary to poverty. I hope that won’t happen again; otherwise, we’d have to find out who those persons were and make them do penance. *Mon Dieu!* What great reason I have to fear that God may punish me for not having been careful to prevent such faults. Let me say here, even though it’s not the place for it, that it’s forbidden to write in books and to mark them up; that’s an action that denotes proprietorship. We’d have to be their owners to do that, and we’re not. *No one should pass on to someone else what has been assigned for his own use, without the Superior’s permission. Nor should he allow such things to deteriorate or get damaged through his own negligence.* Oh, what harm we do in such matters! *Mon Sauveur!*



“Article 7: *No one should go in for useless or exotic things. O cursed curiosity, how much harm you do! Each one, too, should keep his needs within moderate limits, and curb his hankering after such things, so that his life style as regards food, room, and bedding is that of a poor person. And in this connection, and with regard to everything else for that matter, he should be prepared to put up with even the worst facilities in the house, willing to feel the bite of poverty in his life.* Oh, what a beautiful practice! O my Savior, You who, in this state of poverty, suffered nakedness, grant us the grace of practicing this virtue to that point.

“Article 8: *And so that nothing which smacks of ownership to even the slightest degree may be seen among us, our rooms are not to be locked in such a way that they cannot be opened from the outside. And we should not have a safe in our rooms, or anything else locked with a private key, without the Superior's express permission.* My dear confreres, the Jesuits have only a latch on the door to their bedroom; there are only three rooms in their house that may be locked: the Superior's, the Minister's, and the Procurator's, and that's because of the important things that are kept in them. So, no chests, suitcases, or strongboxes here, except in those rooms in which important Community items are kept.

“Article 9: *No one moving from one house to another is to take anything with him, without the Superior's permission.* So then, to take away bags or suitcases full of books is to act contrary to this Rule and is against poverty. ‘But I bought those books,’ someone will say. My reply is that either it was done with Community money, and those books still belong to the Community, or, if it was with your own money, you gave that up; and it's the same for money from your relatives. We cannot and must not say, ‘That breviary is mine,’ for you have only the use of it. Our Lord went from village to village without a purse or a sack, and, in the beginning. He even forbade having two tunics, so great was His love of poverty. So, my dear confreres, I recommend that we strive to imitate Him in that poverty. When you go to another house, you take your notes. Fine, that's allowed in every well-regulated Community, but not books; you'll find enough of them everywhere; thanks

be to God, you won't be going into any of our houses where you won't find enough of them to write your sermons according to our method. As for books that men in other well-regulated communities have in their rooms, and which they need to write their sermons, if they go to the country, this is what they do: they give them to the Superior or the Assistant to keep, who takes them, or he leaves them in the room, which he locks. I ask all of you to act in this way.

*“Article 10: The virtue of poverty can be infringed by even the undisciplined craving for personal belongings. For this reason each one should take particular care that this failing does not get a grip on him; and this includes wanting benefices, as being of spiritual value. No one, therefore, should covet any benefice or honor in the Church, under any pretext whatsoever.”*

“We have to be satisfied with that for now. I've made a few notes; please bear with me while I see if I've said everything.”

He read his notes in a low tone of voice, after which he said, “That's it. God be blessed! It's striking nine o'clock; time to go to bed; we're not going to have time to talk to you about the means of practicing this holy poverty and of avoiding the faults I've just mentioned.

“The first means, my dear confreres, is to give ourselves to God, to give Him the entire Company, that He may be pleased to grant us the grace of having this holy poverty. We have to have it (1) because we've promised it; (2) because of what is divine in this virtue; (3) because the good order of the Company depends on it. If we strive to practice this virtue well, those who come after us will feel the effects of it, will bless God for it, and will practice it as well. If we don't practice it, our successors won't do it either, with the result that we—I mean all of us—will be responsible for it at the judgment seat of God if we don't do all in our power, by word and example, to see that this virtue of poverty is operative among us.

“O my dear confreres, what a consolation it will be when we go before God, wearing this beautiful robe of poverty! Because of us, posterity will be established in it as in its strong point, yes, its strong point, for it's the practice of poverty that preserves and strengthens houses and Companies, just as, on the contrary, it's proprietorship

that ruins them; experience of this is only too apparent and catastrophic!

“O my Savior, may Your Infinite Goodness be pleased to preserve us and help us to grow in the practice of this virtue! All of us are the fathers of those who will come after us; let us beget them in these practices. Oh, how happy we’ll be to have contributed to that! Brothers, I implore you to do your part in this by your word and example. We priests have a greater obligation to do it than others do. When the Church practiced this in the beginning, the faithful were all saints; but, as soon as people began to have property of their own and priests had personal benefices, which happened under Pope Saint Telesphorus,<sup>11</sup> everything began to decline. Priests today are only the shadow of the priests of that happy time and golden age. May God be pleased to grant us the grace of inciting all of us to practice that holy virtue of poverty, which, besides the temporal reward promised to it, will merit for us the eternal one!”

**219. - THE DESIRE FOR BENEFICES**  
(Common Rules, Chap. III, Art. 10)

[November 28, 1659]

*The virtue of poverty can be infringed by even the undisciplined craving for personal belongings. For this reason each one should take particular care that this failing does not get a grip on him; and this includes wanting benefices, as being of spiritual value. No one, therefore, should covet any benefice or honor in the Church, under any pretext whatsoever.*

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<sup>11</sup>Seventh successor to Saint Peter. He had been Pope for eleven years (ca. 125-36) when he suffered martyrdom.

**Conference 219.** Manuscript of Conferences. Judging from the many blank spaces left in the manuscript by the copyist, this conference is very incomplete. Although the conference is undated, its subject matter seems to indicate that it followed immediately after that of November 21, hence the date we have given here.

“The first reason is that the strengthening of the Company or its total ruin depends on the observance or lack of observance of this Rule. Anyone can see that, if the Company were once to allow itself to aspire to benefices, in a very short time it would be deserted, with nothing but a perpetual ebb and flow of persons entering and leaving. This Company could then be compared to an inn, where someone might stay one or two times, namely, for two or three years, and then, after that, might go somewhere else; and what’s more damnable, is that ambition might profit more by it than in the world, and a man might play his role better in it; for, under cover of piety or of some acquired reputation, he might have greater success in his enterprises.

“In a word, this Company would no longer be a firm, permanent Company as, by the grace of God, it is now, but a movable camp. It wouldn’t be a Company of God, but a refuge for ambitious men who would have one foot in the Company and the other in the world. What good results could it then have? How could people trust such persons, who might turn their backs on the slightest mortification they encountered, who are here today and might be gone tomorrow, as experience has shown in Companies where the door isn’t closed to benefices, whereas, in those where it is closed, the Companies are flourishing. Saint Ignatius was well aware of this truth. . . .

“The second reason is that we aspire to benefices either to produce greater fruit in souls or to live more comfortably and sensually. If it’s to live more sensually, who doesn’t see immediately that it’s a temptation and totally bad? If it’s to produce greater fruit in souls and to win them over to God, the deception is no less great than the first; it’s even all the more to be feared because it appears, at first sight, to be reasonable. For, please consider, you want to have a benefice; perhaps you want to be a Pastor to attend to your neighbor more. Let’s take a closer look at that. What do Pastors do that we don’t do? Pastors hear the confessions of their parishioners, and so do we, etc. And not only do we have that in common with them, but we have it to an even greater extent, since we’re not simply Pastors of one parish, but God has placed in our hands the care of all souls. In addition, what will a Bishop do that we don’t do?

He'll open ecclesiastical seminaries, and we have them in the Company; he has ordinands, so do we, etc. And we have the advantage in that because they use us to do all these things; that's why we have an even greater share in the good done there, since we're the most proximate causes of them. From that we can judge the deceit of the devil, who very often causes us to lose our vocation under such specious pretexts. . . .

"The third reason is that very often those benefices we think about having are not so easily found in this day and age. Experience has shown many men how hard this is; they've been frustrated in their hopes and are now the laughing stock of people; they are considered persons who allowed themselves to be deceived, like children who have run after butterflies, or like those who try, while running, to catch their shadows, which are a true image of honors, etc. The devil makes us see marvels; very often we imagine that everything will come to us while we're sleeping, but we find ourselves deceived; everything seems to be gold and silver to us, but, in reality, it's nothing but lead. . . .

"The fourth reason is that to desire a benefice (even when that could be done without losing our vocation first, presupposing that we were seculars in the world) is to run the risk of great danger: it's putting a heavy burden on our shoulders, that of being responsible for souls, and, furthermore, to seek honors, which we allow ourselves to do; but, in the Company we have the difficulty and not the prestige attached to those responsibilities; and in this our vocation is more certain. . . .

"The fifth reason is the example of the saints and of important persons like Saint Ambrose, Saint Martin, and Saint Athanasius, who avoided the offices people wanted to give them with as much zeal as worldly people go after dignities and honors. And what is remarkable is that this calling wasn't as dangerous then as it is now because the honors involved weren't so great, but were rather the crosses and martyrdom that had to be endured. Why, then, will we not do what we're obliged by our Rules to do, seeing that those saints did it well, even though they were in no way obligated to do so and had the virtues and rank appropriate to such positions! Take

the example of M. Pillé, who, at the hour of death, regretted having been a Pastor. . . .

“The sixth and strongest reason is that, having taken a vow to live and die in the Company, and not being able to live in it while in possession of a benefice, since that’s incompatible, it must, of necessity, be renounced, if we don’t want to give up our vocation. Moreover, that’s contrary to the vow of poverty. . . .

*Means to remedy this unfortunate situation:*

“First, forget your relatives, get rid of that destructive attachment that makes us wish for benefices so that we can better their situation, once we have them; that, ordinarily, is the cause of such intrigues. . . .

“Second, go to see them only as little as possible, and talk to them also as infrequently as possible; for, such propositions regarding benefices usually come from relatives who, through a foolish kind of love, very often ruin us. . . .

“Third, have a very high regard for our vocation, considering that the most beautiful benefice we could have is to be a Missioner, saying, like David, *Elegi abjectus esse in domo Domini mei*,<sup>1</sup> etc.

“Fourth, never write or receive any letter without showing it to the Superior; go to see Prelates as little as possible, unless we’re sent by Superiors; make as few visits as possible to persons outside the Community, especially those in high places. . . .

“Make known our temptation as early as possible to the Director, even telling him the means we thought about ahead of time to succeed in our undertaking. . . .

“Lastly, give ourselves to God in the Company, not looking back, not thinking about either our relatives or our friends, but saying, *Pater meus et mater mea dereliquerunt me, Dominus autem assumpsit me*,<sup>2</sup> *Deus pars haereditatis meae et calicis mei*,<sup>3</sup> etc.”

<sup>1</sup>I have chosen to be abject in the house of my God. Cf. Ps 83:11. (D-RB)

<sup>2</sup>My father and mother have forsaken me, however, the Lord will take me in. Cf. Ps 27:10. (NAB)

<sup>3</sup>God, my allotted portion and my cup. Cf. Ps 16:5. (NAB)

220. - POVERTY<sup>1</sup>

[December 5, 1659]

“My dear confreres, here’s the fourth chapter, which is on chastity:

*1. Our Savior showed clearly how highly He rated chastity, and how anxious He was to get people to accept it, by the fact that He wanted to be born of an Immaculate Virgin through the intervention of the Holy Spirit, outside the normal course of nature. Christ allowed himself to be falsely accused of the most appalling charges, following His wish to be overwhelmed with disgrace. Yet He loathed unchastity so much that we never read of His having been in even the slightest way suspected of it, much less accused of it, even by His most determined opponents. For this reason it is very important for the Congregation to be strongly determined to possess this virtue. And we must always and everywhere uphold it in a clear and decisive way. This should be more obviously our practice since mission ministry almost all the time brings us into contact with lay men and women. Everyone, therefore, should be careful to take advantage to the best of his ability of every safeguard and precaution for keeping this chastity of body and mind intact.*

*2. In order to succeed in this, with the help of God, we should be very careful to control internal and external senses. We are never to speak to women in a one-to-one situation in unbecoming circumstances of either time or place. When speaking or writing to them we should completely avoid using any words, even spiritual terminology, which smack of affectionate feelings toward them. When*

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**Conference 220.** Manuscript of Conferences. This conference was obviously given shortly after November 4, 1659, the day Nicolas Étienne departed for Nantes to board a ship for Madagascar, or, rather, shortly after November 21, because the saint speaks about a ceremony usually held on that date, as having just taken place in the house of the Priests of Saint-Sulpice. What was said in the citation of Conference 216 suffices to explain why we have chosen December 5 as the date of the present conference.

<sup>1</sup>Although this conference is entitled “Poverty,” Saint Vincent begins by citing the whole of Chapter IV of the Common Rules on chastity. He then states that he first wanted to make a few more remarks on poverty. As it happened, he spent the entire conference on poverty and had to postpone the conference on chastity until the following week.

hearing their confessions, or when speaking to them outside of confession, we should not go too close to them nor take our chastity for granted.

3. And since intemperance is, so to speak, the nursing mother of unchastity, each one should be moderate with regard to eating. We should, as far as possible, use ordinary food, and wine diluted with plenty of water.

4. Moreover, each of us needs to convince himself that it is not enough for Missioners to have reached an above-average level in this virtue. We must also try with every means available to prevent anyone from having even the slightest suspicion of the opposite vice in any member of our Community. The mere suspicion of this, even though completely unfounded, would do more damage to the Congregation and its good work than the false accusation of any other wrongdoing, especially since it would result in our missions doing little or no good. Because of this we should use not merely every available ordinary means but even exceptional ones where necessary to prevent or remove this evil. For example, we should at times withdraw from some works, which in other respects are permissible and even good and holy, when in the judgment of the Superior or Director they seem to give reason for fearing such suspicion.

5. And since a lazy life is the enemy of virtues, especially of chastity, each of us is to avoid being idle and should always make good use of his time.

“Before beginning our conference today, my dear confreres, I think I should tell the Company something I forgot to mention the other day concerning poverty. Maybe I didn’t explain myself clearly enough because of my limited intelligence. I was saying, then, that the vow of poverty we take doesn’t prevent us from reserving the right to and ownership of our goods, even though we don’t retain the use of them, and I added that we willed or returned those goods to our relatives. I should have said, however, that we may will them to our relatives or to those among them who might need them the most and for whom we might have greater affection, or use the money in good works. For, when the Pope gave his explanation of our vow of poverty, he didn’t go into detail and, by



leaving us in the state and Order of the clergy, intended that we have the same power and use as the members of the clergy regarding the disposal of the capital of our goods, with the permission and consent of the Superior. Each of us, therefore, is free to make a will and to dispose of his property, even in good works.

“We saw this recently in the case of M. Étienne,<sup>2</sup> before he left for Madagascar. Since, from his youth, he had been thinking about a similar plan, he disposed of his property in two ways: he left part of it to his brothers, namely, his elder brother and his brother-in-law, each in due proportion, in accordance with the custom of the region, reserving for himself a very considerable annuity. In addition, he created a foundation, not in favor of the Company, since this foundation is for the public good and for a good work, although the Company administers it and is obliged to provide a sum of money annually for the support of those who will be ministering in Madagascar, as long as the Mission continues there; otherwise, somewhere else for the conversion of unbelievers. He did that, I repeat, with the consent of his relatives and after presenting the matter to four of the most famous lawyers in Paris, who had been asked to meet here so we could find out from them whether, given his vow of poverty and the Pope’s Brief explaining the vow as it is made in the Company, he could dispose of his personal possessions in that way. They replied unanimously that he could.

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<sup>2</sup>The personnel catalogue states: “Nicolas Étienne, born on September 17, 1634, was admitted on August 8, 1653, on condition that he remain a seminarian all his life because of the serious deformity of one of his hands. He took his vows on August 8, 1655, and, with a dispensation, was ordained a priest on August 31, 1659, provided that he go to Madagascar.” (Cf. *Notices*, vol. I, p. 480.) Étienne had already volunteered to go there as a catechist; it was Saint Vincent who sought the dispensation for his ordination (VIII, 20). He set off the first time in 1660 but was unable to land and had to return to France. In May 1663, he left again, arriving in Madagascar in September. His apostolate was short-lived: Dian Mananghe, a Malagasy chief, who had promised to receive Baptism, invited him to dinner, had him imprisoned, and murdered him, along with Brother Philippe Patte and some indigenous Christians.

Coste and *Notices*, vol. V (Supplement), p. 218, give February 27, 1664, as the date of the massacre. *Notices*, vol. III, pp. 350-68, gives a fuller biography of Étienne; on p. 350 it states that he died on March 4, while on p. 367 it says “in the first week of Lent 1664.” A short account of Brother Patte is given on pp. 369-71 of the latter, which states that he died along with M. Étienne on March 4. In both instances, *Mémoires de la Congrégation de la Mission, Madagascar*, vol. IX, is cited; Coste specifies pp. 374-494.

“That, then, is the freedom each of us has, either to leave our property to our relatives to divide up among themselves, or to dispose of it by will, in favor of those among them who might have the greatest need of it, or to others for whom we might have greater affection, or to use it in good works.

“Another point concerns going into others’ bedrooms to nose about in them, looking through books and papers and taking what we please, under pretext that anything there is common property. I didn’t explain myself clearly on that point and didn’t describe this fault as it deserves. The Rule forbids us to keep our rooms locked and to have anything locked up in them. Although, as we said the other day, the Superior may keep his room locked because of the important papers and letters that are in it, God gave me the grace in the beginning of never locking mine and of having no chest or strongbox that locks; only in the past two or three years has there been under our table a drawer that locks, but which is almost always left open. It’s also true that the little room where I go down to spend the day is locked when we go to meals and at night when we go to bed; but that’s because there are important papers in it.

“The Mission acts this way to honor that state so highly esteemed by Our Lord of putting everything in common, and that no one have anything of his own. But the Rule of not locking anything is applicable only if no one is going into the rooms or private places to rummage around and take for himself what’s in them. To practice this poverty better, Our Lord himself had nothing of His own, not even a stone on which to lay His head; and so that we may imitate Him more closely and more perfectly in that, didn’t He say, ‘No one can be my disciple, if he does not renounce all that he possesses’?<sup>3</sup> That’s to be understood, in the way the Doctors of the Church explain it, for the perfect.

“According to the Rule, our rooms must not be locked, nor should anything in them; that means that what’s in them isn’t ours, that we’re not attached to it, that things can be taken from us or we can be deprived of them in order to honor, by this state and disposition, the holy virtue of the poverty of Our Lord. But take a man who,

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<sup>3</sup>Cf. Lk 14:33. (NAB)

with no consideration for God, whom he is offending, or for his conscience, which is a constant reproach to him, or for his neighbor, whom he sees and scandalizes, enters the room of a priest in his absence, when the latter has just gone to the country, and rummages everywhere in it, looking at his books, papers, and writings, and taking what he pleases; is this man to be tolerated? Should we let that go unpunished? First of all, he's breaking a Rule; second, he's scandalizing those who see him; third, he's destroying, as far as in him lies, that state of poverty which Our Lord esteems so highly; fourth, he's drawing complaints from those from whom he's taken something, if they're not very virtuous and if God hasn't given them the strength to put up with such a loss, and he gives them good reason for saying that we should have keys to lock our rooms, which hasn't been done up to the present. So we see the Company on that occasion, suffer a loss and risk being turned completely upside down, if nothing is done to remedy this great evil and if that fault goes unpunished.

"I sent someone to the Jesuits to ask one of the senior priests, Fr. Haineuve, what they do in a similar case. 'What would you do,' our man said to him, 'to one of your men who might go into someone else's room like that?' 'That's unheard of among us,' he replied, 'that a man should go into someone else's room is unheard of; it's contrary to good manners, against the Rule, and against conscience.' Their rooms are closed only with a latch, and nothing inside is locked. 'But, Father,' our man continued, 'what would you do in your house with a person who had gone into one of the bedrooms? What punishment would he receive?' 'He'd be made to strip in the middle of the refectory and to take the discipline in front of the Company.'

"In certain towns in Italy, the ruler forbids anyone to be armed during the night, and that order is obeyed, except by those who, having enemies, get permission to remain armed for that reason. But do you know what those people may say to their ruler? 'You forbid us to be armed during the night; so then, you have to do what's necessary to keep us safe.' That's only just. So, that ruler does all he can so that people can go everywhere at night in safety. You might say the same to us here: 'You forbid us by Rule to keep

our rooms locked and to have anything in them locked; fine! We're willing to practice poverty and detachment from everything for love of Our Lord; but you have to see that no one enters without permission, that people don't rummage around in them and take what they like.' That's fair and reasonable, and not only must it be very expressly forbidden, but also serious punishments must be imposed on the offenders. The Jesuits certainly do it; they have the penance I just mentioned to you. I'm thinking about what we'll have to do and, with the help of God, I intend to correct that judiciously. I've considered several means, which I'm not going to mention right now; I'll reflect some more on them before God; I'll seek advice; but, in the name of God, brothers, let's give ourselves to His Divine Majesty to practice this Rule faithfully; I ask the Company to do so, and I ask God to grant us the grace of having the zeal and strength to prevent its being broken, and of finding the means and punishments we have to use against offenders; for it's not suitable to keep them here, since this house is the first in the Company and should serve as a model for all the others. To put up with a man who goes into someone else's room like that, who sees and takes whatever he likes, should we tolerate that? I let you be the judges. I ask God to grant us the grace of putting this to rights and to give Superiors the zeal and strength to enforce it, since it's a matter of very great importance for the good order and peace of mind of the Company.

"The third thing I didn't explain sufficiently has to do with the things we have personally, that we've brought to this house, bought with our own money, or received from our relatives, such as a small box, books, or pictures. Remember that what we have doesn't belong to us individually; we have only the use of it and must each be ready to give it up and to deprive ourselves of it, according to the will of the Superior. I know a Community in which every year the individuals make a list in writing of the things they have in their rooms, to be presented to the Superior for him to judge what's to be left or taken away.

"The fourth remark, which doesn't deal with possessions but with the use of certain things we might have, concerns only the Officers and Superiors. They must never allow any individual to

have something exceptional in his room, such as tapestries, paintings, etc., or to have special food, like capon or partridge, etc. at his meals, even though that's done in certain Communities in the sight, and with the knowledge, of the Superior and others. But, for the Company—the poor Company—nothing special should be permitted either in food or clothing! I make exception, as always, for the sick. Oh, the poor patients! For them, even the chalices of the Church should be sold. God has given me tender feelings in that regard, and I ask Him to give this spirit to the Company. So then, let no one have anything exceptional.

“ ‘But,’ you will say, ‘we’ve seen just the contrary with M. Étienne, who had his own books.’ I reply, first of all, that the vow hadn’t yet been explained by the Pope; we received the Brief only a short time ago. How long ago? Two or three months. I can testify that, whenever he received any money, he always asked permission to buy books and never gave any of them to others until after he had asked the permission.

“So then, never allow anything special; that might make the other men unhappy, give rise to jealousy and envy, and cause charity to be lost, for it’s equality that preserves the charity and friendship we should have for one another.

“ ‘But, if a person of rank should come to this house to join the Company, shouldn’t he be allowed to have a tapestry and some paintings in his room, and always something special in the refectory?’ No, God preserve us from that! Don’t we say to them when they arrive, ‘Don’t think about having a tapestry, etc.? Test yourself to see if you can be content with ordinary food and with following the Community in everything.’ If we did otherwise, we’d not only cause a breach in the Community but would be ruining it entirely. I thank God that we’ve acted in this way with regard to men like that who have presented themselves to the Company, and for the grace He has given them of being so disposed.

“It’s almost nine o’clock, too late to get into our topic; it’s better to stop here.

“O Savior of the world, when the Company was in its infancy, composed at the time of only three or four men, You inspired it with

the thought of going to Montmartre<sup>4</sup> (this wretched man who's speaking to you wasn't well at the time) to commend itself to God, through the intercession of the holy martyrs, to take on this practice of poverty, observed so well at that time and since then by a large part of the Community. O Savior of my soul, grant us the grace of wanting and possessing only You. Doesn't the entire clergy say, *Dominus pars haereditatis meae et calicis mei*,<sup>5</sup> and aren't we members of the clergy? As Christians by Baptism, haven't we renounced the pomps and vanities of the world, which, in the words of the holy Doctors, are nothing other than earthly possessions?

"Not long ago, the Coadjutor Bishop of Cahors<sup>6</sup> did me the honor of telling me how consoled he was when he was at a ceremony at which the priests of Saint-Sulpice, the seminary, and the priests of the parish were present.<sup>7</sup> After a Solemn High Mass sung in their private chapel, and after they had listened to a sermon, they came, one after another, dressed in surplices, and said devoutly those words, *Dominus pars haereditatis meae et calicis mei*. He was so deeply touched by it that he was speechless. In the early days, when people came into the Church, they left all their possessions, keeping nothing for themselves, and they said, *Dominus pars haereditatis meae et calicis mei*. May His Divine Majesty grant us the grace of cherishing this state of poverty, of observing exactly the Rule that speaks of it to us, and of doing all we can to be an example to posterity in regard to the principle of this holy virtue, so dear to Our Lord, and which He will reward so abundantly!"

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<sup>4</sup>At the time of Saint Vincent there was an abbey of Benedictine nuns near the site of the third-century martyrdom of Saint Denis, first Bishop of Paris.

<sup>5</sup>*The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and my cup.* Cf. Ps 16:5. (NAB)

<sup>6</sup>Nicolas Sevin, Bishop of Sarlat, appointed by Alain de Solminihac as his Coadjutor and successor in the See of Cahors.

<sup>7</sup>November 21, feast of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

**221. - CHASTITY**  
(Common Rules, Chap. IV)

[December 12, 1659]

“My dear confreres, last Friday all I did was to finish what I had omitted in the preceding conference on poverty, and although we read the entire fourth chapter, which is on chastity, we didn’t speak about it, for lack of time. It’s appropriate to do it this evening; and to make the points more present to our minds, we should read them again:

*1. Our Savior showed clearly how highly He rated chastity, and how anxious He was to get people to accept it, by the fact that He wanted to be born of an Immaculate Virgin through the intervention of the Holy Spirit, outside the normal course of nature. Christ allowed himself to be falsely accused of the most appalling charges, following His wish to be overwhelmed with disgrace. Yet He loathed unchastity so much that we never read of His having been in even the slightest way suspected of it, much less accused of it, even by His most determined opponents. For this reason it is very important for the Congregation to be strongly determined to possess this virtue. And we must always and everywhere uphold it in a clear and decisive way. This should be more obviously our practice since mission ministry almost all the time brings us into contact with lay men and women. Everyone, therefore, should be careful to take advantage to the best of his ability of every safeguard and precaution for keeping this chastity of body and mind intact.*

*2. In order to succeed in this, with the help of God, we should be very careful to control internal and external senses. We are never to speak to women in a one-to-one situation in unbecoming circumstances of either time or place. When speaking or writing to them we should completely avoid using any words, even spiritual terminology, which smack of affectionate feelings toward them. When*

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**Conference 221.** - Manuscript of Conferences. No date appears on the manuscript of this conference; the choice of December 12, 1659, has been explained in the citation of Conference 216.

hearing their confessions, or when speaking to them outside of confession, we should not go too close to them nor take our chastity for granted.

3. And since intemperance is, so to speak, the nursing mother of unchastity, each one should be moderate with regard to eating. We should, as far as possible, use ordinary food, and wine diluted with plenty of water.

4. Moreover, each of us needs to convince himself that it is not enough for Missioners to have reached an above-average level in this virtue. We must also try with every means available to prevent anyone from having even the slightest suspicion of the opposite vice in any member of our Community. The mere suspicion of this, even though completely unfounded, would do more damage to the Congregation and its good work than the false accusation of any other wrongdoing, especially since it would result in our missions doing little or no good. Because of this we should use not merely every available ordinary means but even exceptional ones where necessary to prevent or remove this evil. For example, we should at times withdraw from some works, which in other respects are permissible and even good and holy, when in the judgment of the Superior or Director they seem to give reason for fearing such suspicion.

5. And since a lazy life is the enemy of virtues, especially of chastity, each of us is to avoid being idle and should always make good use of his time.

“Or sus, let’s put on our birettas. We have to speak to you about the virtue of chastity. We’re going to divide our talk into three parts, as usual: first, we’ll give, with a few additions, the motives laid down in the Rules, which oblige us to have a great appreciation for the practice of the virtue of chastity; in the second point, we’ll say what the virtue of chastity is, and the principal ways we have to practice it; in the third point, we’ll give the means.

“As to the motives, *O Sauveur!* Who doesn’t know them? Is there any child who doesn’t learn from his father and mother that it’s a sin, and a serious sin, to commit any impure actions? *O Savior,* You who know the motives obliging us to practice this virtue, not



only with regard to exterior actions, but also with regard to interior purity, impress them deeply on our minds so that we may practice this virtue exactly! The practice of chastity, as you know, is commanded by God, just as the vice contrary to this virtue is forbidden: ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ It’s not necessary to dwell on something that speaks for itself.

“Our Rule gives as the first motive the great disaffection Our Lord had for anything contrary to chastity, so much so that, before becoming man, He didn’t want this to happen in the ordinary manner, but in an extraordinary way, by means of the Holy Spirit. His mother remained a virgin and was always chaste, and the Holy Spirit worked this great wonder.

“*O Seigneur!* It truly must be said that there’s something great in this virtue, since the Saint of Saints breached the order of nature to be conceived and born in a way that showed the great importance He was giving to chastity!

“A second reason, no less important, and likewise mentioned in the Rule, is that, during the thirty years Our Lord lived with His father and mother in a family, working in their shop (which caused people to say, *Nonne hic est faber et fabri filius?*<sup>1</sup>) and after leaving them to preach His Gospel, with such success that everyone, men and women, followed Him, and even though He conversed with some of them, and His greatest enemies calumniated Him and made a thousand reproaches and accusations against Him, calling Him a seducer, a drunkard, a man possessed by the devil, He never allowed them to reproach Him with anything contrary to chastity.

“What an important motive! O Savior, it’s to You we turn to obtain such a rare virtue as this. Nature doesn’t go that far; on the contrary, it’s nature that stirs up in us a thousand and one temptations, images, and imaginations contrary to this virtue. O Lord, please grant us the grace, then, that neither the Company in general nor any of its members in particular, near or far, may ever fall into the contrary vice.

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<sup>1</sup>*Is not this the carpenter and the carpenter’s son?* Cf. Mt 13:55; Mk 6:3. (NAB)

“Our Lord goes beyond that, saying that anyone who doesn’t leave his wife isn’t worthy of Him, so greatly was He attached to this virtue. Therefore, the Apostles and disciples who had wives left them to follow Him, and the women left their husbands. Several of the first Christian men did the same and no longer had any marital relations with their wives; but, not long after that, the devil, the enemy of this virtue, saw to it that the men didn’t keep this resolution very long, for intimacy with others and the great weakness of human nature caused some to revert to actions contrary to this virtue. Several withdrew to the deserts of Lybia and Egypt, driven by the fear of not being able to live such perfect chastity in the world. In this way, the deserts were filled with people who practiced this virtue exactly. Since that time, monasteries have been established to allow people to tear themselves away from the sins and pleasures of the world and to live in chastity. O Messieurs, let’s all lift our hearts to God, beginning right now, to ask Him and to obtain from Him that this poor Little Company may not be contaminated in its body and in its members. What do I mean by that? I mean for the Company in general and for each individual. We go everywhere, preaching chastity and inculcating this in the people. How important it is, then, for us to be very chaste ourselves!

“But, in what does this virtue consist? Little children are taught by their parents how despicable is the sin contrary to this virtue. How beautiful, then, is the virtue! There are two or three kinds of chastity: conjugal chastity, which moderates the affections of sexual pleasure, and the chastity that eliminates all affections from our hearts. The latter is a very lofty virtue; it leads those who practice it to live very purely. Conjugal chastity doesn’t pertain to us, since it consists in moderating sexual pleasure, and we shouldn’t take any pleasure in that. So then, it’s the other kind of which we have to speak. It requires us to tear from our hearts any inclination to acts of impurity, evil attachments, and so forth; I won’t say any more, or go into detail, about particular acts. Oh, how rare this virtue is, and how the devil strives to make us lose it! God is sometimes pleased to try holy souls by allowing the devil to tempt them with bad thoughts and imaginations, and nasty representations, even in

holy things. I knew a religious soul who had temptations to impurity and temptations of the flesh only at the time of Holy Communion; never, outside of that, was she tempted, and never did she go to Communion without them. See that malice of the devil in using the holiest things to tempt us to impurity. So, this virtue consists in eliminating inclinations to impurity from our hearts—not only from fantasy and imagination, but from our hearts. O Lord, help us to wrench from our hearts these cursed attachments to impurity, and from our memory the remembrance of persons we've known too familiarly, and with whom we've perhaps committed some bad action in the past! O God, tear this remembrance from our hearts!

“There's purity of body and purity of mind. The person who has purity of body doesn't necessarily have chastity; it's purity of mind that animates this virtue and gives it its perfection, even its essence, and banishes all bad thoughts from our mind, our memory, and our imagination. Our entire practice consists in that: to banish from our hearts, etc., if we want to have the chastity the Rule asks of us, recalling that, in coming into the world, Our Lord attached so much importance to it that he wanted to change the nature of things and to be born of a virgin. It's because of this virtue that it's said that virgins will accompany the Lamb everywhere and will sing new canticles. Oh, how the Company in general and each of its members in particular must have great respect for this virtue and do everything possible to possess it and to have it more and more perfectly!

“But what will help us to do that? Control over our senses; that's stated in the Rule. Control over our sight. O dangerous sight! How wrong it is to allow our eyes to wander here and there over all sorts of things! Because David, that holy man, looked at a woman, he fell into the sin contrary to chastity and did something even worse, for to that one sin he added another, namely, murder; you know that story.

“Hearing, control over our hearing. You, who have heard confessions in the country and even in the city, know that many persons learn what impurity is by seeing and hearing those itinerant entertainers, those clowns who depict disgraceful actions and hold wicked conversations. Oh, how dangerous that is!

“So then, control over the senses: of sight; I repeat, of sight, yes, of sight, of hearing, and so on for the other exterior senses, including that of touch; master our senses as much as we can. Sight, hearing, touch.

“Another means is never to be alone with a person of the opposite sex in unsuitable times and places (this is stated in the Rule) because it’s in such times and places that the devil arouses sexual desire. We’re men like others, so, be careful! I can’t help mentioning here the serious fault those commit who speak with a woman or an unmarried girl alone in our little parlor. Oh, how it grieved me to learn that someone was there, choosing its darkest part, with the person sitting across from him in more light, and staying there for two or three hours! These are the beginnings of something very dangerous!

“So then, I ask the Company to be careful about that. When you have to speak to a woman in that little parlor, if you don’t know her and don’t have much to say to her, you should ask her to come out, remain standing while you talk out in the open, and cut the conversation short. Because of their position, several men are obliged to converse with women, but I ask them to do so in that way, without sitting close to them—unless they’re persons of rank and you have to spend a long time with them because of necessary business. Alas! How I have failed in this, and still fail in it only too often! God knows, however, the pain I experience when I’m obliged to speak with women in this way. Be that as it may, the Rule tells us never to speak one-on-one with a woman. Consequently, I exhort the person in the Company (for there is one, and I know of only one who’s subject to this failing) to work on that and to make it his practice; or, if he wishes, to abstain, as a form of penance, from such conversations with women. God has sometimes granted me the grace of asking them to come out of that little parlor or office and, once they’re outside, I speak with them and keep the conversation short.

“Another great danger to chastity is overeating, eating fine foods and finding a way to get them. Oh, how harmful that is, but especially drinking too much wine, without adding any water. Oh, why shouldn’t I make a fuss over that because of the problems that have

arisen in the Company through the fault of those who have gone to excess in it! They're no longer with us, thank God, but we really have to give ourselves to His Divine Majesty not to drink wine any more, or at least to water it well.

"Would you like me to tell you what the Bishop of Cahors,<sup>2</sup> that holy man, that great servant of God, did so as not to drink wine any longer—for all he drinks now is water? He doesn't have dinner, but in the evening, after his visits, sermons, and other ministries in his pastoral and episcopal responsibility, he eats a little bread, some vegetables, and some fruit, and drinks a glass of water, and that's all. He's been doing this for about thirty years, and is now around seventy years of age. Here's what he did, according to what he did me the honor of telling me. Even though he drank wine in the beginning like everyone else, he began to add half a glass of water to it, then two-thirds, then he put just a little wine in a lot of water. Little by little he lessened the amount of wine in that way, so that his drink was nothing but reddened water; by having become indifferent to the taste of wine and by drinking so little that it wasn't worth mentioning, he decided not to drink any wine at all and has been very exact to that.

"Another means for preserving chastity is to avoid laziness, which is, in itself, a great evil. Oh! How carefully we should avoid that, especially persons who, by their behavior, have become useless for ministry, and also those who are in ministry; for, take my word, when the devil finds a lazy person, it's very easy for him to torment him and to tempt him strongly to the vice contrary to chastity! So, my dear confreres, see that you're always busy, and then, if the devil tempts you, at least the work will greatly lessen the strength of his temptation.

"Yet another means—but this pertains to confessors—is not to get too close to female penitents, for, as you see and know better than I, each thing gives off its own emanations. Just as that lighted lamp sends out its rays and light, so do the head, the face, and the clothing of those penitents give off certain emanations, which, mixing with

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<sup>2</sup>Alain de Solminihac.

those coming from the confessors, spark the temptation and, if we're not very careful, wreak distressing havoc. So then, I exhort the Company not to get too close to female penitents, but rather to keep them at a distance. If some men acted otherwise because they're hard of hearing, *O Sauveur*, let them realize that this wasn't the thing to do. I ask the confessors to be very attentive to that and to set things straight.

“What may also be very harmful to us is to ask too many questions when we're explaining the sixth Commandment, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ We should ask the penitent only what's necessary. Confessors must know what's necessary to ask penitents about this Commandment; we don't have time to mention it here; it would be a good thing for the confessors to meet here one of these days to discuss that. Meanwhile, let's give ourselves to God not to ask any question in confession about this Commandment except what's necessary; for, if we ignore this, the devil won't fail to subject us to serious temptations against this virtue, and the image of what was asked or replied will often come back to mind, arouse sexual desire and wreak terrible havoc.

“Another means for preserving chastity is to avoid conversation with nuns, even the most reformed of them. Before the foundation of the Company, the Bishop of Geneva,<sup>3</sup> whom we had the honor of knowing and with whom we had the honor of conversing, obliged us to take on responsibility for the Visitation Nuns, so we're bound to do this; it's a sacred pledge, what can we do about that? But, Messieurs, you must be aware that those conversations are a diabolical love potion, for we are men, and men like others. We get involved in this under the pretext of devotion; we always begin that way, and God knows how it often ends! It's contrary to the purpose of our Institute, which is to serve the poor people of the rural areas. Now, we can't serve two masters. So then, I recommend that the Company never accept any ministry that might oblige it to direct, guide, and converse with nuns. Speaking of this, I can tell you that, at the beginning of the Company, we gave a mission in a village or

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<sup>3</sup>Saint Francis de Sales.

hamlet where there were some nuns. They asked us to give them a few sermons and hear their general confession, since we were hearing the confessions of the good people, which we did. Good M. de la Salle was there. After his return here, those good nuns wrote to him several times. As soon as he noticed that there was some attachment in that, M. de la Salle, who was a man with common sense, replied to them that they should be satisfied with what he had written to them and even said to them when he was in that place, and that he had nothing more to say or to write to them. So, we have to avoid all that as a snare of Satan.

“Yet another means is not to write sentimental thoughts; this adds fuel to the fire, commits us to affections (and God knows what kinds of affections), requires that the other give replies also filled with sentimental thoughts—even more so, for we don’t want to be outdone. For the love of God, Messieurs, I recommend that we refrain from all contacts with women, both personally and in writing. I think there are still one or two of those letters here in this house, but what letters they are! Shall I read them? Better that I keep silent! No harm came to the man in this house to whom they were addressed. Oh, but how close he came!

“Yet another means is to have no devotees. ‘But Our Lord certainly had them; he conversed and visited with them; the Apostles had some, too, and so many holy persons as well.’ Nevertheless, how risky that is! In places where there are any of those followers who praise, for his fine guidance, the confessor to whom they open their heart and conscience, we really have to fear for the Company. Oh, what an attachment! Woe to the Company if it allows such persons in those places! What great danger they’re in! I know a place where women are so affectionate toward their confessor that I’ll say nothing more.

“What should be done about that? (1) Have a firm command of our senses; (2) speak to these devout women only in confession, not even standing in church and never—I mean never—in their homes or in our house. Recommend that they tell you in confession whatever they have to say to you, or will have to say to you, and never anything apart from that. Oh, would that God might be pleased to grant us the grace of holding fast, and of never speaking to them standing

in the church, at the door, or in their homes! Those are the means of preserving chastity in the Company. What should we not hope from the Company, here and elsewhere, in France and in foreign countries, if it uses such precautions! Otherwise, God might turn His indulgent countenance on other persons who would render Him much greater service and glory in the missions.

“*Or sus*, Messieurs, what shall we do to keep this Rule? The means that have just been proposed will be of little use if they’re not animated by the Spirit of God. We must, then, ask Our Lord very earnestly for it in our prayers, and have a special intention to give ourselves earnestly to His Divine Majesty that we may be preserved and grow more holy in this virtue and keep ourselves very far removed from the contrary vices. If we do that and work here to acquire in this way the preservation and development of this virtue, that will be extended everywhere. Thus, the Company will become ever more pleasing to God, who will have only eyes of indulgence for it and new and abundant graces to share with it. May His Divine Majesty grant that it may be so!”

**222. - OBEDIENCE**  
(Common Rules, Chap. V, Art. 1-3)

[December 19, 1659]

“My dear confreres, we’re at the fifth chapter of our Rules, which is on holy obedience.

*1. Our Lord Jesus Christ taught us obedience by word and example. He wished to be submissive to the Most Blessed Virgin, Saint Joseph, and other people in positions of authority, whether good or disagreeable. For this reason we should be completely obedient to every one of our Superiors, seeing the Lord in them and them in the Lord. In the first place we should faithfully and sincerely reverence and obey our Holy Father the Pope. We should*

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Conference 222. - Manuscript of Conferences. This conference is undated; the choice of December 19, 1659, has been explained in the citation of Conference 216.



*also humbly and consistently obey the most reverend Bishops of the dioceses where the Congregation has houses. Furthermore we should not take on anything in parish churches without the approval of the parish priests.*

2. *Every one of the confreres should also obey the Superior General promptly, without complaining, and unwaveringly in all matters not obviously sinful. This obedience is, to some extent, blind. It implies giving up our own opinion and wishes, not only with regard to what he specifically tells us but even with regard to his intention, since we believe that what he asks us to do is always for the best. We should always leave ourselves open to what he wants, like a file in the hands of a carpenter.*

3. *We are also to obey, in the same way, other Superiors, whether local or provincial, as well as lesser office-holders. Each one should also try to answer the call of the bell as Christ's voice, going so far as even to leave a letter unfinished as soon as the bell starts ringing.*

“I think that’s enough reading for this evening; if we have time, we’ll proceed further. This evening’s conference, my dear confreres, is on obedience. We’re going to divide what we have to say into two or three points. In the first, we’ll state our reasons for giving ourselves to God that He may be pleased to fill us with this virtue of obedience; in the second, we’ll explain what this virtue of obedience is and in what it consists; in the third, we’ll mention the kinds of this virtue, if we have time.

“Regarding the first reason we have for giving ourselves to God that He may give us this virtue of obedience, that’s stated in the Rule, namely, the example the Son of God gave us and continued to give during His entire life, which was simply a sequence of obedience. It must be said that there’s something great and divine in this virtue, since Our Lord loved it so much from His birth to His death and performed all the actions of His life through obedience. He obeyed God His Father, who willed that He become man; He obeyed His mother and His putative father Saint Joseph, *et erat subditus illis*,<sup>1</sup> and all those who were in authority, both good and

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<sup>1</sup>*And he was obedient to them.* Cf. Lk 2:51. (NAB)

bad, so that all the actions of His life were nothing but a sequence of obedience. He began His life in that way, *factus obediens usque ad mortem, mortem autem crucis*,<sup>2</sup> obedient unto death, and even to death on the Cross, and because of that—*propter quod*—His Father esteemed Him highly, exalted Him, and lifted Him up.

“O Savior, what, then, is this virtue of obedience? How excellent it is, since You have found it worthy of a God! Is there anything greater than to obey even to the ignoble death of the Cross? What’s left after that? What a picture we have in that, Messieurs, in that example of obedience, which Our Lord has given and shown us! What reasons can you expect after that—obedience unto death of God made man!

“If there were anything additional, it’s that Our Lord has said that ‘anyone who does not renounce himself is unworthy of Him and of being His disciple.’<sup>3</sup> What will we be if we’re not disciples of Our Lord? And yet, we can’t be so if we don’t renounce ourselves. And, as we can’t part with ourselves, or our soul, or our body (they’re held fast by a bond that’s too tight for us to be able to part with them), in the thinking of the Fathers, to renounce ourselves is to give up our own judgment and will. O my Savior, those, and only those, who renounce themselves, are the ones You take and accept to follow You in this life in order to glorify them in heaven above. So then, I can’t be a disciple of Jesus Christ unless I renounce myself, my judgment, and my own will. I have to do this; I have to ask it of God, for I need His grace, without which I couldn’t do it; it’s repugnant to nature; I can’t do it on my own, even though I have to do my part in it. For this, we have to mortify ourselves, otherwise, we can’t be disciples of Jesus Christ. Let’s do what Saint John Chrysostom did, who used to give a sparkle to things when he was repeating something important. We have to go through this, namely, that, to be truly a disciple of Our Lord, we must renounce ourselves, practice obedience, and live in the submission of a priest, or of a Brother of the Mission. Is that really true, Lord? Do we think about that? To obey, we need the grace of God; God has to be in-

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<sup>2</sup>*Becoming obedient even to death, even death on a cross.* Cf. Phil 2.8. (NAB)

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Lk 14:33. (NAB)

volved in it. O Lord, we can't go on, nor do we want to follow our own will; we've renounced that by our vows, and the Fathers say that even Christians have renounced it by Baptism. So then, we have to renounce our own judgment. O Lord, please grant us that grace.

“Another motive that can be added to that, even though the first is more than sufficient, is that we can't disobey without committing a more or less grave sin, depending on how serious the disobedience is, especially with regard to things that are in the Rule, given that it's based on Holy Scripture and the Commandments of God. And if the disobedience has any repercussions, and certain persons consequently disobey, there is sin, and mortal sin, when this leads to scandal and, above all, if we disobey in a certain spirit of contempt. *O Sauveur!* This is usually the case when we do it with some determination and boldness, likewise when the Superior recommends the observance of a practice that's obligatory, or uses the words, 'I order you to do that,' and also, 'in virtue of obedience.' I witnessed this especially in something that was recommended here a few days ago;<sup>4</sup> you know what I'm talking about, namely, the obligation the Company has to pray the Divine Office in common. There are some who still aren't doing it. That gives us cause to tremble. The Rule states that; we've recommended it; it's the practice of the Company in the other houses; it's the way good priests pray it, and they do so in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. When you see those priests who come here on Tuesdays for the conference saying it devoutly in church, two by two, it's very edifying. I recall that, when the Prince de Conti<sup>5</sup> came here some time ago, he said to

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<sup>4</sup>The preceding September 26.

<sup>5</sup>Armand de Bourbon, Prince de Conti, brother of the Grand Condé, was born in Paris on October 11, 1629, and became the head of the Conti house, a cadet branch of the house of Bourbon-Condé. His father, who had earmarked him for the priesthood, had conferred on him a large number of abbeys, including Saint-Denis, Cluny, Lérins, and Molesme, but the military attracted him more than the Church. His passion for the Duchesse de Longueville drew him into the intrigues of the Fronde. After having him locked up in the prison of Vincennes, Cardinal Mazarin gave him his niece, Anna Maria Martinozzi, in marriage. The Prince became Governor of Guyenne (1654) and General of the armies in Catalonia, where he captured several cities. He was also Grand Master of the King's household and Governor of Languedoc (1660). Before his death on February 21, 1666, his virtuous wife was able to bring him back to God. Two hours of his day were devoted to prayer. A friend of Saint Vincent, he offered his services to him more than once and was present at his funeral.

the people with him, 'I have to say some prayers, which I do, as far as I can, in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament; so I'm going to the church.' Let's leave things at that.

"If the spirit of obedience is not present in the Company, what will it become? Won't it be a Tower of Babel, in constant disorder? Look at those Communities where there's no obedience; everything is in disorder. I admire the obedience of several in the Company; it's marvelous both here in this house and elsewhere; several men write to me for the slightest thing they have to do, 'What shall I do in this and in that? How shall I act in such or such a circumstance in which passion has a grip on me?' O Savior, forgive us if, up to now, we have committed many faults against obedience! Grant us, Lord, the grace to correct ourselves.

"In what does this virtue consist? Theologians say that it's in a disposition of doing what those to whom we are subject wish. You see, Messieurs, God is the God of virtues: *Deus virtutum*; virtue must have its principle and root in the interior; for, just as what appears in the person is not the person, what obedience appears to be is not always the virtue of obedience; for, it consists in a continual disposition to obey and to renounce our own judgment. In line with this disposition, we go straight to where God wishes, and that's where we should aim in order to be perfectly obedient. Let's ask God to give us this spirit of obedience. A Superior who gives orders for something may be wrong. Alas! He's neither infallible nor sinless; but the person who obeys, provided that it not be in a thing that's obviously a sin, as it would be to do something dishonest and wicked—no, never that; rather to die—that person is assured of doing God's Will, and won't be mistaken; for God can't deceive us. And how could Our Lord have commanded the people to obey the Scribes and Pharisees and the priests of the Old Law, corrupt men for the most part, to whom Our Lord gives great and continued reproaches! Yet he said to the people, 'Obey them, do whatever they tell you, but don't do what they do.' And how could He himself have obeyed them if He would have been doing something wrong, or rather, if He hadn't known that obeying corrupt and evil persons was to practice great acts of virtue! They, however, had authority

and were in office; He had to obey them because of this rule: *Qui vos audit me audit, qui vos spernit me spernit*.<sup>6</sup> They had the direction of souls. Our Lord, then, was in the right, Messieurs, when He said, *Qui vos audit me audit, qui vos spernit me spernit*. Can we call this into question? Shall we not ground ourselves, more than ever, in the practice of this virtue? We have taken the vow to live always in submission and dependence by practicing holy obedience. Think about what that means.

“But to whom do we owe obedience? The Rule begins with Our Holy Father the Pope; he is the common father of all Christians, the visible head of the Church, the Vicar of Jesus Christ, the successor of Saint Peter; we owe him obedience, we who are in the world to instruct the people in the obedience they, as well as we, should have for this universal shepherd of our souls. It’s up to us to show them the example of this. Therefore, let’s give ourselves to God to obey Him faithfully, and receive gladly what will come from Him. It’s to him, in the person of the saint to whom Our Lord said, ‘Peter, feed my lambs, feed my sheep,’<sup>7</sup> that this same Savior has given the keys of His Church. He is, as it were, another species of man, so far is he above others. Consequently, we must consider him in Our Lord, and Our Lord in him.

“We owe obedience to the Bishops. According to certain persons, the authority of the Pope is shared with them, and according to others, they have the authority from Jesus Christ himself. Let’s leave that. When we received priesthood, we priests promised obedience to them, not only to them and to their successors but also to the Prelates in the dioceses in which we’ll have to live and work, so that we have always felt, and still do, that we should consider ourselves like those servants of the Gospel to whom the father of the family says, ‘Come,’ and they come; ‘Go,’ and they go. I’ve always been committed to obeying their orders. In fact, we’re subject to them and dependent on them with regard to preaching, catechizing, hearing confessions, and administering the Sacraments during missions, although they most willingly have left to

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<sup>6</sup>*He who hears you, hears me; he who despises you, despises me.* Cf. Lk 10:16. (NAB)

<sup>7</sup>Cf. Jn 21:15-17. (NAB)

the Company the regulations and orders for the internal discipline of Rule. Our Holy Father expressed this in his Brief, without our getting involved in it, saying that our men who are sent to give missions or to direct seminaries will be subject to the Ordinaries, that is, to the Bishops. He issued this Brief after consulting the Cardinals of the Congregation for the explanation of the Council of Trent. We owe them obedience as we owe it to God. I ask those who will be sent to their dioceses to act in this way and to be exact in obeying them.

“That’s how it is with regard to obedience to Bishops. Isn’t it just as reasonable with regard to Pastors? *Quoi!* Would it be right for an outsider to do anything in their parish without their consent? That would be a great disorder. From the very beginning and to this day, the Company has received from God the grace of paying them great deference and of doing nothing in their domain without their consent.

“That leaves obedience to the Superior. O wretched man that I am! To obey me who am disobedient to God, to the holy Church, to my father and mother from my childhood! And nearly my whole life has been nothing but disobedience! Alas, Messieurs! To whom are you rendering obedience? To the person who, like those Scribes and Pharisees about whom I was speaking to you a short time ago, is filled with vices and sins. But that’s what will make your obedience more meritorious. I was just thinking about that again, and I remember that when I was a little boy, as my father used to take me with him into town, I was ashamed to go with him and to acknowledge him as my father because he was shabbily dressed and a little lame. O wretched man that I am! How disobedient I have been! I ask pardon of God; I also ask your pardon, and that of the whole Company, for all the scandal I have given you, and I beg you to pray for me, that God will pardon me and will always give me heartfelt regret for this.

“*Or sus*, let’s stand up, it’s almost nine o’clock; let’s not start another topic. Now, Our Lord has shown such a beautiful example of obedience that He himself says, *Quae placita sunt ei facio semper*,<sup>8</sup> yes, *facio semper*. And that obedience he rendered to God His

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<sup>8</sup>*I always do what is pleasing to him.* Cf. Jn 8:29. (NAB)

Father not only lasted while He was on earth; He has continued it in His glory in heaven, obedient to priests, even sinful ones, who raise Him and lower Him in the Eucharist, as they please. Oh, what obedience, which persists even until after death! O Lord, You who have taken from all eternity the resolution to obey, grant us the grace of taking it now! Grant us the grace of obeying the Rules and the orders of our Superiors, their will signified in word or even by signs, as the Fathers demand, who go so far as to say that we should obey their intentions. But, above all, Lord, please grant us the grace of being exact in carrying out the obedience we have vowed, of really going forward in being devoted to this virtue! That, Messieurs, is what we'll earnestly ask of God, and we'll give ourselves to His Divine Majesty to obtain this grace. *O Seigneur!* What will the Company of the Mission be like, if it is truly obedient to the Pope, to the Bishops, to Pastors, and to its Superiors! How many blessings should it not expect from His Divine Majesty! May God grant us this grace!"

**223. - REPETITION OF PRAYER**

(Now Vol. XI, 82a.)

**224. - RETREAT MINISTRY**

(Now Vol. XI, 107a.)

## SUPPLEMENT

### 1. - SAINT JANE FRANCES DE CHANTAL <sup>1</sup> TO SAINT VINCENT <sup>2</sup>

[Orleans, End of May 1628]

*My Reverend and very dear Father,*

*May the most Holy Spirit of our good God fill you with His sacred gifts!*

*I want to tell you how sorry I was to leave without saying a last good-bye to you. But, my very dear Father, the most pure and holy union God has made of our spirits, although I am unworthy of this, makes up for these small exterior failings. I also think it gives us a certain sweetness and consolation in the belief that this separation is simply one of physical presence and that, by the Divine Mercy, we shall see each other eternally in that blessed company of saints to which you aspire as directly as possible, and I with desires only, since I do not yet have the authentic virtues which, by the grace of God, elevate us to this happiness. Pray, my dear Father, that His Goodness will give them to me, and I assure you that I will never forget you before Him—I mean in a special place.*

*I cannot tell you how happy I am to know that my very dear Sister <sup>3</sup> is satisfied with my dear older daughter, as you also are, my*

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**Supplement 1.** - Visitation of Moncalieri (Italy), copy. Letter published in *Sainte Jeanne de Chantal, Correspondance*, Paris, Cerf, Vol. III, 1989, pp. 360-61. This letter probably belongs in Vol. I, after no. 24.

<sup>1</sup>Jane Frances Frémiot de Chantal (cf. **XI**, 103, n. 3).

<sup>2</sup>Saint Vincent was the Superior of the two Visitation monasteries of Paris.

<sup>3</sup>Hélène-Angélique Lhuillier. Superior of the First Monastery of Paris; Mother Favre was designated for the monastery in the Faubourg Saint-Jacques.

Hélène-Angélique Lhuillier, born in 1592, daughter of François, Seigneur d'Interville and Anne Brachet, Dame de Frouville. Married in 1608 to Thomas Gobelin, Seigneur du Val, Master Ordinary of the *Chambre des Comptes*, she was received into the Visitation convent in Paris on July 2, 1620, after her marriage was annulled, and on the advice of Saint Francis de Sales. Professed on February 12, 1622, she was elected Superior several times. Saint Vincent used to say that she was one of the holiest souls he had ever known. (Cf. *Sainte Jeanne-Françoise Frémyot de Chantal. Sa vie et ses oeuvres* [8 vols., Paris: Plon, 1874-1880], Vol. V, p. 65, note.)



*very dear Father, and I am confident that the better she is known, the more she will be loved, and that you will find in her what I told you about her and much more.*

*It is my total desire that, in serving God, we might give satisfaction to everyone, especially to those to whom we are most indebted, as we are to that dear, virtuous foundress,<sup>4</sup> who has such affection and kindness for us. After God, you are the primary cause of all this, my very dear Father. Our good Sister the Superioress gives me evidence of all that in her letters and attests to the special affection and satisfaction of both you and her. May God be glorified for everything and may He pour out His blessings ever more generously on your dear soul, my very dear Father.*

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He put her in contact with Commander de Sillery in the hope that she would finish the work of bringing him back to God. Mother Lhuillier died on March 25, 1655, in the Chaillot monastery, where she was the first Superior. Her name is often mentioned in the biography of her sister: *R.P. Salinis, Madame de Villeneuve* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1918). (Cf. manuscript life of Mother Hélène-Angélique Lhuillier in the Archives of the Daughters of the Cross of Tréguier.)

Marie-Jacqueline Favre was “the first religious, the second professed, and the second Mother” of the Visitation (cf. *Année Sainte*, Vol. VI, p. 346). Her biography was written by Mother François-Madeleine de Chaugy, *Vies des premières Religieuses de la Visitation Sainte-Marie* (2 vols., Paris: Julien Lanier et Cie, 1852), Vol. I, pp. 3-120. She was born in Chambéry in April 1592, the daughter of Benoîte Favre and Antoine Favre, President of the Council of the Genevans, then Chief Justice in the Senate of Savoy. One of the two companions of the Baronne de Chantal at the time of the foundation of the Visitation on June 6, 1610, she was successively elected Superior of the First Monastery of Lyons (1615), of Montferrand (1620), of Dijon (1622 and 1625), of the Second Monastery of Paris (1628), and of Chambéry (1635). She founded the Visitation of Bourg-en-Bresse in 1627 and died in Chambéry, June 14, 1637, at the age of forty-five.

<sup>4</sup>Mme de Dampierre.

2. - VISITS TO THE CONFRATERNITIES <sup>1</sup> OF SANNOIS,  
FRANCONVILLE,  
HERBLAY, AND CONFLANS

Saturday at noon [May 1630]

*There has been no Procurator at the Charity of Sannois for a year. However, a good man has always written down the receipts and expenditures and is now willing to accept this responsibility by election.*

*The sisters<sup>2</sup> of the Charity have somewhat lost enthusiasm for their work. They have often given up visiting the sick on their day because the treasurer is so willing that she has the cooking done for those whose turn it is. Furthermore, she and the superior<sup>3</sup> have sometimes been satisfied with giving the sick some money. They have also given some to a few needy people and have often been careless about getting meat, and have made the sick do without eggs or something else that was to their liking.*

*The above-mentioned sisters, at least most of them, neglect Holy Communion for months. They need to be stirred up by some kind of exhortation when the Procurator is going to be elected.*

*The superior is satisfied with keeping the money box at her house and has given both keys to the (Treasurer). They are troubled about receiving the sick, and say that they do not need a Charity in Sannois which admits only those who have nothing at all, because there are very few or none at all of that sort, but many whose few possessions are so tied up that they would die of hunger before they could sell them and help themselves.*

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**Supplement 2.** - The first part of this report of Saint Louise to Saint Vincent, the section on Sannois, was published as no. 47a (I, 78), but Coste, in n. 1, identifies the place as Villepreux. The copyist states that Saint Louise wrote the report in her own hand. *Spiritual Writings*, pp. 705-06, contains the full text, continuing with the section dated "Thursday evening." For the sake of clarity, the entire report is given here. As stated above, it belongs in Vol. I, as a continuation of no. 47a.

<sup>1</sup>The Confraternities of Charity (XI, 94, n. 1)

<sup>2</sup>The Ladies of the Confraternities were often referred to as "sisters."

<sup>3</sup>The Lady in charge of the Confraternity.

*Thursday evening*

*In Franconville, the Procurator of the Charity has lent money to twenty-five day laborers and seemed disposed to continue this practice as the occasion might arise. The officers do not dare oppose him in this because he is very autocratic. The officers were dismissed a long time ago and another election took place; they continued, nevertheless, to function; it is to be feared that, by leaving them in any longer, it may be difficult to get rid of them and to put others in charge. They also sometimes give money to the patients, when their relatives want to take care of them, and they make them go without meat whenever it is a little hard to get it. Many sisters give free rein to spending money on their day, with no concern for the regulations.*

*Friday morning*

*In Herblay, the sisters of the Charity are still in their first fervor, yet have found it difficult to ask for alms, and are complaining that the curate had promised to have the charity to celebrate Holy Mass without a stipend. The Treasurer does not keep records. They have decided to carry a candle in the procession and at the burial of the sisters, to receive Holy Communion on the appointed days, and to observe faithfully the rest of the Rule.*

*Tuesday after Vespers*

*In Conflans, no Procurator was ever elected for the Charity, and, because of illness, the service of the sick stopped a long time ago. A clergyman takes the trouble to record expenses, but doesn't enter the revenues because, he said, there are too few of them. There is no more linen. There are about fifty livres in the treasury. On the advice of the Pastor, money has been given to the sick. The sisters often make the patients go without meat, but most of them are very faithful; all have promised to observe the regulations, and some of them have promised to provide linen.*

3. - JEAN-JACQUES OLIER <sup>1</sup> TO SAINT VINCENT  
AND THE MEMBERS OF THE PARIS CONFERENCE <sup>2</sup>

1636

*You are firmly fixed by Our Lord in the city of Paris like lights placed on a large candelabrum to enlighten all the clergy of France, so you must be particularly encouraged by the excellent results and spiritual profit that the group of priests who have shared successfully in your spirit is bringing about in the town of Puy. They give examples of virtue that delight the entire province: they catechize in several places in the town; they visit prisons and hospitals there frequently; and they are now ready to go to give missions in all the places that depend on the Chapter. I am embarrassed to see how zealous they are for me, as incapable as I am, to go to open their mission.*

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**Supplement 3.** - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. II, p. 265. This letter probably belongs in Vol. I, after no. 257.

<sup>1</sup>Jean-Jacques Olier (cf. **XI**, 350, n. 1).

<sup>2</sup>The members of the Tuesday Conferences.

4. - TO SAINT LOUISE DE MARILLAC <sup>1</sup>

[Undated]

The two letters I am returning to you, Mademoiselle, seem fine to me. I think you would do well to have Sister Barbe make her retreat. I will hear her confession, God willing, and will speak to her by the same means next Saturday. I am unable to do so any sooner because of my business affairs. I am, in the love Our Lord, Mademoiselle, your most humble servant.

VINCENT DEPAUL

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**Supplement 4.** - Archives of the Mission (Paris), original autograph letter, undated. The text was published with the spelling and presentation of the original in *Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission* (1961-62), p. 16, and published in *Mission et Charité* 19-20 (1970), p. 169. This letter probably belongs in Vol. II, after no. 458.

<sup>1</sup>Saint Louise de Marillac, Foundress, with Saint Vincent, of the Daughters of Charity, was born in Paris on August 12, 1591. Her father was Louis de Marillac, brother of the devout Michel de Marillac, Keeper of the Seals (1616-30), and half-brother of another Louis, Maréchal de France, renowned for his misfortunes and tragic death. Louise married Antoine Le Gras, secretary of Queen Marie de Médicis, on February 5, 1613, and they had one son, Michel. Antoine Le Gras died on December 21, 1625. The devout widow had implicit confidence in her spiritual director, Vincent de Paul, who employed her in his charitable works, eventually making her his collaborator in the creation and organization of the Confraternities of Charity. The life of Saint Louise, whom the Church beatified on May 9, 1920, was written by Gobillon (1676), the Comtesse de Richemont (1883), Comte de Lambel (n. d.), Monsignor Baunard (1898), and Emmanuel de Broglie (1911). Her letters and other writings were copied and published in part in the work entitled: *Louise de Marillac, veuve de M. Le Gras. Sa vie, ses vertus, son esprit* (4 vols., Bruges, 1886). More complete editions are *Sainte Louise de Marillac, Écrits spirituels* (Tours: Mame, 1983), ed. Sister Élisabeth Charpy, D.C., trans. by Sister Louise Sullivan, D.C., *Spiritual Writings of Louise de Marillac, Correspondence and Thoughts* (Brooklyn: New City Press, 1991), and Sister Élisabeth Charpy, D.C., ed., *La Compagnie des Filles de la Charité aux Origines. Documents* (Tours: Mame, 1989). Saint Louise was canonized on March 11, 1934, and on February 10, 1960, was named patroness of all who devote themselves to Christian social work. To the above bibliography should be added some of her more recent biographers: Alice, Lady Lovat, *Life of the Venerable Louise de Marillac (Mademoiselle Le Gras)* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1917); Monsignor Jean Calvet, *Louise de Marillac, a Portrait*, translated by G. F. Pullen (1959); and Joseph I. Dirvin, *Louise de Marillac* (1970).

5. - TO SISTER HÉLÈNE-ANGÉLIQUE LHUILLIER,  
AT THE VISITATION MONASTERY OF ROUEN

Saint-Lazare, October 7, 1643

My very dear Sister,

The grace of Our Lord be with you forever!

Yesterday I was at Sainte-Marie<sup>1</sup> when they opened your packet of letters; I thank God for the good health He is giving you and pray that He may continue to do so for many years to come. Oh, how good it is to put oneself at risk for the service of a Master who knows how to recognize in this way the services rendered to Him!

You will see from the enclosed letters what M. Destampes has written me; I replied to him that I felt he should not go to Rouen or that they should not begin to appeal to temporal powers until the spiritual ones of your meditations and your practices of virtue, and especially your acts of patience, have not merited and obtained from God the grace you need to do His work. And I praise God, my dear Sister, that your letter helps us to catch a glimpse of the dawn of that pleasant anticipation. Oh, what an example that will be to posterity and will honor God marvelously, if you can introduce the Spirit of Jesus Christ by Jesus Christ in that place, and how pleased with you our blessed Father<sup>2</sup> and our worthy Mother<sup>3</sup> will be for this! Then, too, you do not see either the devil's tricks or the venom he conceals under recourse to human means and worldly powers, unless the relatives of those good young women first begin to have recourse to them. *In nomine Domini*, at that time the Will of God will be made known to you as to how to make use of the same means. You know, my dear Sister, how many times we discussed together how irrelevant these means are to divine things, and the

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**Supplement 5.** - Archives of the Visitation, 68, avenue Denfert-Rochereau, Paris, handwritten copy, of which there is a photocopy in the Archives of the Mission, Paris. The original has been lost. This letter probably belongs in Vol. II, after no. 679.

<sup>1</sup>First Monastery of Paris.

<sup>2</sup>Francis de Sales.

<sup>3</sup>Jane Frances Frémiot de Chantal.

resolutions we have often taken to hold to those that Our Lord teaches us. Let us give ourselves again to God in a very particular way for this, my dear Sister; I am going to do it right away at Holy Mass, at which I will not fail to offer you to God, as, by His grace, I never fail to do, who am in His love, my dear Sister, your most humble and obedient servant.

VINCENT DEPAUL,  
i.s.C.M.

6. - CHARLES FAURE<sup>1</sup> TO SAINT VINCENT

*J[esus] h[ominum] S[alvator] <sup>2</sup>*

*Monsieur and very Reverend Father,*

*May J[esus] the S[avior] of m[en] be your life!*

*I am witness to the extraordinary zeal and care you have used to bring about the success of the Sainte-Geneviève Abbey affair, and, nevertheless, your same zeal, which you exhibit in all that regards*

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**Supplement 6.** - Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève, Paris, MS 3275, fol. 550, original autograph letter; photocopy in the Archives of the Mission, Paris. This letter probably belongs in Vol. II, after no. 710.

<sup>1</sup>Charles Faure, born in Louveciennes (Yvelines) on November 29, 1594, took the habit of the Canons Regular in the Abbey of Saint-Vincent de Senlis and was professed on March 1, 1615. The examples of laxity he saw did not lessen his progress in virtue. His reputation for holiness reached the King, who entrusted him with the delicate mission of establishing the reform of the Sainte-Geneviève Monastery in Paris. He was so successful that, to extend the reform, Cardinal de la Rochefoucauld gathered into one Congregation, under the name of Congregation of France, several houses of the Canons Regular spread throughout the Provinces of the kingdom, placed them under Sainte-Geneviève Abbey, and appointed Fr. Faure Vicar-General of the new Institute. Fr. Faure visited the establishments, laid down Rules for them, and founded some seminaries. The Congregation of France was canonically erected by a Bull of February 3, 1634. On October 17, the General Chapter elected Fr. Faure Superior General for a term of three years. He was reelected in 1637. Since the Constitutions did not allow a third term, he yielded his position in 1640 to Fr. Boulart, but retained such extensive powers for himself that his successor could do nothing without his advice. When Fr. Boulart's three-year term ended, Fr. Faure was once again placed at the head of the Congregation of France, but fell ill that same year and died on November 4, 1644. He left several works on asceticism. His attitude toward Saint Vincent was rather cold and reserved. Cf. Lallemand et Chartonnet, *La vie du Révérend Père Charles Faure, abbé de Sainte-Geneviève de Paris* [Paris: J. Anisson, 1698].

<sup>2</sup>*Jesus Savior of men.*

*God's honor, gives me good reason to ask you, for Our Lord's sake, to be [our] protector with Her Majesty and to make known to her how dangerous this charge imposed on you would be for our Congregation and the setbacks and difficulties it might cause. I am asking you this because I believe that, notwithstanding your humility, God has advanced you to the influence you have with Her Majesty to assist with your support the requests that, for God's sake, we make to her. We have known only too well the perseverance of your zeal, which makes me hope that, if [the] Queen's goodness were informed of the justness of what our Congregation desires, after the transfer of Cardinal de la Rochefoucauld,<sup>3</sup> Her Majesty would grant it, unless you know some secret reason that would make any plea and solicitation useless. Excuse my importunity; it seeks your help in an affair that God obliges us to pursue, and will give me and all our Congregation, of which I am only a weak instrument, another obligation to ask God to bless all your holy plans. I am, in His holy love, Monsieur and most Reverend Father, your very humble and obedient servant.*

*Ch. Faure*

*Nanterre, June 21, 1644*

*Addressed: Very Reverend Father Vincent, Superior General of the Mission, in Paris.*

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<sup>3</sup>Cardinal de la Rochefoucauld resigned his title and the possession of Sainte-Geneviève Abbey.

François de la Rochefoucauld was born in Paris on December 8, 1558. He became Bishop of Clermont on October 6, 1585, Cardinal in 1607, Bishop of Senlis in 1611, and Commendatory Abbot of Sainte-Geneviève Abbey in 1613. In 1622 he resigned his bishopric in order to dedicate himself entirely to the reform of the abbeys dependent on the Orders of Saint Benedict, Saint Augustine, and Saint Bernard. With that end in view, on April 8 he obtained from Pope Gregory XV special powers and the title of Apostolic Commissary. Supported by such men as Saint Vincent, Fr. Tarrisé, and Fr. Charles Faure, he caused order and discipline to flourish once again in the monasteries. The Cardinal died on February 14, 1645, with Saint Vincent at his side to prepare him to appear before God. He was buried at Sainte-Geneviève, but his heart was given to the Jesuit Fathers. (Cf. M. M. La Morinière, *Les vertus du vrai prélat représentées en la vie de l'Eminentissime cardinal de La Rochefoucauld* [Paris: Cramoisy, 1646], and Lallemand and Chartonnet, *op. cit.*)



7. - SAINT LOUISE TO SAINT VINCENT

[1646]<sup>1</sup>

*To help us to understand the state of Daughters of Charity and what disposition the Sisters need to enter the Company. To do this, they must have great respect for their state and for persons who are poor, since they are paid and maintained from their alms.*

*What they can do to prevent receiving in this life the reward for the service they render to poor persons for the little work they do compared to the work they left behind, and the honor they may receive.*

*Whether the Sisters may not be wrong in their urgent desire to serve poor persons, both in the parishes and in the Hôtel-Dieu, which sometimes makes them less willing to remain in the House.<sup>2</sup>*

*Whether the Sisters who remain in the House do not have the same merit as those who are serving poor persons directly.*

*The care and affection the Sisters should have for the Regulations of the House and for practicing them.*

*How the Sisters must respect and love one another, and how they should be willing to have their faults reported to the one who holds the place of Superioress for them. Whether each of them in turn should charitably inform the same Superioress of the faults they see her commit.*

*How each Sister should inform her Sister at once of her faults, and how the other should accept this.*

*The danger there is in Sisters telling each other of their dissatisfactions with one another, particularly by grumbling, even venting themselves on others for the reprimands given them.*

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**Supplement 7.** - Archives of the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity, original unsigned autograph note; photocopy in the Archives of the Mission, Paris. Text published in *Spiritual Writings*, 766-67. This letter probably belongs in Vol. II, after no. 778.

<sup>1</sup>It was in 1646, beginning on February 13, that Saint Vincent treated in the conferences the subjects proposed here by Saint Louise.

<sup>2</sup>The Motherhouse.

8. - TO SISTER JEANNE LEPEINTRE,<sup>1</sup> IN NANTES <sup>2</sup>

Paris, March 8, 1648

My dear Sister,

The grace of Our Lord be with you forever!

I am more consoled than I can say to hear of the good services you and our dear Sisters are rendering to God in the person of His poor. Oh, how happy you will be, when our works will be considered on that great day, to be able to reply, “Yes, Lord, we have done the things you ask of us.”

I hope to send you a good confessor soon. In our *collège* there is a wise, pious priest who has given us hope of accepting this ministry and of going to live in your hospital. We are urging him to go, and if he should change his mind, we will try to send someone else, such as the Fathers<sup>3</sup> are requesting.

Meanwhile, I ask our dear Sisters, and you as well, to bear with one another. You are going as companions into eternity, and you are all spouses of our Savior Jesus Christ. So then, be more and

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**Supplement 8.** - Archives of the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity, original signed letter. Near the address is the seal of the Congregation of the Mission. This letter probably belongs in Vol. III, after no. 1019.

<sup>1</sup>Jeanne Lepeintre had been sent to the Daughters of Charity by her mistress, Madame Goussault. Saint Vincent says elsewhere that she was “a very fine, wise, and gentle young woman.” Both he and Saint Louise had great confidence in her because of her intelligence and organizational skills. She was first sent to the school of the Charity in Saint-Germain-en-Laye (1642). In the spring of 1646, after installing the Sisters in the Le Mans hospital, she returned to Paris, where she was put in charge of the Motherhouse while Saint Louise was establishing the house in Nantes. Jeanne then became Sister Servant in Nantes (1646), where great difficulties were being encountered. In 1654 she made the foundation in Châteaudun and, in 1657, at the Salpêtrière (cf. *Spiritual Writings*, L. 64, p. 77, n. 1). In *Recueil de pièces relatives aux Filles de la Charité*, MS, p. 24, preserved in the Archives of the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity, we read: “During the lifetime of Mademoiselle Le Gras, she seemed to be a hypochondriac. Moreover, she could not be made to do anything she did not like, nor would she accept opinions other than her own.” She was reprimanded for this fault more than once by Saint Vincent. Her last years were sad ones spent at the Nom-de-Jésus hospice, where she had to be committed because of mental illness.

<sup>2</sup>Elisabeth Martin’s poor health was probably the main cause of the disorders that had slipped into the little Community in Nantes. The difficulties were exacerbated by the hospital chaplain, who was the Sisters’ confessor.

<sup>3</sup>Here “Fathers” refers to the Administrators of the Nantes Hospital, who were known as Fathers of the Poor.

more united with one another. No Sister should be upset if another Sister is at variance with her, or if people talk or murmur against her. There is no one in the world who does not have to put up with the neighbor. Our Lord himself found some of these among His disciples. We have to go through that or live apart in a desert; but what great sadness for the person who is alone. So then, let us go along together gently and cheerfully; we belong to God and are bound to accept what He orders and permits.

People rebuff us, find fault with what we do, treat us worse than servants, report us, listen to others, do the worse things possible against us. O Lord my God, what beautiful opportunities for acquiring holy humility, for practicing gentleness and patience, for becoming pleasing in God's sight, for making ourselves loved by the glorious Virgin and the whole celestial court; and, lastly, for winning the hearts of those very persons who make us suffer, and who, sooner or later, recognize their fault, provided we do our humble duty. And that is what we have to do with care and diligence. So, my dear Sisters, let's do it. I say "my dear Sisters" for I'm speaking to all of you. Let's do it in the sight of God, with peace of mind, courtesy, and gracious condescension toward one other. With that, your actions will all be golden and your reward will be great.

But what should be done to make good use of the contradictions and troubles God sends us? We have to love them, but how can we love what displeases us? First of all, we have to consider that this was the constant practice of Our Lord while He was in the world, and of all the saints without exception. Second, that we go to heaven only through tribulation and penance. Third, that it's necessary to suffer in this world, either willingly or unwillingly, and that only those who love to suffer don't suffer at all. Fourth, if the Sisters of Charity are unwilling to do anything to honor the Passion of Our Lord, who chose them from among a thousand others to raise them to His love, who, then, is going to do it? You are Daughters of Charity. Mortification is also a daughter of charity and must, consequently, be your sister. So then, cherish it, consider it often at meditation, and remember it when opportunities present themselves. Ask God to give you an affinity for it so that by this means

you may one day reign above it with Our Lord, in whose love I am, for all in general and for you in particular, my dear Sister, your most humble and affectionate servant.

VINCENT DEPAUL,  
i.s.C.M.

*Addressed:* Sister Jeanne Lepeintre, Daughter of Charity at the Nantes Hospital, in Nantes.

**9. - TO THE MOTHER SUPERIOR OF THE FIRST MONASTERY  
OF THE VISITATION, IN PARIS**

Saint-Lazare, December 14, 1648

My very dear Mother,

The grace of Our Lord be with you forever!

Thank you for your frequent remembrance of me before God, which has been very helpful to me. Thanks to His mercy, I am better and was purged today as a final remedy. I hope to be able to go out tomorrow or the next day.

According to the letter that came from Saint-Denis, it seems that Sister Directress is bearing her cross peacefully and does not feel that the relief you offer her is necessary, so I think we should let her be.

Time will gradually reveal to us the errors of Port-Royal. I had already heard something similar to the letter you sent me, from someone who had come expressly from Brittany to enter there, but left it seven or eight months later because of several things to be desired. I will tell you more about this when I have the consolation of seeing you. You say nothing to me about your health; please take care of yourself.

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**Supplement 9.** - The location of the original is unknown. A photocopy of a handwritten copy is in the Archives of the Mission, Paris. This letter belongs in Vol. III, after no. 1081.

I give you permission, my dear [Mother], to allow the candidate for Compiègne to enter, and your grandniece for one day. May Our Lord be the life of our hearts. I am, with all my heart, in His love, my very dear Mother, your most humble servant.

VINCENT DEPAUL,  
i.s.C.M.

10. - SAINT LOUISE TO SAINT VINCENT

[Before 1650]<sup>1</sup>

*Monsieur,*

*I have been asked to appeal to you very humbly, for the love of God, as I am now doing, to show your charity to a poor woman who greatly needs to be committed, by asking M. Gillot, a merchant in the Place aux Chats,<sup>2</sup> to help her obtain a place at the Pitié.<sup>3</sup> The need that has been presented to me is most worthy of compassion, both for the salvation of her soul and for her personal safety. That is why, Monsieur, I resolved to bother you and to assure you, by this note, that I am, in the love of Our Lord, Monsieur, your most humble and very obedient servant.*

L. DE MARILLAC

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**Supplement 10.** - Archives of the Mission (Paris), original autograph letter, undated. The text was published with the spelling and presentation of the original in *Annales de la Congrégation of the Mission* 1961-62, p. 16, and published in *Mission et Charité*, 19-20 (1970), p. 169. This letter probably belongs in Vol. III, after no. 1165.

<sup>1</sup>Date assigned by Sister Elisabeth Charpy in *Écrits spirituels*.

<sup>2</sup>Square in Paris, situated near the Cimetière des Innocents.

<sup>3</sup>Hospital of Paris, constructed not far from the Jardin des Plantes.

11. - MADELEINE DE LAMOIGNON<sup>1</sup> TO SAINT VINCENT

[October 1650]<sup>2</sup>

Monsieur,

*I want to tell you about the blessing God is giving our poor Picards, because today M. Marbe preached at Saint-Jacques and recommended those poor people so strongly that I was told that those listening dissolved into tears. I hope, then, that the collection will begin tomorrow, since we see people prepared; we think it will be very successful. The Pastor of Saint-Eustache recommended them so well that I have already experienced the results of this: money has been brought to me from all sides. Lastly, Monsieur, because holy and adorable Providence gives us what is needed to help those poor people, let us not set any limits; we decided to ask you to please tell M. Berthe<sup>3</sup> to borrow some money, and we will repay it in Paris, and to assist all the sick until they are completely healed and strengthened, and the same for all the listless and convalescent. In short, that there not be a single place where anyone might die for lack of assistance. I put the responsibility on your conscience to please tell him that, and I unburden mine on yours.*

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**Supplement 11.** - Convent of the Visitation, 110, rue de Vaugirard, Paris, original autograph letter; photocopy in the Archives of the Mission, Paris. This letter probably belongs in Vol. IV, after no. 1273.

<sup>1</sup>Madeleine de Lamoignon was born in Paris on September 14, 1608, of Chrétien Lamoignon, a Presiding Judge of the Parlement of Paris, and of Marie des Landes, who initiated her from childhood into the traditions of the Confraternity of Charity. Both mother and daughter were very zealous in their dedication to poor persons. They often went to visit them in their homes, dressed their wounds, cleaned their rooms, made their beds, and provided them with clothing, linen, food, and money. Mlle de Lamoignon supported and took an active part in all the works Saint Vincent founded. He used to say that she forged ahead so fast with her charitable activities that no one could keep up with her. She died on April 14, 1687, at seventy-nine years of age; her life has been written by Fr. d'Orléans (*Vie de Mademoiselle de Lamoignon*, Bibl. Nat., Ms. fr. 23895) and by Mlle Louise Masson (*Madeleine de Lamoignon* [Lyons, 1846]). Abbé Guy-Toussaint-Julien Carron gave her a place in *Vies des Dames françaises qui ont été les plus célèbres dans le XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle par leur piété et leur dévouement pour les pauvres* (2nd. ed., Louvain: Varlinthout et Vandenzande, 1826).

<sup>2</sup>Date written on the back by Saint Vincent's secretary.

<sup>3</sup>Thomas Berthe (cf. XI, 165, n. 2).

*Mme de Herse*<sup>4</sup> would like to know if seven hundred livres a week would be enough for M. Berthe, but do not limit it to that, for fear that he might need more. It was also decided this week to send one hundred écus to M. Le Soudier<sup>5</sup> in Saint-Quentin, and to continue this. Please let me know if you can hold the meeting Sunday.<sup>6</sup>

Addressed: *To Monsieur Vincent, at Saint-Lazare*

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<sup>4</sup>Mme de Herse, née Charlotte de Ligny, was the daughter of Jean de Ligny, Seigneur de Ranticey, Master of Requests. She was also the widow of Michel Vialart, Seigneur de la Forest de Herse, Counselor to the King in his Parlement Court, President of Requests of the palace, then Ambassador to Switzerland, who died in Solothurn (Switzerland) on October 26, 1634. Mme de Herse was the mother of Félix Vialart, Bishop of Châlons, as well as a relative of Jean-Jacques Olier: Francis de Sales, a good friend of hers, was her son's godfather. A Lady of Charity, she was one of Saint Vincent's chief auxiliaries and a great benefactress of the poor people of Paris, Picardy, and Champagne. Works for the ordinands and for abandoned children received her support, and she established the Daughters of Charity in Chars (Val-d'Oise). During the wars that ravaged the capital, the Queen Mother entrusted to her and to some other Ladies the distribution of her personal alms. Mme de Herse died in 1662.

<sup>5</sup>Jacques Le Soudier, born in Vire (Calvados) on October 28, 1619, entered the Congregation of the Mission on May 16, 1638, was ordained a priest in 1642, and took his vows in Richelieu on June 14, 1642. In 1646, Saint Vincent considered him for the foundation of the mission in Salé (Morocco). The project was abandoned, however, when the saint discovered that the Order of Recollects (Franciscans) had already made a commitment to that mission. In 1651 Le Soudier was in Saint-Quentin, where he remained for two years. He became Superior in Crécy (1652-54) and in Montmirail (1655-56). A long illness interrupted his work, and he died in Montauban on May 17, 1663. His brother Samson was also a member of the Congregation of the Mission.

<sup>6</sup>The meeting of the Ladies of Charity.

12. - TO CARDINAL ANTONIO BARBERINI,<sup>1</sup>  
PREFECT OF PROPAGANDA FIDE

March 1652

[Most] Em[inent] and [Most] Rev[erend] L[ord],

We have heard that certain French priests are seeking to obtain, through the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide, authorization to form a new body of missionaries in this kingdom. We are wondering if this may not be prejudicial to the Congregation of the Priests of the Mission, already instituted apostolically in this same kingdom under the direction of Vincent de Paul, its Superior General, and spread over and ministering for many years not only in France and in other provinces of Christianity, to the benefit of the people and at the service of the clergy under the authority of the most illustrious Ordinaries, but also *in partibus infidelium*,<sup>2</sup> in obedience to the said Sacred Congregation. The said Vincent, Superior General, who has recourse very humbly to Your Eminence, has many reasons to fear that, if the aforesaid authorization is granted, the multiplicity of Congregations of secular priests having the same name and with identical ministries [might create]<sup>3</sup> great confusion. For this reason, he most humbly begs Your Eminence to be pleased to have every consideration for us and to see that nothing is innovated on this point without having heard the

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**Supplement 12.** - The location of the original, written in Italian, is unknown. A handwritten copy is in the Archives of the Mission, Paris. This letter probably belongs in Vol. IV, after no. 1479.

<sup>1</sup>Antonio Barberini, nephew of Pope Urban VIII and his brother the Capuchin Cardinal Antonio Barberini, was only twenty when he entered the Sacred College of Cardinals in 1627. He was placed in charge of several legations. Since the steps he took to prevent the election of Innocent X were unsuccessful, he came to France, obtained the bishopric of Poitiers in 1652, and became Archbishop of Reims in 1657. He died in Nemi, near Rome, on August 3, 1671.

<sup>2</sup>*In regions of infidels*, i.e., no longer an extant diocese, but only a titular one.

<sup>3</sup>This word is illegible.



Superior of Rome, and this will be received as a particular grace from Your Eminence. *Quam Deus.*

*Addressed:* To the [Most] Em[inent] and [Most] Rev[erend] L[ord] Card[inal] Barberini

With the recommendation of the [Most] Exc[ellent] L[ord] Ambassador of France

VINCENT DEPAUL,  
Superior General of the Congreg. of the Mission

13. - TO CHARLES OZENNE, IN DOVER, ENGLAND

Paris, September 11, 1653

Monsieur,

The grace of Our Lord be with you forever!

*Mon Dieu*, Monsieur, how saddened I am for you and for the treatment you have received! I hope from the Goodness of God that you are now free and that all those heavy crosses with which Our Lord has burdened you and our dear Sisters of Sainte-Marie<sup>1</sup> will be the means of drawing down on them and on you more abundant graces.

The word here is that it is doubtful that they will continue their journey. If they do not, please do all you can not to stay on. I am writing this to the Queen of Poland.<sup>2</sup> You could take advantage of the ship on which you set out. I am certain that M. Datineau, who has gone to England, will give you what you need, or, if you are going to Calais, as I am told, that the Comte de Charreau will have someone give you the money by a bill of exchange, which I will pay here on demand; he is my good *seigneur*; show him this letter. I

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**Supplement 13.** - National Library, Warsaw, original autograph letter; photocopy in the Archives of the Mission, Paris. This letter probably belongs in Vol. V, after no. 1653.

<sup>1</sup>Visitation Nuns.

<sup>2</sup>Louise-Marie de Gonzague (cf. XI, 317, n. 2).

have written to him on behalf of our dear Sisters of Sainte-Marie. If, then, you are leaving, I ask Our Lord to be your guide. I am, in His love, your very humble servant.

VINCENT DEPAUL,  
i.s.C.M.

Please greet M. de Montois<sup>3</sup> for me and assure him of my obedience, as I am doing in the letter I am writing to our dear Mother the Superioress.

*Addressed:* Monsieur Ozenne, Priest of the Mission, presently in Dover, England.

#### 14. - TO DOMINIQUE LHUILLIER,<sup>1</sup> IN CRÉCY<sup>2</sup>

Paris, September 10, 1656.

Monsieur,

I am writing this letter to ask you to send Br. Sené<sup>3</sup> back to us here with the bearer of the letter, who will return with him the day after his arrival. So then, we shall expect him on Wednesday, at ten o'clock or at noon. He could come to sleep in Lagny<sup>4</sup> Tuesday night

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<sup>3</sup>The Director who was to accompany the Visitation Nuns to Poland. The spelling of his name is not certain. It can also be read: *de Montou* or *Monthoux*.

**Supplement 14.** - This letter was published in *Carità e missione*, nos. 1-2, 2001, pp. 7-8. It is in the possession of a person in Italy who prefers to remain anonymous. The letter should be placed in Vol. VI, after no. 2136.

<sup>1</sup>Dominique Lhuillier, born in Barizey-au-Plain (Meurthe), entered the Congregation of the Mission as a priest in Paris on July 11, 1651, at the age of thirty-two. He took his vows there on May 5, 1659, in the presence of M. Alméras. Lhuillier was a Missioner in Crécy (1654-60) and in Toulon, where he died.

<sup>2</sup>The house of the Mission in Crécy (today Crécy-en-Brie, department of Seine-et-Marne) was founded in 1641. The Missioners were called there by Louis XIII, who had given them the house and 4,000 livres pension.

<sup>3</sup>Nicolas Sené, born in Paris, entered the Congregation of the Mission on October 7, 1651, at twenty years of age, and took his vows in 1653.

<sup>4</sup>A town of more than 15,000 inhabitants in the department of Seine-et-Marne.

and leave the next morning when it is still cool. I ask you to pray for me, and am, in the love of Our Lord, Monsieur, your most humble servant.

VINCENT DEPAUL,  
i.s.C.M.

*Addressed:* Monsieur Lhuillier, Priest of the Mission, in Crécy

15. - TO SISTER FRANÇOISE ANGÉLIQUE LE ROY,  
VISITATION NUN

(Paris, October 16, 1656)

We, Vincent de Paul, Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and Spiritual Father of the Religious of the Visitation Sainte-Marie in Paris, to you, our dear Sister Françoise-Angélique le Roy, one of the Religious of the First Monastery of the city, greetings. The Mother Superior of your house in Le Mans has asked us for a Sister of your Community to help her bear the yoke of Our Lord in the government of her Community and to contribute to the sanctification God is asking of the souls who compose it.

Knowing that God has blessed your way of acting in all the duties you have had up to the present, we have chosen and delegated you, choosing and delegating you to go to your house in Le Mans, accompanied by our Sister Marie-Joseph Trouillet, and to remain there in the above mentioned office until holy obedience ordains otherwise. We enjoin you to lower your veils at the entrance of the cities where you will pass and to conduct yourselves everywhere in keeping with the Rules and practices of your holy Institute, in such a way that God may be honored and the neighbor edified by this,

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**Supplement 15.** - Archives of the Mission, Paris, original signed letter. This recently discovered letter was sold on November 27, 2008, at the Hôtel Drouot, Paris; it should be placed in Vol. VI, after no. 2157.

begging His Divine Goodness to honor you with His protection and to continue to bless you.

Given at Saint-Lazare-lez-Paris, October 16, 1656.

VINCENT DEPAUL,  
unworthy Priest of the Mission

16. - TO THE BISHOP OF SOISSONS<sup>1</sup>

[Around the beginning of March 1657]<sup>2</sup>

I take the liberty of renewing to you the offer of my perpetual obedience with all possible affection and humility; I most humbly entreat you, Excellency, to accept it, as also the very humble request I make of you to give permission to M. Guillot of our Company, the bearer of this letter, who is leaving to direct the little house we have near Montmirail, and to two or three other priests, our confreres, who are to go there at the end of this week, to open the mission in Montmirail next Sunday and then to go on to the villages that are dependencies of it. This is the time when we are obliged to do it, if you, Excellency, see fit. And if you, Excellency, agree to give permission to absolve reserved cases and to commute vows, as the other Bishops do, we will have the means of serving the poor people more effectively. That, Excellency, is the very humble request I have the honor of making of you. I am, in the love of Our Lord, Excellency. . . .<sup>3</sup>

The bearer of this letter returned from Poland some time ago. If you, Excellency, would like to know the state of the Church in that kingdom, he is able to speak with you about it.

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**Supplement 16.** - The location of the original is unknown. A photocopy of the unsigned autograph draft is in the Archives of the Mission, Paris. This letter probably belongs in Vol. VI, after no. 2221.

<sup>1</sup>Charles de Bourlon. After having been the Coadjutor of Simon Le Gras, he succeeded him in the See of Soissons at his death on October 28, 1656.

<sup>2</sup>In this letter, Saint Vincent announces that M. Guillot, C.M., is leaving to head the Montmirail house. It was on May 3, 1657, that he first sent a letter to M. Guillot as Superior there (cf. VI, 311-13).

<sup>3</sup>The text of the draft stops here and skips the formula: "your very humble and obedient servant," as well as the signature, but it adds a postscript.

17. - TO JEAN PARRE,<sup>1</sup> IN SAINT-QUENTIN

Paris, September 27, 1659

My dear Brother,

The grace of O.L. be with you forever!

I am writing to you but have nothing to tell you, since we did not have any meeting this week. I do not know if you are in Saint-Quentin yet because I did not receive any news from you by the last coach.

We have M. Le Soudier<sup>2</sup> critically ill, and M. Perraud<sup>3</sup> as well. I recommend both of them to your prayers, and I am, in the love of O. L., my dear Brother, your very affectionate servant.

VINCENT DEPAUL,  
i.s.C.M.

*Addressed:* Bro. Jean Parre, of the Mission, at Saint-Quentin

18. - REGISTRATION BY THE PARLEMENT OF THE UNION  
OF SAINT-LAZARE  
TO THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION

Monday, March 21, [1633]

The Court having examined the letters patent of the King given at Saint-Germain in January 1633,<sup>1</sup> by which the said Lord praises,

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**Supplement 17.** - DePaul University (Chicago) Special Collections, original signed letter. A few lines of the text were published by Coste (VIII, 157) as a summary; at that time its location was unknown. In May 2007, the original was purchased from The Boys' Town Collection. This letter, then, replaces the summary given in Vol. VIII.

<sup>1</sup>Jean Parre (XI, 306, n.3).

<sup>2</sup>Jacques Le Soudier.

<sup>3</sup>Hugues Perraud.

**Supplement 18.** - Excerpt from the Acts of the Parlement of Paris, copy found in D. Félibien, *Histoire de Paris*, Vol. V, p. 85. This document probably belongs in Vol. XIIIa, after no. 84a.

<sup>1</sup>Cf. XIIIa, 293-95.

accepts, confirms, and approves the union made by the Archbishop of Paris<sup>2</sup> of the priory, leprosarium, and administration [of] Saint-Lazare to the Congregation of the Priests of the Mission, wills that the said priests and their successors in the future should enjoy it “in perpetuity, together with all fruits, rights, revenues, emoluments and any dependencies whatsoever, with the responsibilities, terms, and conditions stated in the contract for this union, decrees of the Court, declaration of the Prior,<sup>3</sup> approval and union of the said Archbishop,<sup>4</sup> etc. The Act of the said union was passed on the last day of this past December.<sup>5</sup> The said contract, letters patent, decrees of the Court, declaration of the Prior and other documents, etc...” The said Court has ordered, and does order, that the said letters will be in its office to have them implemented according to their formulation and terms.

#### 19. - REGISTRATION BY THE PARLEMENT OF LETTERS PATENT ON BEHALF OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION

September 3

The Court examined the letters patent of the King given in Paris in the month of May 1642,<sup>1</sup> obtained by the Priests of the Congregation of the Mission, by which the said Lord permitted and granted that the said Priests of the Congregation of the Mission may, and are free to, have implemented the Bulls attached under the counter-seal obtained by them from the Pope, stating the approval of their Insti-

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<sup>2</sup>Jean-François de Gondi.

<sup>3</sup>Adrien le Bon, Canon Regular of Saint Augustine and Prior of Saint-Lazare, was born in Neufchâtel (Seine-Maritime) and died at Saint-Lazare on April 9, 1651, in his seventy-fourth year. When he offered the Priory to Saint Vincent, the generous offer alarmed the saint, who refused it several times, until a trusted advisor, André Duval, convinced him of the wisdom of this agreement (cf. XIIIa, 283-86).

<sup>4</sup>Cf. XIIIa, 275-80.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. XIIIa, 286-93.

**Supplement 19.** - Excerpt from the Acts of the Parlement of Paris, copy found in D. Félibien, *Histoire de Paris*, Vol. V, p. 133. This letter probably belongs in Vol. XIIIa, after no. 88.

<sup>1</sup>Cf. XIIIa, 321-22.

tute, and to enjoy their contents, point for point, in accord with their formulation and terms. The said letters of permission given and granted, the Lord causes, admits of, and allows the said Priests of the Congregation of the Mission, present and to come, to enjoy them fully and peacefully, putting a stop to all disturbances and hindrances, provided that there be nothing else in them contrary to the rights of the said Lord and any concordats between the Holy See and him, and the privileges and liberties of the Gallican Church, as is stated more fully in the said letters and the said Bulls given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, in the year of Our Lord 1632, the day before the Ides of January (January 12, 1633),<sup>2</sup> attached under the counter-seal; foundation contract of the said Mission of April 17, 1625;<sup>3</sup> approval of the said contract by the Archbishop of Paris of April 24, 1626;<sup>4</sup> letters patent of the said Lord King, given in Paris in the month of May 1627;<sup>5</sup> confirmation of the foundation stated in the said contract, and permission to form among the said priests the Congregation and Association mentioned therein; decree of April 4, 1631,<sup>6</sup> of verification of the said letters and contract, passing over the opposition of the Pastors of the city and faubourgs of Paris to the modifications stated in the said decree;<sup>7</sup> request of the said Priests of the Congregation of the Mission for the purpose of verification, etc.; the said Court has ordered and does order that the said letters and Bulls be registered in its office so that the said petitioners may enjoy their effect and contents in the offices stated in the said letters and decree of the Court of April 4, 1631.

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<sup>2</sup>Cf. **XIIIa**, 296-304.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. **XIIIa**, 213-17.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. **XIIIa**, 218.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. **XIIIa**, 226-27.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. **XIIIa**, 258-59.

<sup>7</sup>Cf. **XIIIa**, 253-57.

20. - REQUEST OF WITHDRAWAL FROM A LEASE

Saturday, May 14, 1644

Before the royal notary of the Comté of Beaumont and the castellany of Creil, appears the undersigned Marthe Goupil, residing in Précý,<sup>1</sup> widow of the late Ghislain Frappiet, during his life one of the four messengers<sup>2</sup> between Poitiers and Paris. Presently receiving income from the land and seigniorship of Précý, where she resides, she has appointed as her general and special attorney René de Matsé, esquire, *Sieur de Plessis*,<sup>3</sup> Prosecutor in the Privy Council of the King, to whom she has given, and hereby gives, authority, for her and in her name, to draw up before all the notaries whom it may concern the waiver of the lease drawn up by her, under the name of *Sieur Vezon*, of the farm<sup>4</sup> of the coaches and carriages of the town of Rennes and other towns of Brittany, which she had taken from the Fathers of the Mission established at Saint-Lazare in the faubourg Saint Denis in Paris. The lease had passed before Paizant,<sup>5</sup> ~~Paizant nott son~~ [words crossed out], royal notary at the Châtelet of Paris, and Dupuyc<sup>6</sup> his associate, on September 27, 1643 [the 3 is crossed out and 2 is written above it] and from him passed to the

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**Supplement 20.** - Archives of the Mission, Paris, original, copy made for one of the parties. The document was previously in the Archives of the Mission of the Province of Belgium before being transferred to the Paris Archives of the Mission in 1998. It was published in *Vincentiana*, November-December, 2006, no. 6, pp. 461-72, and translated by John E. Rybolt, C.M. It is reproduced here with a few stylistic changes, and should probably be placed in Vol. XIIIa, after Doc. 91.

This document and Supplement 21, which follows it, both deal with a matter involving the coach lines of Rennes and Brittany. Vincent de Paul relied on these coach lines to support his works, as well as those of certain other Orders and Congregations, especially of the Daughters of Charity. As with other documents dealing with legal matters, these two texts help us to understand better his skill and diplomacy in business affairs, especially his financial acumen in finding funds for the relief of poor persons and the provinces devastated by wars.

<sup>1</sup>Précý-sur-Oise.

<sup>2</sup>A messenger was in charge of transporting the mail from one town to another.

<sup>3</sup>One of the twenty-eight communes of this name in France, four of which are in Oise.

<sup>4</sup>The term "farm" is used here to designate the system of providing leases for collecting taxes on the tolls on coach lines.

<sup>5</sup>Étienne Paisant, one of the notaries used by the Congregation of the Mission.

<sup>6</sup>Jean Dupuys, one of the notaries used by the Congregation of the Mission.



said party all the documents he will advise to be proper. ~~Promising, etc.~~ [words crossed out] Promising, etc. Obliging, etc.

Drawn up and signed at the château of Précy, May 14, 1644, in the presence of Jehan Randon, *Sieur* of Compen,<sup>7</sup> and Thomas Maris, and approved by them.

MARTHE GOUPIL

RANDON [paraph]<sup>8</sup>

R. DEMASÉ<sup>9</sup> [paraph]

PAISANT [paraph]

D. CREMASSON [paraph]

[Added nine days later in another hand]: Paraphed by the undersigned parties and notaries [paraph of Demasé] a certain document passed today before the said undersigned notaries this twenty-third day of May, sixteen hundred forty-four.

R. DEMASÉ [paraph]

VINCENT DE PAUL [paraph]

D. CUSSET [paraph]

C. MOUFEL<sup>10</sup> [paraph]

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<sup>7</sup>Probably Compans, a village in Seine-et-Marne, an arrondissement of Meaux.

<sup>8</sup>A paraph or "flourish" was required to authenticate the signature on a legal document.

<sup>9</sup>The notary wrote "De Masé," but in that period, people often joined the De to their name in their signature, just as Vincent did.

<sup>10</sup>The spelling of this name is uncertain but it is probably "Moufel." The scribes wrote what they heard and were not always consistent in their spelling. Because they had to write so quickly, their handwriting was not always legible.

## 21. TRANSACTIONS CONCERNING WITHDRAWAL FROM A LEASE

(May 23, 1644)

Present in person were Messire Vincent de Paul, priest, Superior General of the Priests of the Mission established at Saint-Lazare, owners of the coaches and carriages going and coming between this city of Paris into the town of Rennes and the towns of the province of Brittany, with Monsieur de Paul living at Saint-Lazare-lez-Paris, on the one hand, and Monsieur René Demasé, esquire, of Plessis, advocate at the Privy Council of the King, residing in Paris on rue de l'Arbre secq<sup>1</sup> in Saint-Germain de l'Auxerrois parish, in the name of, and as agent of, the honorable woman Marthe Goupil, widow of the late Gillain Frappier, during his life one of the four ordinary messengers between Poitiers and Paris, established by her as her proxy, passed before Lemasson, royal notary of the comté of Beaumont and the castellany of Creil, residing at Précý, on the fourteenth of the current month and year, her special agent in substance, to have the proxy passed before the present notaries, as it has appeared to the undersigned notaries, by the original of the texts later signed Marthe Goupil, Randon Paris, R. Demasé, and Lemasson, and joined to the present minute after being signed with *paraphs ne varietur*<sup>2</sup> by Monsieur Masé and Monsieur de Paul; and to that of the same Goupil the aforementioned Monsieur Masé promises to have ratified before the present [*notaries*] and for her certainty, to oblige her to provide the valid act of ratification to Monsieur de Paul [*?en lestepre*] in Paris, as many times and whenever it will be requested, without, however, allowing default of the ratification to be prejudicial to the parties present, since said Goupil, the interested party, by the declaration of Jean Vezon, had taken a lease on

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Supplement 21. - The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations, Lee Kohns Collection, Manuscripts and Archives Division, published in *Vincentiana*, November-December, 2006, no. 6, pp. 461-72; translation by John E. Rybolt, C.M., with a few stylistic changes. Where the reading of words or phrases is dubious, other possible forms given are placed in brackets. The document should probably be placed in Vol. XIIIa, after Supplement 20.

<sup>1</sup>Between the Place Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois and rue Saint-Honoré, Paris.

<sup>2</sup>"Lest it be changed," i.e., by anyone else.

the said coaches and carriages, passed before Dupuis and Paysant, notaries, the twenty-seventh of September 1642, as recorded in the document of the declaration passed before Le Vasseur and Moufle, the undersigned notaries, on the last day of December in the year 1642. These parties, on the other hand, in order to avoid the disagreements that were at the point of arising between them, since the said Goupil held that Père<sup>3</sup> de Paul should be obliged to compensate the lack of income borne from the said farm because of the obstacles placed to that income by the ~~tax farmers~~ messengers of the said province up to today, or to cause these obstacles to cease in the future.

To this charge Père de Paul maintained that he was not obliged, since, according to the lease, said Goupil was responsible for establishing the coaches and carriages at her own cost and expense, and [?then,] if there were any impediment, she was supposed to act against those who had created the obstacles and to continue the lawsuits already begun, likewise to avoid all costs and expenses that might arise because of these disputes. They have concurred on the following, namely, that Pierre [*sic*] de Paul and Monsieur Masé, in her name, have voluntarily desisted and annulled, and do desist and annul by these documents, the lease agreement that has been broken[?], and they agree that it remains null and void for the time remaining from today onward. By so doing, said Goupil is freed both for the past and for the future from the rentals and income of the coaches [and carriages], so that, afterwards, Pierre [*sic*] de Paul (paraphs) may make no demand on her in any way or manner, but Pierre [*sic*] de Paul frees her from them purely and absolutely, with no further expense, damages, and interests on one side or the other. By means of this, Pierre [*sic*] de Paul consents and agrees, in addition to what is found above, that said Goupil may take up her case and continue, if she thinks it advisable, to deal with the said messengers and others who are supposed to have created the obstacles, to receive compensation because of the lack of income up to today, without, nevertheless, for that reason, being able to oblige Père de

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<sup>3</sup>Several times throughout the document, this is incorrectly written as "Pierre."

Paul to be held to any guarantee for the indemnification, nor even, should this not be forthcoming, that said Goupil may have any recourse against Pierre [*sic*] de Paul nor transfer to him any costs or expenses, but refrain from so doing and indemnify him against all those which might be claimed by the messengers. It has, however, been agreed between the parties that, in case a lawsuit be brought against the messengers for the said non-payments, of which Monsieur de Mouchal [?Moufel] is the rapporteur, Monsieur de Paul should take care not to find in it any charges or expenses. He will reject legal pursuits against those that might be awarded. And for the execution of these present and [?pending] documents, the parties have chosen and do choose their irrevocable domicile in the said city of Paris, that is, Monsieur de Paul at Saint-Lazare, and C. De Masé, in her name, in the house stated above, where he lives, in which places we.... Promising, etc. for Monsieur de Paul at Saint-Lazare, and Monsieur de Masé, in her name, in the house of... Secretary of the king, located on rue de Montmartre, in the year 1644, the twenty-third day of May, in the afternoon.

The following have signed and attested to the present documents.

VINCENT DE PAUL [paraph]

R. DEMASÉ [paraph]

D. CUSSET [paraph]

C. MOUFEL [paraph]

22. - REGISTRATION BY THE PARLEMENT  
OF THE CONFIRMATION OF THE UNION OF SAINT-LAZARE  
TO THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION

Monday, May 15, 1662

The Court having examined the letters patent of the King, given in Aix in the month of March 1660,<sup>1</sup> signed *Louis*, and on the fold, *in the name of the King, de Loménie*, and sealed on silk knotted cords with the great seal in green wax, obtained by Father Vincent de Paul, Superior General of the Congregation of the Priests of the Mission, by which, and for the terms and contents, the said Lord praised, accepted, approved, and confirmed the union of the house and priory of Saint-Lazare, situated in the faubourg of Saint-Denis-lez-Paris to the said Congregation of the Priests of the Mission, and confirmation of that union and incorporation made by our Holy Father the Pope by his Bulls of April 18, 1655,<sup>2</sup> of the rights, fruits, profits, revenues, emoluments, and any dependencies whatsoever, following and in conformity with the said Bulls, as well as what is contained in the said letters “addressed to the Court; petition of Vincent de Paul, Superior General of the said Congregation at the end of their registration, conclusions of the Attorney General of the King, and all things considered; the Court has ordered, and does order, that the letters and Bulls be registered in its office so that the Priests of the Mission may enjoy their effect and contents according to their formulation and terms.”

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**Supplement 22.** - Excerpt from the Acts of the Parlement of Paris, copy found in D. Félibien, *Histoire de Paris*, Vol. V, p. 190. This document belongs in Vol. XIIIa, after no. 123.

<sup>1</sup>Cf. XIIIa, 485-88.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. XIIIa, 409-16.

23. - MAXIMS OF SAINT VINCENT

**ORDER IN THE SERVICE OF CHARITY**

*In view of the help brought to the poor people of Châtillon, he said: “They’re practicing great charity, but it’s not well organized. Those poor sick people will be overwhelmed with so many provisions all at the same time, of which some will spoil and be lost, that they’ll be just as needy afterward as in the beginning.” (I, 72)*

**AVOIDING NOVELTIES**

“The human mind is quick and restless, and the most active and enlightened persons are not always the best, if they’re not the most discreet. Those walk surely who don’t stray from the path which most of the wise have used.” (I, 101)

**CHARITY: HAVING A POSITIVE ATTITUDE**

“Some people always think well of their neighbor, as much as true charity allows them to do. They can’t see virtue without praising it, or virtuous persons without loving them.” (I, 103)

**INSTRUCTING THE ORDINANDS AS A REMEDY  
TO THE STATE OF THE CLERGY**

“Oh, Your Excellency, surely this is a thought that comes from God! It’s an excellent means for gradually restoring order to all the clergy of your diocese.” (I, 139)

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**Supplement 23.** - In addition to the correspondence, conferences, and repetitions of prayer of Vincent de Paul that have been preserved, there also exist other maxims or teachings of M. Vincent recorded by Louis Abelly (cf. **XI**, xxiv, n. 21), which deserve to be remembered, brief though they may be. These were collected by André Dodin, C.M. in *Enretiens spirituels de Saint Vincent de Paul* (Éditions du Seuil: Paris, 1960) pp. 988-1019, and are reproduced here in English; the pages noted are from the English translation of the 1664 edition of Abelly, *The Life of the Venerable Servant of God Vincent de Paul*, translated by William Quinn, F.S.C., and edited by John E. Rybolt, C.M. (New City Press: New Rochelle, New York, 1993). Those maxims that already appear in one of the volumes have not been repeated here. The headings and the phrases in italics are from Dodin.

## THE BISHOP AS AN EXPRESSION OF GOD'S WILL

M. Vincent never failed to do what that Prelate had prescribed for him, since he was more convinced that God was asking this service of him, which he learned from the mouth of a Bishop, than if it had been told him by an angel from heaven. (I, 139)

## THE BODY'S DESTINY

“One of these days, the miserable body of this old sinner will be put into the earth and will be reduced to dust, and you'll trample it underfoot.” (I, 257)

## A SEVERE JUDGMENT ON HIS LIFE

*When he spoke of his age, he used to say, “For so many years I have abused the grace of God! Heu mihi quia incolatus meus prolongatus est!”<sup>1</sup> Alas, Lord! I'm living too long because there's no improvement in my life, and my sins increase with the number of my years.*

*“You leave me behind, my God, and You call Your true servants to yourself. I'm like those weeds that spoil the good grain You harvest, and here I am, taking up space uselessly *ut quid terram occupo!*<sup>2</sup> Or sus, my God, may Your Will be done and not mine.”* (I, 257)

## THE MISSIONER: A CARTHUSIAN AND AN APOSTLE

“The life of a Missioner should be the life of a Carthusian at home and an Apostle in the rural areas, and, in proportion as he works more earnestly at his interior holiness, his works and ministries will also be more fruitful for the spiritual welfare of others.”<sup>3</sup> (II, 24)

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<sup>1</sup>Woe to me that my dwelling has been prolonged! Cf. Ps 119:5. (D-RB)

<sup>2</sup>So that I'm cluttering up the ground. Cf. Lk 13:7. (NAB)

<sup>3</sup>Cf., for example, III, 344.

## EXCELLENCE OF THE CATHOLIC VOCATION OF THE MISSIONER

“Ah, wretched man that I am! My sins have made me unworthy of rendering service to God by going to the peoples who don’t know Him.... How happy, yes, how happy, is the situation of the Missioner who has no other boundaries for his missions and ministries for Jesus Christ than the entire inhabited world! Why, then, do we hold back and set limits for ourselves, since God has given us such an expanse in which to exercise our zeal?” (II, 84)

### FRUITFUL HUMILITY

*Regarding the confreres martyred in Ireland, he replied, “It sufficed for God to know all that was done there. The humility of our Lord requires that the Little Company of the Mission hide itself in God with Jesus Christ<sup>4</sup> to honor His hidden life. The blood of those martyrs will not be forgotten by God, and sooner or later will bring about a new generation of Catholics.”* (II, 134)

### IN PRAISE OF SIMPLE PREACHING

“Simplicity edifies the ordinands; they praise it and come here to seek only that; the truths they’re taught are well received when clothed in it and are more effective in this natural adornment.” (II, 190-91)

### CONFIDENCE IN PROVIDENCE REGARDING RETREAT EXPENSES

*His response to a Brother who objected to the large number of retreatants at the Mission: “Brother, this is because they want to be saved. . . . If we had thirty years to exist, but because of receiving so many retreatants would be able to manage for only fifteen years, we shouldn’t stop receiving them because of that. It’s true that this is a*

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<sup>4</sup>Cf. Col 3:3. (NAB)



great expense, but the money can't be put to any better use, and, if the house goes into debt, God will know how to get us out of it, as we have good reason to hope from His Providence and His Infinite Goodness." (II, 233)

### **GENEROSITY IN ACCEPTING RETREATANTS**

"It's no small thing if some people benefit from it. . . . Well, it's still an alms pleasing to God. If you make it difficult for them to come, you'll turn away someone Our Lord might want to be converted on this retreat, and being too strict in examining motives will make some of them lose the desire they had to give themselves to God." (II, 234)

### **WITHDRAWAL OF UNUSED GRACE**

"Let us fear God, Messieurs, let us fear that God may take from us this harvest that He's offering us; for, if we fail to use His graces as we ought, He may transfer them to others." (II, 235)

### **GOOD FOOD FOR THE BOARDERS**

*Carry out our ministry well.* "Otherwise, God will punish us. Yes, we could expect his curse to fall upon the Saint-Lazare house if we neglected the care we should show to these poor people. I recommend, above all, that we feed them well, at least as well as we do our own Community." <sup>5</sup> (II, 264)

### **FAITH WITHOUT OUR REASONING BUT BY REASON OF THE CHURCH**

"The more directly we look at the sun the less we see it; likewise, the more we try to reason about the truths of our religion, the less we know them by faith. It's enough that the Church proposes them to us; we can't fail to believe it and to submit to it." (III, 15)

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<sup>5</sup>Cf. XI. 299-300.

## THE CHURCH, RESIDENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

“The Church, which is the kingdom of God, inspires with good leadership those He appoints to govern it. Its Holy Spirit presides in the Councils, and from It come the lights spread over the earth, which have inspired the saints, judged the wicked, resolved doubts, proclaimed the truth, uncovered errors, and pointed out the way by which the whole Church and each one of the faithful in particular can advance with assurance.”<sup>6</sup> (III, 15-16)

### RELATIONS OF MONSIEUR VINCENT WITH THE JANSENISTS

“You know, Monsieur, that this new error of Jansenism is one of the most dangerous that has ever troubled the Church. I have to bless and thank God very especially for having allowed that the first and most important persons to promote these teachings—some of whom I knew well and who were my friends—weren’t able to win me over to their thinking. I can’t tell you the trouble they took in this and the reasons they gave me; but my answer was, among others, the authority of the Council of Trent, which manifestly opposed their teachings. In face of their persistence, instead of responding to them, I recited the *Credo* to myself; and that’s how I remained steadfast in Catholic belief; apart from the fact that I have always, even from my earliest years, had a secret fear in my soul—and have dreaded nothing else as much—that I might be swept away in the torrent of some heresy with those curious for novelties,<sup>7</sup> and be shipwrecked in the faith.”<sup>8</sup> (III, 17)

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<sup>6</sup>Cf. XII, no.198.

<sup>7</sup>Cf. I Tim 6:20. (NAB)

<sup>8</sup>This quotation is an extract from a letter submitted to the investigation by Michel Caset, who entered the Congregation in 1649. See also, XI, 30-31.

Michel Caset, born in Vautortes (Mayenne), entered the Congregation of the Mission on October 31, 1649, at twenty-four years of age, took his vows in November 1651, and was ordained a priest in 1653. He was Superior in Toul (1659-60), then in Cr cy (1662-70), after having spent some time in Fontainebleau. He later became a diocesan priest and died as Pastor of Crouy-sur-Ourcq (Seine-et-Marne).

## OUR LORD FINISHES THE WORK BEGUN

“Let’s leave that to Our Lord, for it’s His work. It has pleased Him to begin it, so we can be sure that He will bring it to fruition<sup>9</sup> in the way He deems best. . . .

“Have courage, trust in Our Lord, who will be our help in the work we have begun and in the undertaking to which He has called us.” (III, 21)

## CONSTANCY OF PROVIDENCE

“Divine Providence never fails us in those things we undertake by its direction.” (III, 22)

## TRUST IN TIMES OF POVERTY

“What good news! God be blessed! Fine! Now we have to show whether we have confidence in God. . . . When we’ve spent all we have for Our Lord and have nothing left, we’ll put the key under the door and leave. . . . The treasures of God’s Providence are inexhaustible, and our lack of trust does Him no honor. The Company of the Mission will be ruined by wealth rather than by poverty.” (III, 23)

## GREATNESS OF THE TREASURES OF PROVIDENCE

“O Monsieur, the treasury of God’s Providence is immense; it’s good to cast our cares and thoughts upon Our Lord; He won’t fail to supply our nourishment as He promised us. *Oculi omnium in te sperant, Domine, et tu das illis escam in tempore opportuno. Aperis tu manum tuam, et imples omne animal benedictione*”<sup>10</sup> (III, 24)

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<sup>9</sup>Cf. Phil 1:6. (NAB)

<sup>10</sup>*The eyes of all look hopefully to you; you give them their food in due season. You open wide your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing.* Ps 145:15-16 (NAB)

## **GOD'S KINDNESSES ARE UNENDING**

“Once God has begun to do good to a creature, He continues to do so to the end, unless it makes itself unworthy of this.” (III, 28)

## **UNION WITH GOD'S WILL; AN ANGELIC LIFE**

“To conform ourselves in everything to the Will of God, and to take all our pleasure in this is to lead a truly angelic life upon earth, and even to live the very life of Jesus Christ. . . .” (III, 40)

## **DISCERNING GOD'S WILL**

“Among the multitude of thoughts and feelings that constantly come to us, many seem to be good, yet, they don't come from God and aren't pleasing to Him. How, then, can we discern them? We should examine them carefully, have recourse to God in prayer, and ask for His light. We should reflect on the motives, purposes, and means to see if all these are in keeping with His good pleasure. We should discuss them with prudent persons and take the advice of those placed over us. These persons are the depositories of the treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of God.<sup>11</sup> In doing what they advise, we do God's Will.”<sup>12</sup> (III, 46)

## **SUPERIORITY OF ACCEPTANCE OVER SUCCESS**

*Seeing one of his men upset by a very unfortunate incident that befell their Congregation, he said to him, “One act of resignation and of acceptance of God's Will is worth more than a hundred thousand temporal successes.”* (III, 48)

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<sup>11</sup>Cf. Col 2:3. (NAB)

<sup>12</sup>Cf. XII, no.199.

## **THE EXCELLENCE OF PRAYER AND CONFIDENCE IN GOD**

“There’s not much to be hoped for from a man who doesn’t love to converse constantly with God. In addition, if he doesn’t carry out his ministries in the Lord’s service as he should, it’s because he’s not attached enough to God and hasn’t asked, with perfect confidence, for the help of His grace .” (III, 56)

### **DISPOSITIONS FOR MEDITATION**

“The best virtues are humility, the recognition of our nothingness before God, mortification of the passions and the unruly movements of nature, interior recollection, uprightness and simplicity of heart, attention to the presence of God, total dependence on His Will, and frequent aspirations to God’s Goodness.” (III, 61)

### **MASSES SERVED BY CLERICS**

“Laymen do not have the right to do this, except in cases of necessity. It’s a pity that a priest, who has the sacred character for the service of the altar, should see his duty being done by those who do not have it.” (III, 77)

### **EFFECTS OF COMMUNION**

“Don’t you feel, Brothers, don’t you feel this divine fire burning in your breast when you’ve received the adorable Body of Jesus Christ in Communion?” (III, 79)

### **INFALLIBILITY OF DIVINE WISDOM**

“Human prudence is often mistaken and leads us away from the right path, but the words of Eternal Wisdom are infallible, and its guidance right and sure.” (III, 88)

## FOR CHARITY: FOR GOD

“What’s done out of charity is done for God. It’s a great happiness for us if we’re found worthy to use what we have for charity’s sake, that is, for God who has given it to us. We should thank and bless His infinite goodness to us.” (III, 108)

## PEACEFUL DEATH OF THE FRIENDS OF THE POOR

*At another meeting, speaking with two priests from noble families,<sup>13</sup> he said something very remarkable to them, which is worth being remembered: “All those who love the poor in life will have nothing to fear from death, as I’ve seen on many occasions.” Because of this he was accustomed to instill this teaching in the minds of those whom he saw tormented by the fear of death, and he used the opportunity to spur them on to love of poor persons.* (III, 117)

## DUTY OF MAKING GOOD ACTIONS KNOWN

*Anne of Austria, having made a gift to M. Vincent of a diamond worth 7,000 livres and of a very beautiful pendant, which was sold for 18,000 livres by the Assembly of the Ladies of Charity, asked M. Vincent “through a sentiment of Christian humility,” not to speak of it to anyone. He, however, did not feel obliged to obey her on this point, but said to her, “Madame, Your Majesty will please pardon me if I no longer keep secret such a marvelous example of charity. It is good, Madame, that all of Paris and even all of France should know of it. I feel obliged to speak of it wherever I go.”* (III, 122)

## COMPASSION FOR THE IRISH REFUGEES

*One day, having learned that there was in Paris at that time a large number of Irish Catholics, who had been exiled for their faith*

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<sup>13</sup>Louis de Chandénier and Louis de Blampignon. This account was given by Brother Robineau (cf. XI, 86, cit.), the saint’s secretary.

*and reduced to great misery, he called in one of the priests of his Congregation, a native of Ireland, and asked what might possibly be done to help those poor Irish refugees. "Is there no way we can bring them together to console them in their suffering and instruct them? They don't understand our language, and they seem so forsaken. My heart is stricken for I have great compassion for them." This good priest responded that he would do what he could. "God bless you," replied M. Vincent, "here are ten pistoles. Go in the name of God, to give them whatever consolation you can." (III, 128)*

### **CHARITY AS A MATCH FOR TEMPTATION**

*M. Vincent persisted in remaining on his knees before a Missioner who was being tempted. "No," he said, "I won't get off my knees until you agree to what I'm asking. On this point I want to be at least as insistent as your tempter, the devil." (III, 151)*

### **FULFILLING THE DUTY OF OUR STATE IS NOT A BURDEN**

*To a Brother who had been treated rudely by an officer of the Saint-Lazare house he said, "You were right to come to tell me this; I'll handle it. Come to see me any time you have a complaint, for you know how fond I am of you."*

*To a Brother who feared disturbing him by putting forward his doubts, he replied, "No, Brother, have no fear that you're bothering me. You should realize that someone appointed by God to serve others is no more put out by the demands made on him than a father would be in regard to his children." (III, 151)*

### **EXPRESSION OF CHARITY IN FACE OF AN ADMISSION OF A FEELING OF AVERSION**

*To a priest who acknowledged having an aversion to him:  
"If I hadn't already given you my heart, I'd give it totally to you now." (III, 152)*

### A SMILING CORRECTION

*A Missioner went to see M. Vincent in his room and stated his intention to leave the Company and return to his own region. M. Vincent began to smile and, looking at him with great kindness and tenderness said, "When do you plan to leave? Are you going on foot, or will you take a horse?" The priest, who was speaking seriously and expected to be reprimanded, was completely surprised and. . . was also delivered from his temptation. (III, 152)*

### BEWARE OF THE TEMPTATIONS OF SICKNESS

*M. Vincent encouraged those patients who were able to make their spiritual exercises, not to omit them, "lest," he said, "the sickness of the body may extend to the soul and cause it to become lax and unmortified." (III, 155)*

### PROMPTNESS IN GIVING

*A Missioner working in Champagne asked for a cap. A Brother<sup>14</sup> offered to go to buy him one. M. Vincent asked that his own be sent off immediately.*

*"No, Brother, don't make him wait, for he may be in a hurry for it. Please send it to him right now, together with the other things he's requesting." (III, 155)*

### FRANCIS DE SALES, EPITOME OF OUR LORD'S GENTLENESS

*He recalled on this topic (gentleness) the example of Blessed Francis de Sales, Bishop of Geneva, who he said "was the gentlest, kindest person I've ever known. The very first time I met him, I saw from the outset that his expression and his way of speaking and conversing with others was an expression of the gentleness of our Lord Jesus Christ, who had taken possession of his heart." (III, 165)*

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<sup>14</sup>The Brother was Louis Robineau.



## **AFFABILITY MUST BE WITHOUT FLATTERY**

“Be affable, but never a flatterer. Nothing is worse or more unworthy of a Christian than flattery. A truly virtuous man holds nothing in such horror as this particular vice.” (III, 166)

## **A PRAYER FOR HUMILITY**

“I’m not a man but a poor worm<sup>15</sup> crawling along the earth, not knowing where I’m going, but seeking only to hide myself in You, O my God, who are all I desire. I’m a poor blind man unable to take a single step in the way of goodness unless You extend Your merciful hand to guide me.” (III, 180)

## **A HUMBLE RESPONSE TO PRAISE**

*M. Vincent replied to a Bishop who had said he was a “perfect Christian,”* “Oh, Bishop, what are you saying? Me, a perfect Christian? I should be considered a reprobate and the greatest sinner of the universe.” (III, 185)

## **MONSIEUR VINCENT DESCRIBES HIMSELF AS A STUDENT OF THE FOURTH FORM**

*M. Vincent, having responded to some difficulties that a student had against hope added,* “If the devil returns with this same evil suggestion, respond in the way I just explained to you. Say to that wretched tempter that it was Vincent, an ignoramus, a student of the fourth form, who taught you that.” (III, 186)

## **MONSIEUR VINCENT RECALLS HIS HUMBLE ORIGINS**

*To a poor woman who said to him, “My Lord, give me some alms!” M. Vincent replied,* “My poor woman, you don’t know me

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<sup>15</sup>Cf. Ps 22:7. (NAB)

very well. I'm a poor pig farmer, the son of a poor villager." . . . *A poor woman who met him at the door as he was saying good-bye to some visitors of rank begged him for alms, saying she had been the servant of "Madame, his mother."* "My good woman," *M. Vincent replied,* "you mistake me for someone else. My mother never had a servant; she was a servant herself, and was the wife, and I the son, of a peasant." . . . *When a young man, who was a relative of a priest of the Company, declined to sit beside M. Vincent and kept his head covered out of respect for him, M. Vincent said to him,* "Why, Monsieur, do you find it hard to sit next to a swineherd and the son of a peasant?" . . . *When a person of rank tried to accompany M. Vincent to the door, the latter dissuaded him with these words,* "You should be well aware, Monsieur, that I'm only the son of a poor villager, and in my youth I tended the flocks in the fields." *The nobleman, who was witty, replied that one of the world's greatest Kings was David, who had also been taken from driving the flocks he was tending. M. Vincent seemed confused and humbled by this response.* (III, 186-87)

### **MONSIEUR VINCENT IS HAPPY THAT GOD TAKES CARE OF HIS AFFAIRS "WITHOUT HIM"**

*When a Lady of Charity reproached M. Vincent for not being firm enough in holding to his own opinion, and of following rather the opinions of others, he replied,* "God forbid, Madame, that my wretched thoughts should prevail over those of others. I'm delighted that God works his marvels without me, who am only a wretched man." (III, 187)

### **MONSIEUR VINCENT DENIGRATES THE COMPANY TO ONE WHO WISHES TO ENTER IT**

"*Quoi, Monsieur, you want to be a Missioner? What makes you look to our Little Company, for we're nothing but poor folk?*" (III, 187)

### **MONSIEUR VINCENT ASKS PARDON OF ALEXANDRE VÉRONNE <sup>16</sup> IN FRONT OF HIS ASSISTANT (1649)**

“You should know, Monsieur, that this good Brother came all the way to Richelieu to help me, and I was not as welcoming as I had usually been. I most humbly ask his pardon in your presence, and I ask you to pray that God may grant me the grace of no longer committing similar faults.” (III, 189)

### **MONSIEUR VINCENT WANTS TO JUSTIFY HIMSELF ONLY BY WORKS**

*One of the chief Magistrates of the Parlement said in the Grand'Chambre that the Missioners of Saint-Lazare hardly gave missions any more. M. Vincent replied to a Missioner who suggested that he justify himself, “Let him be. I'll never justify myself except by works.”* (III, 190)

### **THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION WILL SUBSIST BY HUMILITY**

*For several years, M. Vincent proposed as the subject of prayer for the community a meditation on pride once a month: “The Company can't subsist without the virtue of humility. When this virtue is lacking in a Company, each one thinks about his own particular ministry, and this leads to partiality, schism, and destruction. If Missioners should ask for one thing from God, it's humility. They should be sad and weep when they receive applause, for Our Lord has said: *Vae cum benedixerint vobis homines*. Cursed shall you be, when men shall praise you.”*<sup>17</sup> (III, 190)

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<sup>16</sup>Bro. Alexandre Véronne (cf. XI, 152, n.1).

<sup>17</sup>Cf. XI, 104.

### **MONSIEUR VINCENT WISHES TO WITHDRAW FROM THE COUNCIL OF CONSCIENCE**

*Speaking one day of his position at the Court, he said, "I ask God that I may be regarded as a simpleton, which I am, so as not to have to continue in this type of commission, and that I may have greater leisure to do penance, and give less bad example to our Little Company." (III, 191)*

### **MONSIEUR VINCENT REFUSES TO DEFEND HIMSELF AGAINST A CALUMNY**

*A priest, who died soon after, spread the rumor that M. Vincent had had a benefice bestowed on someone in return for a library and a large sum of money. M. Vincent took up his pen to justify himself, but after reflecting on it he said, "O you wretched man! What are you thinking? *Quoi*, you want to justify yourself, and here we've just heard of a Christian falsely accused in Tunis, who suffered torments for three days and finally died without uttering a word of complaint, although he was innocent of the crime of which he was accused. And you want to excuse yourself? Oh no, it shall not be so!" (III, 191-92)*

### **THROUGH HUMILITY, MONSIEUR VINCENT REFUSES SPECIAL COURTESIES**

*M. Vincent complained that the Missioners stopped or made a sign of reverence to him when he passed. When it was pointed out that this was a common usage in other Communities, he responded, "I'm well aware of that, and we have to respect their reasons for doing so, but I have much stronger ones for not allowing it in my regard, I, who ought not to be compared to the least of men, since I'm the worst of all." (III, 192-93)*

## **MONSIEUR VINCENT RECALLS OBEDIENCE TO THE KING**

*After setting free the pheasants that a Brother had obtained by having a hen hatch the pheasant eggs found in the enclosure of Saint-Lazare, he said, “You know, Brother, we have to obey the King, who has forbidden hunting, and this applies to taking the eggs as well as hunting the birds themselves. We cannot disobey the ruler in these temporal matters without displeasing God.” (III, 209-10)*

## **THE RULE OF CONDESCENSION**

*His great maxim on condescension was: “Be as polite as you can, provided God is not offended in this.” (III, 211)*

## **THE RULE OF SIMPLICITY**

“Making things look good exteriorly while being otherwise interiorly is to be like the hypocritical Pharisees, and to imitate Satan, who disguises himself as an angel of light. Since prudence of the flesh<sup>18</sup> and hypocrisy are so prevalent in this corrupt age, to the great prejudice of the spirit of Christianity, the best way to combat and overcome them is by a true and sincere simplicity.” (III, 217-18)

## **THE SPIRIT OF UPRIGHTNESS AND SIMPLICITY IN THE MIDST OF CUNNING PEOPLE**

*M. Vincent gave this excellent advice to a Missioner sent to a province where rumor had it that the people used cunning: “You’re going to a region where the people are for the most part crafty and devious. If that’s the case, the best way to help them is to act toward them with great simplicity. The teachings of the Gospel are totally opposed to worldly behavior. Since you’re going there to serve Our*

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<sup>18</sup>Cf. Rom 8:6. (NAB)

Lord, you must also act according to His spirit, which is a spirit of uprightness and simplicity.” (III, 218)

### **HUMAN PRUDENCE AND DIVINE WISDOM**

“Where human prudence fails, the light of divine wisdom begins to dawn.” (III, 225)

### **MONSIEUR VINCENT REFERS TO THE GOSPEL IN REPLYING WITH DISCRETION**

*When M. Vincent said that he did not know a priest who had left the Company after many years, a Missioner was surprised and remarked that he couldn't not know him. He replied, “I see that, but could I improve on what Our Lord said in rebuking those who had prophesied in his name, that he didn't know them? This means, of course, that he didn't approve of what they had done.<sup>19</sup> Allow me, then, to follow His example and way of speaking.”* (III, 227)

### **THE TIME OF THANKSGIVING MUST EQUAL THAT OF PETITION**

“We should spend as much time thanking God for His favors as we did in asking Him for them.” (III, 236)

### **THE CONGREGATION WILL NOT PERISH BY POVERTY**

*When one of the leading Magistrates of the kingdom, a man of great authority, told M. Vincent that he should not lose the opportunity to have the Company served as he wished while he was in favor, since the means were presenting themselves, and that other Communities, which he named, were doing this, M. Vincent replied, “Not for anything in the world would I do something against God or*

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<sup>19</sup>Cf. Mt 25:12. (NAB)

my conscience. The Company won't fail because of poverty; whereas, if poverty is lacking, I fear that it will perish." (III, 247)

### **WORK IS THE FULFILLMENT OF GOD'S WILL**

*When a Missioner who had visited the relatives of M. Vincent, returned, he related how praiseworthy their simplicity, piety, and charity were, but that they had nothing to live on except what they earned by their own labor. To this, M. Vincent replied, "Alas, aren't they happy, and could they be any better off than in a situation where they're carrying out God's ruling that we should earn our bread in the sweat of our brow?"* (III, 258)

### **ALLOW FOR GOD'S JUSTICE**

*When the relatives of M. Vincent had been defamed to the highest degree before a noted Parlement, some of his friends wanted to divert the proceedings. He opposed this, saying, "Isn't it reasonable, Messieurs, that justice be done to satisfy the justice of God? The merciful punishments of offenders in this life will save them from His applying to them the rigors of His justice in the next."* (III, 258-29)

### **EVEN WITH ONE FOOT IN HEAVEN, DO NOT GIVE UP MORTIFICATION**

"If a person already had one foot in heaven, so to speak, but gave up the practice of mortification for the time it would take to get the other foot in, he'd be in danger of being lost." (III, 263)

### **WAYS OF MORTIFYING OURSELVES**

"We can practice mortification in every situation, even holding our bodies in a position that might be uncomfortable, without, however, failing in moderation. We can deprive our senses of things that might give them a certain satisfaction, and accept willingly good weather as well as bad." (III, 264)

## IMPOSING A PENANCE ON OURSELVES FOR THOSE WHO SUFFER

*During the extreme misery in Lorraine, he often used to say, "This is the time of penance, since God is afflicting His people. Shouldn't we priests be at the foot of the altar, weeping for their sins? That's an obligation for us, but beyond that, shouldn't we deprive ourselves of some of our food to come to their aid?"*

*During the siege of Corbie (1636), he cut out one of the first courses at meals and never reestablished it later, saying, "Isn't it only right that we should cut back in some way to sympathize with and participate in the sufferings of the people?"*

*M. Vincent rescued a young woman from the danger of losing her virtue but she, seduced by some evil spirit, was miserably lost. "It seems," he said, "that we've done all we could to prevent this misfortune. It remains only to pray and to do penance for her! Oh, this has to cost me something!" (III, 264)*

## MONSIEUR VINCENT REFUSES EXTRA FOOD

*When a Missioner presented some broth to M. Vincent one day, the latter responded:*

*"You're tempting me, Monsieur; isn't it the devil who's prompting you to persuade me to feed this miserable body and puny carcass in this way? Is that being just? May God forgive you for it." (III, 266)*

## IN PRAISE OF PURITY

*Mlle Pollalion<sup>20</sup> came to see M. Vincent one day, accompanied by a girl of fourteen or fifteen years of age, whom she had taken in, and who was very beautiful. M. Vincent told the girl that she should be most obliged to God for having placed her in a devout home and under the care of a charitable person, who looked out for her honor and her salvation; that she should be very grateful for this and*

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<sup>20</sup>Mademoiselle de Pollalion (cf. XI, 341, n. 8)



*should appreciate having such a shelter; that she should make good use of this favor, that Our Lord would do the same for others because He loved virgins and always wanted them to accompany Him wherever He went;*<sup>21</sup> *and that she should rejoice in that.* (III, 272)

### **CALM RESPONSES TO IRATE REMARKS**

*M. Vincent responded to a Magistrate of a sovereign court who challenged him angrily because he did not pay enough attention to his own interests, “I think, Monsieur, that you’re trying to do your duty as you should, and I have to try to do the same in mine.”* (III, 280-81)

*To a noble lady who was trying to involve him in a matter that he felt was unjust M. Vincent declared, “Madame, our Rules and my conscience do not allow me to obey you in this; that’s why I ask you most humbly to excuse me from doing so.”* (III, 281)

### **PATIENCE IN TRIALS**

*At the death of a Missioner who was especially dear to him, M. Vincent said, “By the grace of God, my heart is at peace in the thought that what’s happening is God’s good pleasure. True, I sometimes fear that my sins may be the cause of these losses, but recognizing in that the same Will of God, I accept it with all my heart.” . . . And to a priest who suffered unjustly, “Isn’t your heart consoled to see that it’s been found worthy before God to suffer in serving Him?”<sup>22</sup> Certainly you owe him special thanks and are obliged to ask Him to make good use of this.”* (III, 285-86)

### **PATIENCE IN PHYSICAL SUFFERINGS**

*To a priest who said to him, “Monsieur, how terrible your sufferings are!” he replied, “Quoi? Are you calling God’s work terrible, and what He sends to make a miserable sinner like me suffer?*

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<sup>21</sup>Cf. Rv 14:4. (NAB)

<sup>22</sup>Cf. Acts 5:41. (NAB)

God forgive you for what you've just said, Monsieur, for that's not the language of Jesus Christ. Isn't it right that the guilty should suffer, and don't we belong more to God than to ourselves?" . . . . *And because this same priest told him that it seemed like those sufferings were increasing from one day to the next, he added, "It's true that I feel them getting worse from the soles of my feet to the top of my head. But alas, if I didn't make good use of them, what account would I have to render at the tribunal of God before whom I'm soon to appear?"* (III, 290)



## APPENDIXES

### 1. - MEMO OF BROTHER BERTRAND DUCOURNAU

(Now Vol. XI, Introduction, pp. xxvii-xxxii)

### 2. - TOPICS TREATED IN THE CONFERENCES AT SAINT-LAZARE (1650-60)

**September 23, 1650** - *Informing the Superior of the faults of individuals in the Company.*

1. Reasons obliging us to inform the Superior of the faults we have noticed in individuals in the Company.
2. How this Rule is to be understood; faults that may be committed against it.
3. Means of making this known properly.

**September 30, 1650** - *Willingness to have our faults made known to Superiors.*

1. Reasons for accepting that all our faults be made known to the Superior.
2. How this Rule is to be understood; faults we may commit against it.
3. Means of keeping this Rule well; dispositions required to benefit from it.

**October 7, 1650** - *Repetition of Prayer*

1. Reasons for placing a high value on the Company's practice of Repetition of Prayer.
2. Signs that indicate those who do not esteem it very highly.
3. Means of making it well and benefitting from it.

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**Appendix 2.** - The Archives of the Mission possess two lists of conferences given at Saint-Lazare: one, in the handwriting of René Alméras, Assistant of the Motherhouse, covers 1656-60; the other, in the handwriting of Jean Gicquel, sub-Assistant, encompasses the last ten years of the Holy Founder's life. Neither one lists all the conferences explaining the Rules. The topics in brackets are those not mentioned by either M. Alméras or M. Gicquel.

**October 14, 1650** - *Attachments.*

1. Reasons for breaking our attachments.
2. What they are and which ones are the most dangerous.
3. Means of breaking our attachments.

**October 21, 1650** - *Being admonished at Chapter.*

1. Reasons for appreciating this holy practice.
2. Faults that may be committed against it.
3. Means of benefitting well from it.

**October 28, 1650** - *Spending the All Saints' feasts well.*

1. Reasons obliging us to spend these feast days well.
2. Practices each man proposes for himself to spend them well.

**November 1650** - *Gracious Condescension*

1. Reasons obliging us to practice the virtue of condescension well.

2. What it is and the difference between good and bad condescension.

3. Means of grounding ourselves solidly in the practice of this virtue.

**November 1650** - *Curiosity*

1. Great harm that results from curiosity.
2. The many ways we sin by curiosity.
3. Remedies for this vice.

**December 1650** - *Silence.*

1. Each man's responsibility to do his part to see that silence is well kept in the Company.

2. How the Rule prescribing silence is to be understood and the principal way we break it.

3. Means we should take to ensure observance of this virtue of silence.

**December 24, 1650** - *Spending the Christmas feasts well.*

1. Reasons obliging us to spend the Christmas feasts well.
2. Practices each man proposes for himself for that purpose.

**January 7, 1651** - *Spending this year well.*

1. Reasons we have to spend this year well.
2. What prevented us from spending last year well.

3. Means we propose to practice in order to spend this new year well.

**January 1651 - Modesty.**

1. Reasons obliging Missioners to be very modest.

2. In what this virtue consists and the faults committed against it.

3. Means of acquiring and practicing this virtue well.

**1651 - The good use of admonitions.**

1. Reasons for making good use of the admonitions given us for our faults.

2. Faults we may commit with regard to these admonitions.

3. Means of accepting admonitions well and of making good use of them.

**1651 - Excuses for covering up our faults.**

1. Reasons for never passing off pretexts as good reasons in order to hide the faults in our actions or to exempt ourselves from doing some good.

2. What pretexts are and how many kinds there are; difference between pretexts and real reasons.

3. Means of giving up and avoiding these false excuses.

**1651 - Inspirations.**

1. Reasons for obliging us to respond to good inspirations.

2. What an inspiration is; signs for distinguishing the good from the bad.

3. Means of responding to them and making good use of them.

**1651 - Recreation.**

1. Importance of spending recreation as we should.

2. Common faults we commit during recreation.

3. Means of spending recreation as we should.

**1651 - Simplicity.**

1. Obligation of Missioners to be simple.

2. In what simplicity consists; faults committed against it.

3. Means of having and practicing simplicity.

**1651 - Never to listen to malicious gossip.**

1. Reasons never to listen to malicious gossip.

2. Means of grounding ourselves in this practice.

**1651** - *Neither asking nor refusing anything.*

1. Reasons for adopting this practice.
2. In what it consists and how it is to be understood.
3. Means of putting this practice into effect.

**1651** - *Spiritual dryness.*

1. Importance of making good use of it.
2. What it is and how it differs from lukewarmness.
3. Means of making good use of spiritual dryness.

**1651** - *Doing one's actions with the proper spirit.*

1. Reasons for acting with the proper spirit.
2. How to act with the proper spirit.
3. Means for acting with the proper spirit.

**1651** - *Meditation.*

1. Reasons for making our meditation well.
2. Faults and obstacles.
3. Measures and means for making it well.

**1651** - *Fear of losing our vocation.*

1. Reasons to fear failing in our vocation.
2. Things that can make us fail.
3. Means of preventing this misfortune.

**1651** - *Lowly occupations.*

1. Reasons obliging us to do the least and lowliest occupations well.
2. Common faults we commit in this.
3. Means of rectifying them.

**May 26, 1651** - *Dispositions for Pentecost.*

1. Reasons for preparing ourselves well to receive the Holy Spirit.
2. Things that prevent the Holy Spirit from coming into our souls.
3. Means for preparing ourselves well to receive the Spirit.

**1651** - *Punctuality.*

1. Reasons to be devoted to punctuality.
2. What this punctuality must be; occasions when we must especially practice it.
3. Means of being very punctual.

**1651 - Individuality.**

1. Reasons obliging us to avoid individuality.
2. Principal oddities we must avoid.
3. Means of avoiding all individuality.

**1651 - Not discussing the failings of others.**

1. Great evils of guilt and trouble caused by this vice.
2. Failings we discuss most often.
3. Means of redressing this wrong.

**1651 - Respect.**

1. Reasons for respecting one another.
2. Faults we commit against respect.
3. Means of correcting ourselves and of practicing this respect.

**1651 - Placing high value on the orders given by Superiors.**

1. Importance of having a high regard for the orders and advice of Superiors.

2. Faults we commonly commit with regard to these orders and advice.

3. Means of correcting those faults and of abiding faithfully by the orders and advice given.

**1651 - Uniformity.**

1. Reasons for being uniform in every way we can.
2. In what we must be principally uniform.
3. Means of putting this uniformity into practice.

**1651 - Silence.**

1. The good that proceeds from it and the harm that recurs when we neglect it.

2. Occasions on which we most commonly fail in it.

3. Means of correcting this disorder.

**1651 - Complaining.**

1. The great harm complaining causes in a Community.
2. The most common complaints in the Company.
3. General and particular remedies for this vice.

**December 22, 1651 - Christmas.**

1. Benefits of celebrating Christmas well.

2. Faults we ordinarily commit contrary to the reverence due to this feast.

3. Practices we propose in order to celebrate it well.



**January 5, 1652** - *Spending the new year well.*

1. Reasons for spending this year better than the preceding one.
2. Things that may hinder us from spending it well.
3. Means each individual proposes for himself to spend it well.

**1652** - *The troubles of the time.*

1. Our responsibility to do what we can to appease God's wrath in such a deplorable time.

2. What each man thinks it good to do in order to appease God's anger.

**1652** - *Modesty.*

1. Reasons we have to be modest.
2. Faults we commit against this virtue.
3. Means of being modest.

**February 9, 1652** - *Spending the time of Carnival well.*

1. Reasons for intensifying our devotions and mortifications during these three days of Carnival.

2. Practices each of us proposes for this.

**February 1652** - *Spending this Lent well.*

1. Our responsibility to spend this Lent more devoutly and more strictly than the others.

2. What each man thinks it good to do in order to spend it well.

**1652** - *Gospel teachings.*

1. Reasons for acting always in accordance with Gospel teachings.
2. Gospel teachings to be practiced most particularly.
3. Means of acting well in accordance with Gospel teachings.

**1652** - *Valuing little things.*

1. Reasons we have to set a high value on little things.
2. What these little things are.
3. Means of being faithful in little things.

**March 22, 1652** - *Spending Holy Week well.*

1. Reasons for intensifying our devotion to the Passion of Our Lord during this Holy Week.

2. Practices each one proposes to himself for that.

**April 5, 1652** - *Spiritual resurrection.*

1. Reasons for rising again spiritually on this feast of Easter, not only from sin to grace, but also from imperfections to holiness.

2. Signs to know if we will be resurrected in both these ways.

3. Means to be restored to life in this way.

**1652 - Lukewarmness.**

1. Our great reason for fearing lukewarmness.

2. In what it consists and the difference between lukewarmness and dryness.

3. Means of giving up and getting away from lukewarmness.

**1652 - Public misfortunes.**

1. Reasons for sharing the suffering of public misfortunes.

2. What these misfortunes are, both of body and soul.

3. Means of sharing the suffering of them as we should.

**1652 - Modesty.**

In three points, as above. (Repeated because of the need we have of it.)

**May 17, 1652 - Pentecost.**

1. Reasons obliging us to desire the operations of the Holy Spirit in our souls.

2. Operations of the Holy Spirit.

3. Means of preparing ourselves well to receive them and to correspond to them.

**May 24, 1652 - Feast of the Holy Trinity.**

1. Responsibility to honor the Holy Trinity in a particular way.

2. Practices each man proposes to himself to honor the Trinity properly.

**May 31, 1652 - Corpus Christi.**

1. Reasons to revive our devotion to honoring the Blessed Sacrament.

2. What each one thinks it well to do in order to honor the Blessed Sacrament properly.

**June 7, 1652 - Informing the Superior of the neighbor's failings and accepting that he be told ours.**

1. Reasons for informing Superiors of the neighbor's failings and accepting that he be told ours.

2. Faults we commit in the practice of this Rule.

3. Means of practicing it well.

**June 10, 1652** - *Honoring St. Genevieve's reliquary to pray for peace.*

1. Reasons for sharing the public devotion to pray for peace.
2. Means each man proposes to himself for this. (Two priests or seminarians and two lay persons [Brothers] will fast; this lasted nine years and ended only when peace was achieved.)

**June 14, 1652** - *Directing retreatants.*

1. Reasons for taking particular care in the direction of the retreatants we are given.
2. Faults we may commit in this direction.
3. Means of carrying out this ministry well.

**June 21, 1652** - *Zeal.*

1. Reasons for being very zealous for our own perfection and for the salvation of souls.
2. Acts of this zeal and faults against it.
3. Means of preserving and increasing zeal.

**June 28, 1652** - *Celebration of Holy Mass and Communion.*

1. Reasons for examining ourselves often to see if we are benefitting from Communion and the celebration of Holy Mass.
2. Signs to know if we are benefitting from them or not.
3. Means of benefitting from them.

**July 5, 1652** - *Insensitivity.*

1. Reasons to fear falling into this insensitivity.
2. Signs to recognize whether we have fallen into it.
3. Means of not falling into it, or of getting out of it if we are already there.

**July 12, 1652** - *Good use of God's scourges.*

1. Benefits reverting to us by making good use of God's scourges; drawbacks of making poor use of them.
2. Faults and other things preventing our making good use of God's scourges.
3. Means of removing those obstacles and of making good use of God's scourges.

**July 19 and 26, August 2 and 9, 1652 - Deaths of Brother Patrocle and M. David.<sup>1</sup>**

1. Reasons for discussing the virtues of the deceased.
2. Virtues we noted in them.
3. How each of us proposes to imitate them.

**August 16 and 23, 1652 - Doing nothing without permission.**

1. Benefits of this practice and drawbacks of the contrary.
2. Faults observed in the Company against this practice.
3. Means of putting this practice into effect in the Company.

**August 30 and September 6, 1652 - Death of the late M. Gilles.<sup>2</sup>**

1. Reasons for discussing his virtues.
2. Virtues we noted in him.
3. How each of us proposes to imitate him.

**September 13, 1652 - Assistance to the sick.**

1. Reasons for being zealous in assisting the sick.
2. Faults we may commit in assisting the sick.
3. Means of correcting them and of assisting the sick properly.

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<sup>1</sup>There is some confusion about Brother Patrocle. Coste states that he is Guillaume-Seguïn Patrocle, seminarian of the Mission, who was born in Paris and entered the Congregation of the Mission at the age of thirty-four. *Notices*, vol. I, p. 477, lists him under this name with the priests and seminarians (the seminarians were often called Brothers) who entered the Congregation of the Mission in 1650. However, in *Notices*, vol. V (Supplement), p. 562, he is listed as Patrocle-Guillaume Seguin, a coadjutor Brother, born in Paris in 1616, entered the Internal Seminary in Paris on October 9, 1650, and died in Étampes in 1652.

Jean David, born in Mégières (Ardennes), entered the Congregation of the Mission on August 26, 1645, at the age of eighteen, took his vows on October 29, 1647, was ordained a priest in February 1651, and died on July 15, 1652. David had asked to go to Madagascar, and Saint Vincent was planning to send him there.

<sup>2</sup>Jean-Baptiste Gilles, from the Avranches diocese, had been headmaster and professor of philosophy at the Collège de Lisieux, situated on rue de Beauvais in Paris. He entered the Congregation of the Mission on November 28, 1642, and took his vows on October 11, 1645. After Gilles had served at the Cahors Seminary for some time, Saint Vincent entrusted to him the chair of moral theology at Saint-Lazare. When the Nuncio asked the saint to propose a candidate for Coadjutor Bishop of Babylon, he thought of Gilles. Gilles participated in the second General Assembly (1651), and took part in the debate on the vows, which he insisted on maintaining. His ardent opposition to the Jansenists was manifested mainly in his lectures and conferences to seminarians preparing for ordination. However, his insistence on attacking Jansenism ran the danger of producing the opposite effect. The saint understood this and transferred him from Saint-Lazare in 1651. For a short time, Gilles was Superior of the Crécy house, where he died on August 22, 1652. He received a well-deserved place in *Notices*, vol. III, pp. 110-14. His will, drawn up on April 30, 1643, showed the high esteem in which he held Saint Vincent. (Cf. Arch. Nat. MS. 211, f° 1.)

**1652 - *The good use of illness.***

1. Reasons for making good use of illness and for behaving well when sick.
2. Faults into which we usually fall when we are ill.
3. Means of making good use of illness and of acting appropriately when we are ill.

**1652 - *Retreat.***

1. Reasons for giving ourselves to God so that our retreats will be helpful to us.
2. Faults that may hinder us from benefitting from them.
3. Means of correcting our faults and of making retreats beneficial.

**October 25, 1652 - *All Saints' Day.***

1. Reasons for giving ourselves to God to obtain the graces He is accustomed to give, especially on important solemnities like that of All Saints' Day.
2. What these graces are.
3. Requisite dispositions for obtaining them.

**November 2, 1652 - *Assistance to the deceased.***

1. Reasons for assisting the deceased, particularly on their feast day.
2. Means of assisting them.

**November 8, 15, and 22, 1652 - *Deaths of M. Watebled, M. Deschamps, and Brother Hervy.*<sup>3</sup>**

The usual points, as above, not stopping long on the first point, because we are familiar with them from recent conferences.

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<sup>3</sup>Pierre Watebled, born in Tully (Somme) in 1622, entered the Congregation of the Mission on January 19, 1641, at nineteen years of age, and took his vows on June 14, 1643. He was Superior of the Saintes Seminary (1650-51) and died a victim of his dedication in Villeneuve-Saint-George (Val-de-Marne) in October 1652.

Edme Deschamps, born in Saint-Dié (Vosges) in 1617, entered the Congregation of the Mission on October 5, 1643, took his vows on September 24, 1646, and was ordained a priest in 1650 or 1651. Saint Vincent sent him to assist the people in the provinces of Champagne and Ile-de-France, which were being devastated by the civil war. Exhausted by his devoted labors, Deschamps died in Bâville, near Étampes, in October 1652.

Antoine Hervy, a seminarian, born in Longjumeau (Essonne), entered the Congregation of the Mission on September 21, 1649, at nineteen years of age, and took his vows on October 9, 1651. As noted here, Saint Vincent gave a conference in November 1652 on his recent death at Saint-Lazare.

**November 29, 1652** - *Advent time.*

1. Reasons obliging us to increase our devotions and mortifications during the entire time of Advent.
2. Devotions and mortifications each man resolved to practice every day of Advent.
3. Obstacles to carrying out these resolutions; means of removing the obstacles.

**December 6, 1652** - *Benefitting from the last conference.*

1. Reasons obliging us to see whether we have been faithful to the resolutions made in the preceding conference.
2. Resolutions we made at that time; how we have failed in them or benefitted from them.
3. Means of being faithful to them during Advent.

**December 13, 20, and 27, 1652** - *Punctuality.*

1. Reasons for giving ourselves to God to be punctual in all our exercises.
2. Faults we commit against punctuality.
3. Means of correcting them.

**January 3, 1653** - *Spending this year better than the preceding one.*

1. Motives obliging us to spend this year better than the last.
2. Principal faults of the past year.
3. Means of avoiding them.

**1653** - *Moderation at table.*

1. Reasons for observing moderation at table.
2. Faults noted against it.
3. Means of correcting them and of properly observing moderation at table.

**February 1653** - *Communication.*

1. Reasons for making our communication well every month.
2. Faults we may commit against this practice.
3. Means of making our communication well.

**February 23, 1653** - *Lukewarmness.*

1. Reasons to fear falling into the state of lukewarmness and for seeing whether we are in it or not.
2. What it is and the signs for recognizing it.

**February 29, 1653<sup>4</sup> - Spending Lent well.**

1. Reasons for giving ourselves to God to spend Lent well.
2. What each one thinks should be done in order to spend it well.

**1653 - Death of M. Gurlet.<sup>5</sup>**

Divided as above.

**1653 - Temptations against our vocation.**

1. Reasons for acting well in temptations against our vocation.
2. Faults we may commit when being tempted.
3. Means of acting well during temptations.

**1653 - Death of M. Lambert,<sup>6</sup> who died in Poland assisting the plague victims.**

**May 16, 1653 - Obligation of those who remain at home to contribute to the missions.**

1. Reasons obliging those who remain at home to cooperate in the missions.
2. Practices each one proposes for this.

**June 1653 - Benefitting from Holy Communion.**

1. Reasons for examining ourselves often to see if we are benefitting from Holy Communion.

2. Reasons why several who receive Communion often do not benefit from it.

3. Means of benefitting from it.

**1653 - Devotion to hearing and serving Holy Mass.**

1. Reasons for devotion to hearing and serving Mass.
2. Faults we commit either in saying Holy Mass or attending it.
3. Means of correcting the faults and of acquiring this devotion.

**July 1653 - Giving information to individuals.**

1. Reasons we have to put an end to reports from the Company.
2. What kinds of reporting should be stopped.
3. Means of putting an end to them.

**July 18, 1653 - Curiosity.**

1. Reasons for avoiding curiosity.

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<sup>4</sup>This date is incorrect; 1653 was not a leap year, so February had only 28 days.

<sup>5</sup>Claude Gurlet, born in Lyons, entered the Congregation of the Mission on June 12, 1646, at twenty-four years of age, and died on February 2, 1653.

<sup>6</sup>Lambert aux Couteaux (cf. XI, xx-xxi, n. 16).

2. Acts of this vice; when we must refrain from them.

3. Measures and means of avoiding them.

**1653** - *The spirit of obedience.*

1. Benefits of doing everything in a spirit of obedience; drawbacks of the contrary.

2. In what the spirit of obedience consists; faults we may commit against it.

3. Means of adopting this practice.

**1658**<sup>7</sup> - *Zeal for our own perfection.*

1. Motives for giving ourselves to God to acquire this zeal.

2. In what this zeal and the holiness of a Missioner consist.

3. Means of acquiring this zeal.

**September 27, 1653** - *Retreat.*

1. Benefits we derive from a well-made retreat; the harm in making it badly.

2. Faults that impede these benefits and cause this harm.

3. Means for making the retreat well and for benefitting from it.

**October 1653** - *Studying or working with God.*

1. Reasons for studying or working with God.

2. In what this practice consists; faults we may commit against it.

3. The means of entering into it and advancing in it.

The coadjutor Brothers spoke of working and the seminarians of studying.

**October 1653** - *Observance of the Rules.*

1. Reasons for putting into effect the practice of our Rules.

2. Principal faults individuals have noticed against the Rules.

3. Means of remedying them and implementing the observance of our Rules.

**October 31, 1653** - *All Saints' Day.*

1. Reasons for spending this feast well.

2. Practices each man proposes to himself to do so.

**November 1653** - *First beatitude: Poverty of spirit*

1. Reasons for giving ourselves to God to love poverty of spirit.

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<sup>7</sup>This is probably a typographical error, since the dates before and after it are from the year 1653.



2. In what poverty of spirit consists; its acts.
3. Means of putting ourselves in this state and of acquiring the virtue of poverty.

**November 1653** - *Second beatitude: Gentleness.*

1. Reasons for acquiring this virtue.
2. In what it consists; its acts.
3. Means of acquiring this virtue.

**1653** - *Third beatitude: Love of tears - Blessed are those who mourn.*

1. What Our Lord meant by these words.
2. Acts and signs of this beatitude, which consists in accepting and welcoming gladly tears and crosses.
3. Reasons for accepting and adopting these states.

**1653** - *Fourth beatitude: Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, etc.*

1. What Our Lord means by these words.
2. Acts and signs of this beatitude.
3. Reasons obliging us to assume it.

**1653** - *Fifth beatitude: Blessed are the merciful.*

1. What Our Lord meant by these words.
2. Acts and signs of this beatitude.
3. Reasons obliging us to assume it.

*Note:* No conferences were given at Christmastime because St. Stephen's Day, a second-class feast, fell on Friday.

**January 2, 1654** - *Sixth beatitude: Blessed are the pure of heart.*

1. What Our Lord meant by these words.
2. Acts and signs of this beatitude.
3. Reasons obliging us to assume it and to derive fruits from it, each one according to his need.

**January 9, 1654** - *Seventh beatitude: Blessed are the peace-makers.*

Divided as above.

**January 16, 1654** - *Eighth beatitude: Blessed are those who endure persecution, etc.*

Points as above.

**January 23, 1654** - *Conferences.*

1. Reasons for giving conferences well.
2. Faults we commit at them.
3. Remedies for these faults.

**January 30, 1654** - *The journey and the Mission of Madagascar.*

1. Reasons for discussing this journey and mission.
2. Dispositions required for those who are to be sent there.

**February 6, 1654** - *How to conduct good missions.*

1. Reasons for discussing, from time to time, the means of conducting good missions.
2. Faults we commit during them.
3. Means of correcting those faults.

**February 13, 1654** - *The same subject.*

1. Reasons for giving ourselves to God to conduct good missions; benefits or drawbacks from conducting them well or poorly.
2. Principal faults each one committed or noted in this.
3. General and particular means for correcting these faults; ways to help us to act appropriately during missions and to conduct them well.

**February 20, 1654** - *Spending Lent well.*

Divided as above.

**February 27 and March 6, 1654** - *Silence.*

1. Reasons for keeping it.
2. Faults and major places.
3. Remedies for these faults.

**March 13, 1654** - *Not speaking about outside affairs or of those of the house.*

1. Motives for never speaking of them.
2. Faults against this practice.
3. Means of correcting them.

**March 20, 1654** - *Spending Lent well.*

1. Motives.
2. Practices.

**March 27, 1654** - *Spending Holy Week well.*

1. Reasons.
2. Practices.

**April 10, 1654** - *Spiritual Communion.*

1. Reasons for making it well.
2. Faults.
3. Means.

**April 17, 1654** - *Obedience.*

1. Reasons for practicing this virtue exactly.
2. Faults noticed against it.
3. Means of practicing it exactly.

**May 1654** - *Chapter.*

1. Reasons for giving ourselves to God to share in the graces God pours out at Chapter.
2. Dispositions with which we should go to it.
3. Faults we commit there; remedies.

**October 2, 1654** - *Retreats.*

**October 16, 1654** - *Poverty.*

**October 23, 1654** - *Poverty.*

**November 13, 1654** - *Chastity.*

**November 20, 1654** - *Obedience.*

**November 27, 1654** - *Interior Communication.*

**December 4, 1654** - *Advent.*

**December 11, 1654** - *Interior Communication.*

**December 18, 1654** - *Feasts of Christmastide.*

**1655** - *Chapter.*

**1655** - *Particular Examen.*

**1655** - *How we should conduct ourselves in the refectory.*

**1655** - *Laziness.*

**June 11, 1655** - *Pride.*

**1655** - *Envy.*

**1655** - *Gluttony.*

**July 30, 1655** - *Chastity.*

**August 6, 1655** - *Poverty.*

**August 13, 1655** - *Poverty.*

**August 20 and 22, 1655** - *Preaching.*

**1655** - *Faith.*

**1655** - *Hope.*

**1655** - *Love of God.*

**1655** - *Charity toward the neighbor.*

**1655** - *Retreats.*

**1655** - *All Saints' Day.*

**1655** - *Prudence.*

**1655** - *Justice.*

**1655** - *Fortitude.*

**1655** - *Temperance.*

**1655** - *Always speaking well of the neighbor.*

In addition to these conferences, there were others on Lent, the Passion, Pentecost, and a few deceased members of the Company, with the division of the usual points.

**December 31, 1655** - *Faults of the past year.*

1. Reasons for mortifying ourselves before God for the faults, committed during the past year; reasons for correcting ourselves and for making amends for them.

2. General faults of the Company and in what it was negligent.

3. Means of correcting these.

**January 7, 14, and 21, 1656** - *Good example.*

1. Motives for giving good example to our neighbor, especially to members of the Company.

2. Things that do not edify, or common faults contrary to the edification we should give.

3. Means of giving good example to our neighbor, especially to the Company.

**January 27, 1656** - *Spirit of conferences.*

1. Motives for giving conferences in the spirit of the Company.

2. What we must do interiorly and exteriorly to give them in this spirit.

3. Means we can use to give them in this spirit and to observe in them the things necessary.

**February 11 and 18, 1656** - *Esteeming and practicing little things.*

1. Reasons we have to esteem and practice the slightest little things that concern our state and progress in virtue.
2. What these little things are; faults we may commit against them.
3. Means of acquiring this esteem and practice.

**February 25, 1656** - *Ordination (Retreats).*

1. Reasons for renewing in ourselves the spirit which God, in His mercy, has given the Company to minister attentively during the ordination retreats.
2. What part each of us must play so that they are given well for God's glory and the benefit of the ordinands.

**March 3, 1656** - *The holy time of Lent.*

1. Reasons we have for spending the holy time of Lent well.
2. What each man resolved to do to accomplish this.

**March 10, 1656** - *Humility.*

1. Motives for the Company to work at acquiring true humility.
2. In what true humility consists; acts of humility most appropriate for a Missioner.
3. Means of acquiring it and of growing in it.

**March 17, 1656** - *The Jubilee.*

1. Reasons for doing everything possible to gain the Jubilee properly.
2. What the Jubilee is; Church teaching regarding it.
3. Means of gaining it well.

**March 24 and 31, 1656** - *Humility.*

Divided as above.

**April 21 and 28, 1656** - *Journeys*

1. Reasons for conducting ourselves properly on our journeys.
2. What we should do, on the road or in the inns, with regard to our neighbor and among ourselves to glorify God, edify the people, and keep ourselves in the spirit of true Missioners.

**May 5 and 12, 1656** - *Shunning important posts and loving the hidden life.*

1. Motives for being detached from the love of important posts and ministries.
2. Benefits that come from the hidden life.

3. Means of divesting ourselves of the former and of applying ourselves to the practice of the latter.

**May 19, 1656** - *Ministries that serve the destitute.*

1. Reasons the Company should give itself to God to minister in the service of the poorest and abandoned, even in foreign countries.

2. Signs by which we can recognize if we are called to this by God.

3. Means of obtaining this grace from God's goodness.

**June 2, 1656** - *Feast of Pentecost.*

1. Reasons for preparing ourselves well for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

2. Signs by which a Missioner can recognize if he has the Spirit of God.

3. Means to prepare ourselves to receive the Spirit of God.

**June 9, 1656** - *Admonitions.*

1. Motives for accepting well the admonitions we are given, in public or in private, by the Superior, the Officers, individuals, or in Chapter, and to make good use of them.

2. Means of accepting them well and of benefitting from them after having received them.

**June 17 and 23, 1656** - *Sensuality.*

1. Motives for fleeing sensuality.

2. In what sensuality consists; acts that Missioners must avoid.

3. Means of overcoming this vice.

**June 30 and July 7, 1656** - *Purity of intention.*

1. Motives for acting in all things with purity of intention.

2. What is meant by acting with purity of intention; signs for recognizing if we are acting in that way or not.

3. Means of assuming this practice.

**July 14 and 21, 1656** - *How to conduct ourselves in the refectory.*

1. Motives the Company has to conduct itself well there, both regarding moderation and food and drink.

2. Faults we commit there.

3. Means of behaving properly there.

**July 28, 1656** - *The distress we should experience in seeing that the Company is not in the state to which God calls it.*

1. Motives for being distressed about this state.
2. What each man thinks he contributes to keeping the Company from making good progress.
3. Means of putting ourselves in the state to which God calls us and making good progress.

**August 4 and 11, 1656** - *Uniformity.*

1. Reasons for being uniform in our practices and duties.
2. In what it seems that the Company is not uniform.
3. Means of attaining this uniformity.

**August 19 and 26, 1656** - *Accepting the states in which God places us.*

1. Motives for accepting the states in which God places us.
2. In what this consists; how to put it into practice.
3. Means for benefitting from and accepting all the states in which God places us.

**September 15, 1656** - *Silence and not making noise.*

1. Motives we have for observing silence faithfully, speaking softly, and not making noise.
2. Faults we may commit against this, particularly in the sacristy, refectory, and dormitory.
3. Means of observing silence faithfully and not making noise.

**September 22, 1656** - *Retreats.*

1. Reasons for the Company to give itself to God to make a good retreat.
2. Things from past retreats that individuals found beneficial, or that were, on the contrary, harmful to them.
3. Dispositions necessary for making a good retreat.

**October 6, 1656** - *Illness and convalescence.*

1. Motives for conducting ourselves properly during our illnesses and times of convalescence.
2. What we must do and avoid in these two situations.

**October 13 and 20, 1656** - *Trips into town.*

1. Reasons for behaving appropriately when we go into town.
2. Faults we can commit in this.

3. Means of correcting them.

**October 27, 1656** - *Ministry to retreatants.*

1. Reasons for seeing whether the Company has grown cold and slack in the zeal it had in the past for retreat ministry.

2. In what ways it has grown slack, if that be the case.

3. Means of reviving our first fervor in that regard and of fulfilling our ministry.

**November 17, 1656** - *Catechizing poor persons when the occasions arise.*

1. Reasons for seeing whether the Company keeps to the practice of catechizing poor persons when we meet them, either the good people when we are walking in the country, the poor persons who come to the door, or our domestics, etc.

2. The good that comes from acting in this way.

3. Means of reviving this practice, if it has fallen off, and of retaining it.

**November 24 and December 1, 1656** - *Not eating outside the house.*

1. Reasons for not eating outside without necessity and without permission.

2. Occasions that may lead us more easily to break this Rule.

3. Means of remedying it.

**December 16, 1656** - *Particular examen.*

1. Reasons we have to make our particular examen well.

2. What each man thinks he should do to make it well.

3. Means of making it well.

**December 22, 1656** - *Spending Christmas well.*

1. Motives.

2. Means.

**December 29, 1656** - *Ending the present year well and beginning the next one well.*

1. Motives.

2. Means.

**January 5 and 12, 1657** - *Chapter.*

1. Motives, etc.

2. Things to be observed there.



**January 19, 1657** - *Love of persons who are poor; zeal in devoting ourselves to their service.*

1. Motives for assisting them and getting assistance for them.
2. Acts and practices that are appropriate for us.

**January 26, 1657** - *Our ministry with the clergy.*

1. Motives for giving ourselves to God to work zealously at this.
2. Virtues needed for Missioners to serve the clergy well in our ministry.

3. Faults we may commit in this.

**February 9, 1657** - *Spending the time of Carnival well.*

1. Motives.
2. Means and practices.

**February 16, 1657** - *Repetition on the next-to-the-last conference on ministry to the clergy.*

**February 23 and March 2, 1657** - *Holy Mass.*

1. Reasons obliging priests to celebrate it well.
2. Faults committed in this.
3. Means and remedies for these faults.

For the seminarians and coadjutor Brothers: motives for hearing it well; faults; means.

**March 9, 1657** - *Moderation in the refectory.*

1. Motives obliging the Company to examine how it is negligent in the refectory.

2. Faults committed there.
3. Remedies for these faults.

**March 16, 1657** - *Complaining and malicious gossip.*

1. Motives for avoiding them.
2. What they are and their acts.
3. Means of protecting ourselves from these things.

**March 23, 1657** - *Holy Week.*

1. Motives for spending it well.
2. How to spend it well; practices.

**April 6, 1657** - *Resurrection.*

1. Motives for rising again.
2. Signs of a genuine resurrection.
3. Means for having a genuine resurrection.

**April 20, 1657 - Silence.**

1. Reasons for keeping silence faithfully.
2. Most common faults and occasions.
3. Means of getting back on our feet if we have fallen, or to continue to observe silence and move forward.

**April 27, 1657 - Our late coadjutor Brother Jourdain,<sup>8</sup> who died on April 25.**

1. Reasons for discussing the virtues of those who die in the Company.
2. Virtues we noticed in our late Brother Jourdain.
3. Benefits we each propose to draw from this.

**May 12, 1657 - Detachment from earthly things.**

1. Reasons for detaching ourselves from earthly things in order to be united with God.
2. In what this detachment consists.
3. What we must do to become detached.

This conference was continued on one of the following days.

**May 18, 1657 - The Holy Spirit.**

1. Reasons for asking God to give us the fullness of His Spirit.
2. Signs by which we can know if it is the Holy Spirit who is acting in us.
3. Means of obtaining a share in the Holy Spirit's gifts and workings.

**May 25, 1657 - Feast of the Holy Trinity.**

1. Reasons why the Company should honor the Mystery of the Holy Trinity.
2. In what this Mystery consists.
3. Practices we want to observe to honor it well.

**June 1, 1657 - Devotion to the Blessed Sacrament.**

1. Reasons for giving ourselves to God that He may be pleased to grant His Company the grace of a very special devotion to the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar.
2. In what this devotion consists; its acts.
3. Practices we want to adopt to be strengthened in this devotion.

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<sup>8</sup>Jean Jourdain (XI, 351, n.1).

**June 8, 15, and 22, 1657** - *Mental prayer.*

1. Reasons for making our meditation well.
2. In what meditation consists.
3. How to make it well.

**July 6, 1657** - *Particular Examen.*

1. Motives for making it well.
2. What it is; its acts.
3. Means.

**July 13 and 20, 1657** - *The presence of God.*

1. Motives for grounding ourselves firmly in the practice of the presence of God.
2. In what it consists; its acts.
3. Means of being well grounded in this practice.

**July 27, 1657** - *Respect.*

1. Motives for showing great respect.
2. What respect is; its acts.
3. Means of maintaining great respect.

**August 3 and 17, 1657** - *Conversation.*

1. Motives for talking about good things during our recreations.
2. Topics for discussion.
3. Means of adopting this practice.

**August 31, 1657** - *The late M. Ennery,<sup>9</sup> priest, who died in Genoa.*

1. Reasons for discussing the virtues of the deceased.
2. Virtues noticed in the late M. Ennery.
3. Virtues each man proposes to imitate.

**September 7 and 14, 1657** - *Death of the late M. Belleville,<sup>10</sup> who died on the trip to Madagascar.*

Same points as in the preceding conference.

On the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, a second-class feast, M. Vincent, after giving much thought to this for a long time, declared that, from now on, there would be no Chapter or conference

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<sup>9</sup>John McEnery (cf. XI, 381, n. 8).

<sup>10</sup>Mathurin de Belleville (cf. XI, 371, n. 5).

on Fridays on which a second-class feast falls, even if it is not a holiday.

Because the feast of St. Matthew fell on Friday, there was no conference.

**September 28, 1657** - *Death of the late M. Dufour,<sup>11</sup> who died in Madagascar.*

Same division as above.

**October 6 and 13, 1657** - *Retreats.*

1. Reasons for discussing how to make a good retreat.
2. Signs of a good retreat.
3. Means each man intends to use to make a good retreat.

**October 19, 1657** - *Death of the late M. Dufour.*

Same division as above.

**October 27, 1657** - *Death of the late M. Prévost,<sup>12</sup> who died in Madagascar.*

Same division as above.

**November 2, 1657**, All Souls' Day - There was no conference.

**November 9, 1657** - *Death of the late M. Tratebas,<sup>13</sup> who died in Genoa.*

**November 16, 1657** - *Death of the late M. François Vincent<sup>14</sup> in Genoa.*

**November 23, 1657** - *Death of the late M. Duport,<sup>15</sup> who died in Genoa.*

**November 30, 1657** - A second-class feast day; there was no conference.

**December 7, 1657** - *Missions.*

1. Reasons for discussing, from time to time, the great good that is done in missions carried out well and the harm done by the ones that are conducted poorly.

2. Faults that have slipped into them.

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<sup>11</sup>Claude Dufour (cf. **XI**, *ibid.*, n. 6).

<sup>12</sup>Nicolas Prévost (cf. **XI**, *ibid.*, n. 7).

<sup>13</sup>Antoine Tratebas (cf. **XI**, 153, n. 3).

<sup>14</sup>François Vincent, born in 1611 in Gandelu, Meaux diocese (Seine-et-Marne), entered the Congregation of the Mission on April 2, 1649, and died of the plague in Genoa on July 13, 1657.

<sup>15</sup>Nicolas Duport (cf. **XI**, 379, n. 2).

3. Means of correcting these failings and of conducting the missions well.

**December 14, 1657 - Ordination (retreat).**

1. Reasons for giving ourselves to God to be zealous regarding the ordination retreat.

2. Failures we have noticed in this.

3. Means of making the ordination retreat in such a way that God may be glorified by it and the Church more and more sanctified.

**January 4, 1658 - Death of the late M. Blatiron,<sup>16</sup> who died as Superior in Genoa.**

Same division as above.

**January 11, 1658 - Death of Brother Alméras,<sup>17</sup> cleric, who died on January 4, in his 83<sup>rd</sup> year.**

Same division as above.

**January 18, 1658 - Death of our Coadjutor Brother Hemet.<sup>18</sup>**

Same division as above.

**January 25, 1658 -** Because of the devotion on this feast of St. Paul, anniversary of the birth of the Mission, M. Vincent declared that there would be neither Chapter nor conference.

**February 1 and 8, 1658 - Contradictions.**

1. Reasons for giving ourselves to God to make good use of the contradictions encountered in our ministries.

2. Those that commonly present themselves.

3. Means of making good use of them.

**February 15, 1658 - Support.**

1. Reasons for supporting one another in our infirmities.

2. Common situations in which we must support one another.

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<sup>16</sup>Étienne Blatiron (cf. XI, 193, n. 8).

<sup>17</sup>René Alméras the elder was born in Paris on November 12, 1575. After the death of his first wife, Marguerite Fayet, he married Marie Leclerc, the future mother of his six children. He was Secretary to the King, became Treasurer of France in Paris on January 19, 1608, Secretary to Marie de Médicis, Comptroller (1622-56), Postmaster General (1629-32), and Secretary for the execution of the orders of Marie de Médicis, filling all these positions in a worthy manner. After he had given his son to the Congregation of the Mission, he himself entered it on March 2, 1657, at the age of eighty-one, and died at Saint-Lazare on January 4, 1658. (Cf. *Notices*, vol. II, pp. 453-61.)

<sup>18</sup>François Hémet, born in Camprémy, in the Beauvais diocese (Oise), entered the Congregation of the Mission as a coadjutor Brother on January 27, 1650.

3. Means for grounding ourselves well in this practice.

**February 22 and March 1, 1658** - *Temptations.*

1. Reasons obliging us to discuss temptations in general.
2. What a temptation is.
3. Means of firmly resisting temptations.

**March 8, 1658** - *Fasting.*

1. Reasons obliging us to give ourselves to God to try to keep the fast in the way Our Lord observed it.
2. How Our Lord observed fasting.
3. What we can do to imitate Him.

**March 15, 1658** - *Rising.*

1. Reasons for being punctual in rising at four o'clock at the first sound of the bell, and being with the Company to make meditation.
2. What we have to do to be well grounded in this practice and never to grow lax.

**March 22, 1658** - *The spirit of penance.*

1. Reasons for asking God to give us the spirit of penance.
2. In what the spirit of penance consists.
3. Acts of penance most in conformity with a Missioner.

**April 5, 1658** - *Doing our actions well.*

1. Reasons for giving ourselves to God to do all our ordinary actions well.
2. Conditions and circumstances that must accompany them in order for them to be done well.
3. Means of bringing to them all the requisite conditions.

**April 12, 1658** - *Spending Holy Week and Easter well.*

1. Motives.
2. What we must each do to achieve this.

**April 26, 1658** - *Spiritual resurrection.*

1. Motives.
2. In what it consists.
3. Means.

**May 3, 1658** - *Good example.*

1. Motives.
2. Faults that may be committed against it.
3. Means for avoiding the faults.

**May 10, 1658** - *Growing slack in virtue.*

1. Reasons for fearing that we may fall into this.
2. In what Missioners principally must fear growing slack.
3. Means of preventing and avoiding growing slack.

**May 17, 1658** - *Observance of the Rules.*

1. Motives.
2. Means.

This is the day when M. Vincent distributed the printed Rules.

**May 24, 1658** - *Virtues of the late M. Delville,<sup>19</sup> who died as Pastor in Arras.*

The usual division.

**May 31 and June 8, 1658** - *Detachment from the things of this world.*

1. Reasons for being detached.
2. Things from which the Missioner must detach himself.
3. Means of detaching ourselves well.

**June 14, 1658** - *Feast of the Holy Trinity.*

1. Reasons for honoring this Mystery and celebrating the feast appropriately.

2. What we must believe and teach about this Mystery.

3. Means of honoring this Mystery and celebrating the feast appropriately.

**June 21 and 28, 1658** - *Infirmities.*

1. Motives for giving ourselves to God to make good use of our infirmities.

2. Faults we may commit against this.

**July 5, 1658** - *Mutual Support.*

1. Motives.

2. Things in which we must support our neighbor.

3. Means of truly supporting one another in all circumstances.

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<sup>19</sup>Guillaume Delville, born in Tilloy-lez-Bapaume, today Ligny-Tilloy (Pas-de-Calais), entered the Congregation of the Mission as a priest on January 19, 1641, at thirty-three years of age. He was Superior in Crécy (1644) and Montmirail (1644-46, 1650-51). He then retired to Arras, where, with Saint Vincent's permission, he continued his missionary work until his death in 1658.

For two weeks, evening Benediction for the intention for the King's health prevented us from having the conference.

**July 26, 1658** - *Not to discuss the failings of our neighbor.*

1. Motives for not discussing them.
2. Occasions and number of ways in which we usually fall into this.

3. Means of correcting ourselves.

**August 2 and 9, 1658** - *Accepting the states in which God places us.*

1. Motives for accepting the various states in which His Divine Majesty is pleased to place us.

2. Various states, both of soul and body, in our diverse ministries.

3. Means for all of us to adopt this practice.

**August 16 and 23, 1658** - *Moderation in eating and drinking.*

1. Motives for moderation.

2. Failings.

3. Means of avoiding these failings.

**August 30 and September 6, 1658** - *Availability for any ministry assignment.*

1. Reasons for making ourselves available.

2. Cases where it is permissible to desire a certain ministry.

3. Means of acquiring this availability.

**September 13 and 20, 1658** - *Silence.*

1. Motives for keeping it exactly.

2. Times and places where it should be observed more faithfully; faults committed against it.

3. Means of observing it faithfully.

**September 27, 1658** - *Virtues of the late M. Ozenne, who died in Poland.*

1. Virtues noticed in him.

2. Benefits each of us intends to draw from them.

**October 3, 1658** - *Retreats.*

Same division as above.

**October 11, 18, 25, November 8 and 15, 1658** - *Malicious gossip.*

1. Motives and important reasons for avoiding it.

2. Effective means.



In this conference, M. Vincent asked each man for a practical means, which he had someone write down. He did this in five successive conferences; at the last one, he spoke for one hour, and someone took notes of his talk.

**November 29, 1658** - *Spending Advent well.*

1. Motives for spending it well.
2. Practices.

**December 6, 1658** - *M. Vincent explained the first paragraph of our Rules.*

**December 13, 1658** - *Explanation of the second paragraph of the Rules.*

**January 3 and 10, 1659** - *Mortification.*

1. Motives for acquiring mortification.
2. What it is; its principal acts.
3. Means.

**January 17 and 24, 1659** - *Serving retreatants well.*

1. Motives for serving them zealously.
2. What this requires us to do.

**February 7, 1659** - *Conversation.*

1. Motives for conversing appropriately.
2. Requisite conditions for conversations.
3. Means of providing these conditions.

**February 14 and 21, 1659** - *M. Vincent explained the Rules.*

**February 28, 1659** - *Good use of time.*

1. Motives for using our time well.
2. Ways time is wasted.
3. Means of using time well.

**March 7, 1659** - *M. Vincent explained the Rules.*

**March 14, 1659** - *Ordination retreat.*

1. Motives for making it well.
2. Means of carrying it out well.

**March 21 and 28, 1659** - *M. Vincent explained the Rules.*

On March 28, at the end of the explanation of the Rules, M. Vincent announced for the following Monday, not the regular day, a conference on how to spend the holy time of the Passion well, preferring to give a conference on an exceptional day rather than let

these holy days pass by without encouraging the Company to spend them well.

**April 4, 1659** - *Resolutions at meditation.*

1. Motives for always taking very specific resolutions.
2. Particular resolutions we should take.
3. Means of being faithful to practicing them.

**May 2, 9, 16, 23, 30 and June 6, 1659** - *M. Vincent explained the Rules.*

**June 13, 1659** - *Devotion to the Blessed Sacrament.*

1. Motives.
2. Practices.

**June 20, 1659** - Because M. Vincent did not feel well, there was no conference that day.

**June 27, 1659** - *Chapter.*

1. Motives for assisting earnestly at Chapter.
2. The spirit in which we should accuse ourselves, admonish others, be admonished, and receive the advice of the Superior.
3. Means of benefitting from all this.

**July 4, 1659** - *Conferences.*

1. Reasons obliging the Company to place a high value on the conferences it gives.

2. What must be done before, during, and afterward to benefit from them.

**July 11, 1659** - *Not speaking to the disadvantage of the neighbor.*

1. Motives for refraining from this evil.
2. The harm that can come from it.
3. Means of refraining from it.

**July 18, 1659** - *Punctuality.*

1. Motives for being punctual.
2. Why we need punctuality.
3. Means of becoming punctual.

**August 1, 1659** - *The spirit of Christianity.*

1. Motives for acquiring it.
2. What the spirit of Christianity is.
3. Means of acquiring it.

[**August 5, 1659** - Moral theology, preaching, catechism, and administration of the sacraments.]

**August 8, 1659** - *Good conversation.*

1. Motives for conversing well.
2. Means of conversing well.

[**August 22 and 29, 1659** - *M. Vincent explained the Rules.*]

**September 6, 1659** - *Ordinands.*

The usual points.

**September 12, 1659** - *Divisions.*

1. Evils caused by those who sow division in a house.
2. The many ways this can happen.
3. Means of preventing this evil.

[**September 26, 1659** - *Praying the Divine Office.*]

**October 3, 1659** - *The spiritual man.*

1. Reasons obliging us to work at becoming deeply spiritual.
2. What a prayerful man is.
3. Means of becoming spiritual persons.

[**October 17 and 24, 1659** - *M. Vincent explained the Rules.*]

**October 31, 1659** - *Holiness.*

1. What obliges us to strive deeply for holiness.
2. In what our holiness consists.
3. Means of becoming holy.

[**November 7, 14, 21, and 28, December 5, 12, and 19, 1659** - *M. Vincent explained the Rules.*]

**December 26, 1659** - *Faults committed during the year.*

1. Motives for recovering from our failings and negligences.
2. General and principal negligences of the Company.
3. Measures to take in order to do better next year.

**January 2 and 9, 1660** - *Virtues of M. Perraud.*<sup>20</sup>

1. Motives for discussing them.
2. Practices and benefits.

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<sup>20</sup>Hugues Perraud, born in Arguel (Doubs) on October 3, 1615, entered the Congregation of the Mission on January 5, 1640, took his vows on March 23, 1644, and was ordained a priest in 1646. He was placed in Saintes (1646) and Richelieu (1651), and died in Paris on December 26, 1659.

**January 16, 1660** - *Trips into town.*

1. Motives obliging those who go out, and their companions, to behave properly in town.

2. What they must do on the way there, while in people's houses, on the way back, and when they have returned home.

**January 23, 1660** - *Recollection.*

1. Motives.

2. Principal acts.

3. Means.

**January 30, 1660** - *Baptism.*

1. Reasons for recalling the grace received at holy Baptism and the obligations we contracted at that time.

2. What this grace and these obligations are.

3. Means of acknowledging the one and of carrying out the other.

**February 13, 1660** - *The spirit of penance.*

1. Reasons for assuming the spirit of penance.

2. In what it consists; interior and exterior acts.

3. Means of acquiring this spirit.

**February 20, 1660** - *Virtues of M. Portail, first companion of M. Vincent and, later, his secretary.*

1. Reasons for discussing these, etc.

2. Practices.

**April 2, 1660** - *Interior renewal.*

1. Motives.

2. What we should renew.

3. Means.

**April 9, 1660** - *Consecration of the Bishop of Oloron.*<sup>21</sup>

1. Reasons for sharing in it.

2. What should be done.

**April 16, 1660** - *Concern for retreatants.*

1. Reasons for the Company to praise God for the grace He gives it of attracting so many persons to come here to make a retreat and to correspond to this grace.

2. Failings we may commit in this and which we must avoid.

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<sup>21</sup>Bishop Armand-François de Maytie.

3. What we should do; means of cooperating with this grace.  
At that time there were 30 retreatants at Saint-Lazare: 18 of the clergy and 12-15 laymen.

**April 23, 1660** - *Acting in a spirit of faith.*

1. Motives.
2. What it is.
3. Means.

**April 30, 1660** - *Attachments.*

1. Motives for attaching ourselves only to God.
2. Dangerous attachments for Missioners.
3. Means of detaching ourselves from them and of being attached to God alone.

**May 7, 1660** - *Silence.*

1. Reasons for keeping it exactly.
2. Where, when, and how we fail in it.
3. Means of observing it well.

**May 21, 1660** - *Devotion to the Blessed Sacrament.*

**May 28, June 4, 18, and 25, 1660** - *Virtues of the late Abbé de Chandénier, Abbot of Tournus, who died in Savoy on his way back from Rome, where he had gone out of personal devotion.*

1. Reasons for discussing the lofty, heroic virtues apparent in the late Abbé de Chandénier, our benefactor.
2. Those we noticed; the most noble particular acts.
3. Benefit we can draw from them; how can we imitate him.

*The remaining conferences up to the death of M. Vincent were on the explanation of the Rules.*

# INDEX

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This index proposes to facilitate reference to the biographical data used in this volume and to the explanation of places and terms which recur frequently in the text and have been explained when first used. Names of persons are in **bold print**—alternate spellings are given in brackets, those of terms or places in *italics*, cross references are given in parentheses. The accompanying numbers indicate the conference or document to which the reader should refer for the desired information.

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