
Spring 1990

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Recommended Citation

Kelly, Margaret J. D.C. (1990) "The Relationship of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise from Her Perspective," *Vincentian Heritage Journal*: Vol. 11 : Iss. 1 , Article 6.

Available at: <https://via.library.depaul.edu/vhj/vol11/iss1/6>

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Sister Margaret John Kelly, D.C.

The Relationship of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise from Her Perspective

BY MARGARET JOHN KELLY, D.C.

Introduction

It is quite a challenge to attempt in this short presentation to capture Louise de Marillac's almost forty-year relationship with Vincent de Paul. It was quite dynamic and, as in most growth, matured with almost

imperceptible change. One must, therefore, exert great personal discipline to resist the temptation, on the one hand, to reduce the complexity of their relationship or, on the other hand, to romanticize and create more than is actually present in the relevant documents. Far worse still would be to bend the material to fit one's thesis. Yet, the sources from which to sketch Louise's perspective of Vincent are vast, although admittedly less so than those for him. The sheer amount of material then does require a great deal of selectivity, which of itself causes some distortion. To avoid the Scylla of oversimplification and the Charybdis of distortion, I took a middle course and developed a matrix which at the outset disciplines my presentation and reveals the interpretations, possibly prejudices, influencing the organization of this paper.

Organizational Matrix

Source of Louise's Perspective	Dates	Relational Perspective with Vincent
A. Louise's spiritual writings	1623-1660	Vincent as spiritual guide; Vincent as ministry supervisor and collaborator
B. Louise's letters to Vincent	1627-1660	Vincent as spiritual guide; Vincent as ministry supervisor and collaborator; Vincent as intimate friend
C. Louise's letters about Vincent	1640-1660	Vincent as intimate friend; Vincent as co-founder and collaborator
D. Minutes of council meetings	1646-1659	Vincent as co-founder and superior general of the Daughters
E. Conferences of Saint Vincent	1634-1660	Vincent as co-founder and superior general of the Daughters

The matrix moves from the individual to the corporate relationship Louise had with Vincent as she passed from directee to co-founder and superioress. In terms of Louise's self-revelation, we descend from the intimacy of her private journal, through her letters, which are extremely revealing of Vincent and Louise's relationship, to the council minutes and the conferences where one sees both Vincent and Louise assuming their leadership roles. The spontaneity, tenderness, and honesty expressed in their correspondence are not as apparent in their official interactions, but their genuine love and total respect for each other, never far below the surface, did not preclude occasional expressions of frustration and disagreement. The two were too well integrated as

persons and too committed to simplicity to play roles in the political sense, but each was also too well schooled in respect for authority and awareness of protocol to fail in the propriety required of them in their leadership roles.

It is important to make some general comments about Louise before working through these five major source areas.

(1) Louise was a much more complex and balanced person than she has generally been made to appear. She has suffered greatly over the years both from being overshadowed by Vincent and from being caricatured, generally being portrayed as extremely scrupulous, compulsive, over-protective, neurotic, melancholic, dependent, and physically frail. Throughout her life she, like most of us, vascillated between peace and anxiety, enthusiasm and discouragement, intuitive actions and rational behavior. There is no question that her awareness of her illegitimacy, her childhood of rejection and loss, as well as her adult experiences of widowhood, family disgrace, and family conflict left their mark. But the record also shows that Louise was strong, energetic, resourceful, highly intelligent, resilient, administratively astute, politically sensitive, and physically fit to have endured the arduous journeys and the stress of her diverse responsibilities. These traits of strength in the mature Louise were not incompatible with the young woman who wrote in 1621, "The sign of my own abjection led me to consider myself as a mass of pride and self love,"¹ or who in the next year began but did not complete this provocative statement: "This thought produced such a sudden painful sensation within me that I was almost unable to make my confession. The pain was so great that if I had said and done what I felt impelled to do, I believe that ..."² A tendency to self-deprecation and melancholy persisted within Louise until her death, but it was a

¹Louise de Marillac, *Spiritual Writings of St. Louise de Marillac*, trans. Louise Sullivan, D.C. (Albany, 1984), A.13. To allow the reader to consult either the French original or the English translation of the sources, the number or date of the referenced material, not the specific page citation, will be provided. The English translations of Louise's spiritual writings and letters (*Letters of St. Louise de Marillac*, trans. Sister Helen Marie Law, D.C. [Emmitsburg, 1972]) appear in two separate volumes and are arranged in numerical sequence. The one-volume 1983 French edition of the letters and spiritual writings (*Écrits Spirituels* [Tours, 1983]) is arranged chronologically but contains an historical-sequential matrix for easy reference. Because of the limited availability of the unpublished English-language "Minutes of the Councils of the Daughters of Charity, 1646-1659," citations are made to the French version appearing in volume 13 of Pierre Coste, C.M., ed., *Saint Vincent de Paul: Correspondence, Entretiens, Documents*, 14 vols. (Paris, 1920-1925), hereinafter cited as *CED*. For the sake of those with the English version, the date of the council is included in the text. Again, the conferences are referred to by date in the text but are cited according to the English edition (Saint Vincent de Paul, *Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul*, 4 vols., trans. Joseph Leonard [Westminster, Maryland, 1952]).

²Marillac, *Spiritual Writings*, A. 15b.

part of her personality, not the totality. Ironically, the scent of the violet was Louise's "odor of sanctity," the fragrance noted by visitors to her burial site. She was indeed small like the violet, but she was certainly not insignificant and she shrank from nothing, not even herself.

Some see the 1640s as the period of Louise's conversion. Sister Élisabeth Charpy, D.C., characterizes 1640-1642 as an extremely formative period because of a major crisis between Vincent and Louise.³ The 1640s were indeed critical for Louise because at that point the Company (Daughters of Charity) experienced many internal struggles, and her son continued to be a great cause of concern to her. I prefer to see her, however, as undergoing a continuing conversion, or better a spiritual maturation, rather than as experiencing a dramatic or abrupt change in her personality or relationship with Vincent. She appeared to be in process, for she frequently had to work through critical issues. In fact, one finds only short periods of time when she was not confronting a major challenge.

In addition to external challenges, Louise honestly struggled with her own perfectionist tendencies, a natural legacy of her dysfunctional family. In a 1657 letter to Sister Françoise Carcireux, Louise shared advice she had learned from Vincent many years before about the futility of perfectionism.

We're under an illusion if we think ourselves capable of perfection, and still more so if we think ourselves capable of perfection by watching closely the slightest movement or disposition of our soul.

Once a year is quite enough to delve into this kind of research, duly mistrusting ourselves and recognizing our weakness. It's useless, even dangerous, to be forever analyzing our soul and picking it apart so as to give an account of every least thought. I'm repeating to you, what was told to me a long time ago.

I beg you, my dear sister, to help me by your prayers, and I'll do the same for you, so that God will grant us the grace to walk simply along the path of His holy love. Otherwise, we'll be like those persons who become bankrupt instead of amassing riches because they refine everything in the effort to find the philosopher's stone.⁴

There is no question that Louise tended to deep and serious reflection and identified with the suffering Christ, a central focus of seventeenth-century spirituality. "God led me to understand that it was

³See Élisabeth Charpy, D.C., "Come Wind or High Water: Louise de Marillac," *Echoes of the Company* (September 1987), 343-52, and (October 1988), 360. Charpy's life of Louise was published serially in *Echoes* from January 1987 through November 1988.

⁴Marillac, *Letters*, no. 557b ([1657]).

His holy will that I go to Him by way of the Cross. His goodness chose to mark me with it from my birth and He has hardly ever left me, at any age, without some occasion of suffering."⁵ I concur, however, with recent scholars who, rejecting the image of a depressed, scrupulous, anxious Louise, present this woman of under five feet as an extremely sensitive, contemplative, and highly responsible individual with a great deal of self-knowledge. I see her, too, as one who needed not only a serious challenge to match her high ideals and self-expectations but also a strong support system, both of which she found in Vincent de Paul.

It is this deeply reflective attitude that fostered progressive growth in Louise. Her relationship with Vincent allowed the melancholic and conscientious young Louise with fourteen separate retreat resolutions and multiple devotions to become the observant and patient Louise who could provide objective, comprehensive, site-visit reports on Confraternities of Charity. This maturing woman eventually became the organizational Louise who could develop a rule for a radically new type of community and then forcefully and persistently demand of Vincent that the Daughters of Charity remain under the guidance of the Congregation of the Mission. Louise had a dark side but it was a shifting side, not the totality of her person. The play of shadows was subtle, transient, and indirect like Milton's "chequered shade."

(2) Louise's style of spirituality has contributed to the distorted picture of her personality. She was undoubtedly a mystic and frequently expressed herself in the language of mysticism, which is difficult to understand for those who have not experienced transports. She described her "visions" in her *Spiritual Writings*. Her deep sensitivity to the great gap between God's goodness and her own human weakness prompted her to meditate frequently on the Incarnation and Redemption. These became the central theological doctrines undergirding the mission of the Daughters of Charity which was "to honor our Lord Jesus Christ as the source and model of all charity and serve Him in the Poor." More than most, Louise entered fully into Saint Paul's "the Charity of Christ urges us" and was greatly influenced by Pierre de Bérulle's "holy humanity of Christ." She insisted that the Daughters understand that it was the charity of Jesus *crucified* that should motivate them in their service, and she included this image in the community seal.

⁵Marillac, *Spiritual Writings*, A. 29.

While many feel that Louise's harsh spirituality was the product of her self-deprecation, it appears instead to have reflected the historical period. It is apparent too in Vincent's advice to her. In an outline for one of her retreats he proposed a somewhat heavy, retributive orientation with four meditations focusing on sin, judgment, and hell. When the mature Louise wrote him a rather jubilant letter on the anniversary of her vows, he countered with strong moderation. "My heart is filled with joy in the understanding God has given me of the words, 'God is my God,' and the knowledge of all the glory the saints give him," she stated. Vincent responded on the margin, "You must receive them respectfully and devoutly in view of some cross which He is preparing for you."⁶

Writing shortly before her death in 1660, Louise revealed her deep mystical prayer as well as the post-Reformation spirituality so familiar to the readers of the mystic Teresa of Avila and the poet Richard Crashaw.

I felt, upon seeing the Sacred Host, an extraordinary thirst which had its origin in the belief that Jesus wanted to give Himself to me in the simplicity of His divine infancy. When I was receiving Him, and for a long time afterward, my mind was filled by an interior communication which led me to understand that Jesus was bringing not only Himself to me but also all the merits of His mysteries. This communication lasted all day. It was not a forced, interior preoccupation. It was rather a presence or a recurrent recollection, as sometimes happens when something is troubling me. ... No desires, no resolutions. The grace of my God will accomplish in me whatever He wills.⁷

(3) The relationship of Vincent and Louise was extraordinary and was characterized by mutual development. The two were quite different in personality and leadership styles, but they shared the same core values and esteemed the same virtues. In their canon of personal virtues, they both gave priority to simplicity, respect, compassion, mildness or gentleness, and cordiality. Each had experienced and was humbled by a serious temptation against faith. Each was a sensitive, self-aware individual. Both recognized their need for emotional support and professional affirmation, although Louise was more honest and direct in admitting this.

⁶Marillac, *Letters*, no. 369 (24 August [before 1650]).

⁷Marillac, *Spiritual Writings*, M. 8. B.

They shared the charism of concern for the poor but their roles were complementary, or better, unitary in approach. Louise and the Daughters witnessed to Christ by serving the physical and social needs of the poor while Vincent and the missionaries focused directly on evangelization. They were totally comfortable with each other, and despite temporary periods of dependence on Louise's part, they enjoyed a spiritual, apostolic, and social interdependence. The experience of their own human solidarity strengthened their mission to the poor. When Vincent dropped the paternalistic "my Daughter" and replaced it with "Mademoiselle," he signalled his perception that Louise was indeed his collaborator and his equal.

Would Vincent have grown as he did without Louise? I do not think so. Would Louise have matured the way she did without Vincent? I think not. Can we precisely define this mutual influence? No, because it was multi-faceted and life-long, but we can gain insights into the richness of the relationship. Louise's perspectives of Vincent, diverse and scattered through various sources, must be set against the foregoing observations which form the context for the remainder of this paper. In summary, then, Louise has suffered from a caricature of her personality and must now be perceived in her complexity and in totality; she was a mystic and very much reflected the theological currents and style of the post-Reformation period in her writings; the relationship of Vincent and Louise was mutually productive and developmental; their friendship presented the lived ideal of the highest order of friendship but it was based in the reality of their humanity.

Let me now offer an image which may best express the mutual relationship of Vincent and Louise in their seventeenth-century France and post-Reformation, post-conciliar Church. On 27 August 1660, five months after Louise's death and two conferences after her virtues were extolled, Vincent assembled the sisters for the election of officers. In the criteria he set up for leadership in the Company, he captured what Louise had been for him and what he had been for Louise in one crisp, pregnant statement. "It is essential to have one's head well screwed on." Each was for the other, the person who helped to screw the other's head on so that a single heart and joined hands went out to Christ in the poor. It was the intellect which must enlighten and direct the blind will as it chose loving actions. Each, sometimes gently and sometimes rather forcefully, adjusted the tilt of the other's head so that a Christocentric gravity could prevail and each might keep the mission in view as together they "journeyed home to God." Louise most often had to force

Vincent to tend to details, keep on schedule, make decisions, and practice tolerance. This included giving himself the proper physical care, attending to issues of the emerging Company of the Daughters, and at times even recognizing the worth of Louise's opinions. He, on his part, had to keep Louise looking up at the goodness and providence of God even as she viewed the unending needs of the poor, the inadequacies of the sisters, and her own weaknesses. It was a very telling comment that in this conference, Vincent, who for so many years had resisted Louise's insistence that the Vincentians retain authority over the Daughters, noted, "You have reason to hope that, with the help of God *and the Superior General*, all will go well." He then humbly added this disclaimer, "Provided the Company remains humble and persists in the desire to amend itself."⁸

It was also significant that rather than hold the mandated election of Louise's successor, Vincent shared Louise's observations about Marguerite Chétif and without any balloting declared: "For, Sisters, *a good sound head* is required and we need go no farther. Accordingly, I abide by her [Louise's] decision and will do so for this time only."⁹ This was the Louise whom Vincent had challenged to move from self-preoccupation to the service of Christ in others. It was the Louise, who before she knew Vincent, wrote in 1621, "When I considered the esteem which at times, others mistakenly accord me, I felt that I was unworthy to have the holy will of God accomplished in me."¹⁰ After thirty-five years of friendship and collaboration with Vincent, she could write in 1660: "One means to this end is to be found in the fact that, without any cause in me, I appear to others as having received some graces from God. This both humbles me and gives me courage."¹¹ Vincent knew how to direct and motivate Louise, and she was open to guidance from this man of God. Vincent's love for and confidence in Louise helped her to love herself so that she could grow in love of God and the poor.

Source A: Spiritual Writings of Saint Louise

While Louise's *Spiritual Writings* contain relatively few direct revelations of her relationship with Vincent, they do provide a very special perspective because they reveal the authentic and versatile Louise as she expressed herself from her vision of Vincent in 1623 until her death

⁸Vincent de Paul, *Conferences*, 27 August 1660, 4:337. Emphasis added.

⁹*Ibid.*, 338. Emphasis added.

¹⁰Marillac, *Spiritual Writings*, A. 13.

¹¹*Ibid.*, M. 8. B.

in 1660. We see the mystical, ascetical Louise in her prayerful reflections, the organizational Louise who dictated very precise rules for the superioress, the bell ringer, and the pharmacist, the pragmatic Louise who reported on the health of the sheep and lambs at the Confraternities, and the sensitive Louise who described the emotional climate created by the Ladies of Charity. In these writings, Louise showed herself as the docile directee of Vincent but also as his creative but deferential collaborator.

A.1. Vincent as Spiritual Guide.

One of the most important references to Vincent and Louise's spiritual relationship appears in "The Light," the report she wrote of her vision on Pentecost, 4 June 1623. The condition of the document, folded into tiny neat sections and now maintained in the Vincentian Archives in Paris, suggests that Louise carried it on her person. During mass that day, Louise was freed from the doubt about leaving her husband, was reassured about the immortality of the soul, and was allowed to glimpse the future when she would make religious vows but would be in the service of others. In that vision, similar to the one Jane Frances de Chantal had of Francis de Sales, Louise saw Vincent de Paul, who was to replace her current spiritual director, Bishop Pierre Camus of Belley. "I was also assured that I should remain at peace concerning my director," she wrote, "that God would give me one whom He seemed to show me. It was repugnant to me to accept him; nevertheless, I acquiesced. It seemed to me that I did not yet have to make this change."¹²

This is a very revealing statement about Louise's personality and orientation toward reality. Obviously God was speaking to her, but she described the experience as "repugnant." Was this an aesthetic evaluation of the new director whose appearance and bearing possibly offended her or an expression of her fear of separation from Camus? Her words bespeak a pragmatism that even a vision could not obscure, exemplified by her concluding remark, which seems to provide the key to her acceptance: "I acquiesced. It seemed to me that I did not yet have to make this change." Perhaps, and this is highly speculative, Louise could overcome her negative feelings, whatever their source, because she recognized the opportunity for transition, the chance to alter the

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¹²Ibid., A. 2.

situation, or more realistically, the time to work through the difficulties. This was the kind of patient realism and subtle control that Louise showed so often in her later relationship with Vincent.

The same conscious patience guided her apostolic dealings with Vincent as well as with other authority figures in the services. While she found neither obedience nor collaboration easy, and her relationships in their initial phase were far from perfect, she perceived her ministry as God-given despite the human difficulties.

I must make good use of the advice which has been given to me concerning the distinctions which appear among persons working together for the same goal, who have similar and nearly equal responsibilities for its outcome as well as those which exist when there is a single person responsible for the project who through necessity employs an assistant to direct it, who must be looked upon only as his representative. It seems to me that this is how I should consider myself in the tasks which God gives me. Therefore, I must submit, with no resistance whatever on my part, to the directives of those in power for the good of this work, although this was not apparent to me from the beginning.¹³

A.2 Vincent as Ministry Supervisor and Louise as Docilely Persuasive Collaborator.

Louise's *Spiritual Writings* provide insight into the foundations of the Daughters of Charity, the Congregation of the Mission, and the Confraternities of Charity. It appears from her early writings (pre-1628) that she and Vincent had discussions about the establishment of the Congregation. It does not seem idle fantasy that she assisted him in clarifying his thinking on this great work as it evolved. Her reflections on the purpose of the Congregation and on her own motives in praying for it suggest strongly that she perceived herself as Vincent's supporter and sounding board on the Congregation before she actually became his collaborator in the Confraternities.

It is within the apostolic context of visiting the Charities that Louise's journal entry of February 1630 shows the special bond which existed between them:

On Ember Wednesday preceding Christmas, I left for Asnieres. I was fearful of making this trip because of my ailments, but the thought of the obedience which was sending me on this trip strengthened me considerably. ...

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¹³Ibid., A. 12.

I left on the feast of Saint Agatha, 5 February, to go to Saint Cloud. ... God permitting, I wanted to have a Mass celebrated on that day because it was the anniversary of my marriage. I abstained, however, wishing to perform an act of poverty and to depend solely upon God in the action I was about to undertake. I had not expressed my wish to my confessor who celebrated the Mass at which I received Holy Communion. However, as he came out on the altar, the thought came to him to celebrate it for me as an alms and to say the Nuptial Mass.¹⁴

Louise's reports to Vincent on her visitations to the various Confraternities show that she had internalized the principal of accountability because her evaluations allowed him to experience the precise situation. While she obviously recognized and respected his authority, her powers of observation as well as her human psychology were amazingly independent. Her comprehensive, objective reports avoided undocumented observations. The following excerpt is characteristic. "There are six sheep and six lambs which are undernourished. They have about fifteen or sixteen pounds in the treasury. The sick are visited three times a day ... the litanies have been sung only once."¹⁵

While from the beginning Louise assumed full responsibility for her duties, she moved slowly to a posture of collaborative ministry. Actually, in terms of ultimate governance, she consistently expressed a desire that Vincent be in charge of the Daughters. This desire became a major concern, almost an obsession, as Louise in her later years feared that the Company would come under the bishops. She had expressed her wish in the draft of the first rule for the Daughters which granted all power to the superioress who "shall be the soul which animates the body and which enables it to carry out the plan of God for it. Nevertheless, she shall fulfill her responsibilities under the direction of the Priest of the Mission appointed by the superior and in consultation with the two officers when they reside in the House."¹⁶

It is interesting that as early as 1639 Vincent directed Louise to sign contracts under his authorization and to buy a house with Vincentian credit, but he resisted formalizing the Daughters' accountability to the Congregation of the Mission. Louise sought opportunities to influence him on this point of unifying the two Companies. She used the accident of the falling ceiling as a chance to articulate this need for unity:

¹⁴Ibid., A. 50.

¹⁵Ibid., A. 52.

¹⁶Ibid., A. 54.

As on other occasions when the grace of God has acted in our Most Honored Father and in the souls of some of our sisters, leading to the solid foundation of this little family, so it seemed to me that rather than looking upon this event as an accident, we should see it as a warning to His Charity to establish a close union between the way of life that God wanted this community to practice and that of his Institute, since there are common interests to be found in this grace of God. ... In my word and heart, I always considered that it was a grace from God, permitted for an end that we do not know and that God by means of this was asking something of each of us. I pray that He will reveal His Will to our most Honored Father!!¹⁷

Louise never doubted the design of God in this regard.

Although she generally deferred to Vincent, it is important to note that she tended to use “gentle persuasion.” In the spirit of Francis de Sales, she saw this as the way a superioress should get the rule observed. “She does this by gentle persuasion rather than through constraint.”¹⁸ The word “gentle” is ubiquitous in Louise’s writing. Because her quick and perceptive mind caused her at times to be judgmental, it is understandable that gentleness became a preoccupation, but she also seemed to see it as the way to convince Vincent when he was hesitant.

We can then characterize the relationship of Vincent and Louise as portrayed in her *Spiritual Writings* as creatively collaborative and persuasively docile. Louise revealed an awareness of her own contribution without lessening her regard for Vincent’s leadership. One recalls, with humor, that in 1630 Vincent wrote to Louise about the work of the confraternity, “Experience has shown that it is absolutely necessary for the women not to depend on the men in this situation, especially for the money.”¹⁹ This was the same Vincent who told her that except in motherly concern for her son, “you are hardly a woman in anything else.”²⁰

Two excerpts from Louise’s notes on the meetings of the Ladies of Charity capture the honesty, simplicity, and equality of her relationship with Vincent as well as the deference and credit she habitually accorded him, even while she acknowledged the importance of women in the charitable works.

¹⁷Ibid., A. 75.

¹⁸Ibid., A. 91b.

¹⁹Coste, *CED*, 1:78-79, letter 42. For an English translation, see Jacqueline Kilar, D.C., ed., *Saint Vincent de Paul: Correspondence, Conferences, Documents* (Brooklyn, 1985), 1:70. Hereinafter cited also as *CED*. This is the first volume of a projected multi-volume series translating Coste.

²⁰Coste, *CED*, 1:584, letter 400. For the English, see Kilar, *CED*, 1:576.

It is very evident, in this century, that Divine Providence willed to make use of women to show that it was His goodness alone which desired to aid afflicted peoples and to bring them powerful helps for their salvation.

No one is ignorant of the fact that, to carry this out, God used the establishment of the Congregation of the Mission through the instrumentality of Vincent de Paul. Moreover, everyone is aware that through his work this great benefit spread so far that it is apparent that it must be continued by means of the meetings of the Ladies of Charity where needs will be discussed and where, it seems, the Spirit of God presides.

The power which the Holy Father gave to the aforementioned Congregation of the Mission to establish the Confraternities of Charity is the seed of the fruit which has been produced and which is produced daily not only in France but, we might say, throughout the civilized world.

Was it not by means of this light that the Ladies of the Company of Charity recognized the needs of the provinces and that God gave them the grace to aid these peoples so charitably and so magnificently that Paris has become the admiration of and an example for the entire kingdom?

Were not these holy assemblies at which Vincent de Paul, Superior of the Mission, presided, the means which these charitable Ladies employed in order to determine priorities for the distribution of goods to the poor?

As we all know, Monsieur Vincent furnished honest and charitable criteria to enable them to discover true needs and to provide for them prudently. In all of this, they sought to meet the spiritual as well as the temporal necessities of the poor, thereby giving honor to God in heaven perhaps even now by His divine foreknowledge of the innumerable souls which will one day be with Him.²¹

Source B. Louise's Letters to Vincent

In Louise's letters to Vincent, we gain the most diverse and nuanced insights into their relationship. Just as her *Spiritual Writings* were presumed to be free of prying eyes, so her letters to Vincent show utter trust and spontaneity and are devoid of self-consciousness. They reveal their evolving and authentic relationship. Although the earliest extant letter of Louise to Vincent is dated June 1627, she obviously had written him earlier, for in October of 1626 he responded, "I am not answering all of your letters because I am no longer in a situation where I can do what you request."²² While categorization tends to flatten the humanness of the correspondence, for purpose of study it is helpful to look at the letters from several perspectives: Louise's perception of Vincent as spiritual guide, ministry supervisor and collaborator, and intimate friend.

²¹Marillac, *Spiritual Writings*, A. 56.

²²Coste, *CED*, 1:26, letter 12. For the English, see Kilar, *CED*, 1:24.

B.1 Vincent as Spiritual Guide and Louise as Dependent Directee.

Louise appeared most dependent when she sought Vincent's spiritual guidance and support. While Sister Charpy and others attribute much of her pained insistence to the literary conventions of the time, it does seem that her repeated requests of Vincent reveal a more than ordinary need for assistance. This never changed throughout their long correspondence, even though in one of her last requests, she was content to accept "interior" direction because illness prevented him from coming to her. A quick sampling of her various requests shows the consistency and insistency of her demand over the years.

I hope you will forgive the freedom with which I reveal to you the impatience of my soul, since you have been away so long and your destination is so uncertain. ... [I]n my weakness, the days seem like months.²³

If your convenience permits me to talk to you before long, I'll be more at ease. ... Look at all the years that God has spoken to me through you, and I am still as I am.²⁴

If you believe that Divine Providence has guided my life, don't abandon me in my need, my dear Father, for the love of God! Do me the charity to point out to me my self-deception, so that I may not die unrepentant.²⁵

I beg you for the love of God to let me see you today, if only for a few minutes.²⁶

The rest I have to say to you is too long to write down and will be more easily told tomorrow if I have the honor of seeing you. I stand in need of tremendous help from God, because in all that touches me personally, I can see only misery and affliction. ... I am content that you know my needs, as I don't expect help and consolation except from you.²⁷

For the love of God, I beg you to give me time to talk with you before you leave tomorrow, so I can attend to the matter I mentioned to you. If you can't afford this time before your departure, then let me take a coach or borrow a carriage so I can go as far as the inn and talk to you there. I beg you to grant me both these things because I must speak to you.²⁸

²³Marillac, *Letters*, no. 1 (5 June 1627)

²⁴*Ibid.*, no. 8 ([1638]).

²⁵*Ibid.*, no. 25 ([1640]).

²⁶*Ibid.*, no. 42 (feast of Saint Vincent [1641]).

²⁷*Ibid.*, no. 263 (October [1649]).

²⁸*Ibid.*, no. 384 (undated but probably from the late 1640s or early 1650s)

I'm very confident that God knows what He's doing and what His plans are for the Company, if you will only rid me of the obstacles I put in the way by my failings. For His love I beg you to take the time to acquaint yourself with them all. I won't reserve anything, because God has always given me the grace to desire that my thoughts, actions and intentions should be no more hidden from you than they are from Him.²⁹

In your charity, please give me an hour of your time for my urgent needs; for I'm too negligent even to know them well.³⁰

Let me take the place of a bashful beggarwoman [*sic*] and beg you for the love of God to grant the alms of a short visit which I need so urgently.³¹

My heart remains in peace; otherwise I would find it very difficult to bear so long a deprivation. Would you be so good, my most Honored Father, as to reflect on some means I could use so as not to wander away and be lost, living as I am without revealing my state to you and without any advice or communication?³²

I'm grateful that Divine Providence reminded your charity of my wish that you would give me a few minutes afterwards; otherwise I would have been quite upset.³³

Please have the goodness to help me surmount my difficulties and make better use of the days that remain to me so that I may not be filled with shame at the end of my life. I hope this from the goodness of God, and with all my heart I ask you in your charity to give me some time for this purpose, since this is the means that for so many years has assured me of doing God's will in what was commanded me.³⁴

... except for the deprivation of the only consolation that you have given me for thirty-five years. I accept this for the love of Him as Providence ordains, because I hope to receive the same assistance from you, but in an interior manner. I beg this of you for the sake of the union of the Son of God with our human nature.

I still hope to be able to see you when I can without endangering the precarious health God is giving you.³⁵

... the grief of being deprived of the privilege of a talk with you.³⁶

In these excerpts, which span their relationship more than three decades, we see the complete trust Louise had in Vincent as well as her

²⁹Ibid., no. 411 (August [1654])

³⁰Ibid., no. 492 (eve of the Assumption [14 August 1656])

³¹Ibid., no. 558 (Wednesday [1657])

³²Ibid., no. 605a ([31 December 1658])

³³Ibid., no. 615 (25 March [1659])

³⁴Ibid., no. 622 (2 June 1659)

³⁵Ibid., no. 644 (24 December 1659)

³⁶Ibid., no. 655 (January 1660).

obvious dependence upon him as an instrument of God's providence in her regard.

B.2. Vincent as Ministry Supervisor and Collaborator.

Experienced in serving the poor and supporting various charitable enterprises, Louise brought to Vincent's project of the Confraternities a great deal of knowledge and expertise. In the early years of visiting them, she reported to him as if in the position of an inferior. Her method was very objective, descriptive, and a bit detached. Later when she became Vincent's true collaborator, her reports expressed a quiet co-ownership and took on a subtle persuasive tone. At times she told Vincent directly what he should do and sometimes even what he should feel. Frequently she began by asking advice and then, in a detailed response to her own question, laid out a course of action. In those situations, her report generally concluded with an affirmation of his authority or an expression of her deference to him.

... I humbly beg you to give me directions for this undertaking. I think I'll tell Madame de Beaufort, if you agree, that she and the other ladies who want to take part in this work should go to the pastor. ...

To save time I'm sending you my plans, because these Ladies have waited a long time for this day, and I think we should strike while the iron is hot. Don't hesitate, however, to send other plans, for you know best what is to be done.³⁷

Louise expressed herself strongly about the rules of the Confraternity established in 1629 at her own parish of Saint-Sauveur. She observed that it would not be good to have the pastor in control but that the Ladies should report some things to him. After making many specific recommendations, including that the Ladies of the Confraternity handle the bookkeeping, Louise remarked to Vincent: "If you had not told me to compile these ideas, I should never have dared to do so. Why I deferred so long I don't know except that I realize my mind is sluggish when it comes to doing good to others and in my own private devotions."³⁸

While self-reliant in service, Louise leaned heavily upon Vincent in situations that affected the sisters. This may have been caused by spiritual dependence on him, by insecurity in a role of leadership, or even by her great respect for Vincent's authority. A few examples will

³⁷Ibid., no. 6 ([December 1636?]).

³⁸Ibid., no. 4 (4 September [probably 1635]).

illustrate this. In 1641 she expressed concern about a seminarian who had visited a young sister. The cleric requested the latter to visit him, "which I didn't dare let her do without your permission," Louise wrote to Vincent. "He also gave her a few holy pictures, probably because he wasn't allowed to keep them himself. I have them while waiting for your decision about it."³⁹ In that same letter, Louise and Vincent employed for the first time an effective technique: she numbered the items on which she needed help, and he numbered his brief, crisp responses penned on the same page. One of these provides some humor. Vincent told Louise that because he could not assist a certain lady in distress and could not send any of his men, the woman had better seek the help of the Jesuits. (This counterpoint style of Louise's question and Vincent's answer can also be seen in Letter 128 and Letter 545d).

When Sister Anne Hardemont was having a difficult time at Saint-Sulpice and asked to be changed, Louise urged Vincent, "Please let me know what to do about Sister Anne of St. Sulpice; she was quite insistent. We're very grateful that God has given you a paternal heart that can put up with us, especially me, Monsieur."⁴⁰ Regarding a similar matter in April 1649, Louise wrote with restrained impatience at Vincent's failure to respond earlier. "See if we could avoid changing the Sisters. If you think it appropriate that Sister Marie of Tours be missioned as I asked you in two former letters, please send her directly to Tours instead of having her return to Paris. We've tried her out in several places, and when she left for Nantes I told her it was our last attempt to place her. But act as you see fit, Monsieur, according to the inspiration of our Lord."⁴¹ In July 1642 Louise revealed sensitivity about both sisters' acceptance of her and her own tendency toward perfectionism. "I have the idea that our Sisters think I don't want them to talk about their troubles," she told Vincent. "After examining my conscience, I've come up with two incidents that might have given them this impression. If they have lodged other complaints, Monsieur, I think you should investigate them, in order to know their inner dispositions better." Responding on her letter, Vincent referred to his control of the situation. "I have about twenty-five years' experience in judging how far interior and exterior direction should go and the inconveniences

³⁹Ibid., no. 48 (August 1641)

⁴⁰Ibid., no. 68 (1642).

⁴¹Ibid., no. 242 (6 April 1649)



Left to right: Father O'Donnell, Professor Wright,
Sister Margaret John, Father Deville.

attached to both; I'll inform you accordingly."⁴² Throughout their relationship Louise spontaneously sought Vincent's counsel, but he seemed at times abrupt and even resistant to responding to her many needs.

By the late 1640s Louise had perfected her method of analyzing a problem and then presenting the solution in the form of a question or a direct suggestion. A letter describing the conflict produced by having two communities of sisters at the hospital of Le Mans is illustrative: "I think the privilege of the director of the hospital of Le Mans to name two sisters, and that of the administrators to name the others, is the cause of all the disorder encountered there in the service of the poor. Would it be better. ..." ⁴³ We see this again when she questioned Vincent, "Don't you think one of the sisters could go to the procurator-general to remind him about the needs that were represented to him? I think Sister Genevieve [Poisson] is the most suited, the others less so. She could persuade him to provide all the wood in one delivery."⁴⁴

⁴²Ibid., no. 64b (6 July 1642)

⁴³Ibid., no. 177 (28 May [1647])

⁴⁴Ibid., no. 192 (23 August 1647)

Louise also utilized this direct method when she sought Vincent's support in not allowing a convalescing sister to make a trip but rather to have her take a rest at the motherhouse. "Let me tell you, My Most Honored Father, that my heart is often deeply touched at the thought that the Company is on the point of declining, and that I see many disadvantages if you permit this trip. The same thing has been refused to many others for various reasons."⁴⁵ This was a little reversal in roles because Louise generally individualized and personalized situations while Vincent held to principle. Here, Vincent agreed with Louise and in the same letter advised her: "You must comply with God's guidance with regard to your Daughters, offer them to Him, and be in peace. The Son of God saw His Company dispersed and almost becoming extinct in His own time; you must unite your will to His."⁴⁶

Louise's effectiveness as chief executive officer and her collaborative relationship with Vincent appear in her "corporate" letters. On 14 January 1640 she reported to him about the complex legal situation involving the care of foundlings at La Couche.⁴⁷ That same year she described the actions required to buy the house at La Chapelle and advised, "Before deciding to buy it, if you agree, we must tell you all the disadvantages and what can be remedied, so that later we won't regret buying it."⁴⁸ Louise fulfilled the administrative and executive obligations of both the community and charitable works well, but she always reported to Vincent faithfully as if to a board of directors. A good stewardess, she urged him to seek the appropriate legal advice when a dying sister's will was not in order lest "the sum she wants to bequeath to the Company ... be lost."⁴⁹

Like Vincent, Louise engaged in profitable ventures to support charitable projects. In addition to raising sheep for sale, she became involved in a winery and displayed both an astute business sense and a knowledge of masculine behavior, even as she sought Vincent's advice. "We should start selling the wine," she told him in January 1648. "In this district, there's a great demand for it now by the barrel or in large flasks, because soldiers are billeted here [Bicêtre]. If we delay, our chances for a profitable sale will slip by. Sister Genevieve [Poisson] says the Ladies want to wait until they have a cheaper wine and then mix

⁴⁵Ibid., no. 428 (1655).

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid., no. 31 (14 January [1640]).

⁴⁸Ibid., no. 33 (feast of Saint-Denis 1640)

⁴⁹Ibid., no. 609a (January 1659).

them. I don't agree, because we would need a man to do the mixing and he might very well carry off all the profits. Besides, our Sisters might be embarrassed by having to watch that nobody got cheated which would be very difficult to avoid."⁵⁰

In 1647 Louise used a business argument to buttress her repeated requests that the Daughters remain under the control of the superior general of the Vincentians. "God seems to have filled my soul with peace and simplicity during the imperfect meditation I made on the subject of the Daughters of Charity being always under the guidance of Divine Providence in both temporal and spiritual matters. ... He makes His plans evident from the beginning. You know, Monsieur, that in the beginning of this work it was proposed that if this Company should fail because of evil conduct, its resources would revert to the Mission to be used in the instruction of the country people."⁵¹ She seemed to be saying to Vincent that if you have been considered our heirs on death, you must take your responsibility while we live.

At times Louise's attitude toward Vincent bordered on the protective as she quietly suggested a course of action or offered a gentle reminder. When the sisters were being denied the sacraments by the pastor at Chars because they obeyed their superioress rather than him, Louise wrote to Vincent about Sister Julienne Loret. "Please don't write to her in such a way that she would feel obliged to remain. ... In fact, you probably don't think we should."⁵² Reminding him in 1649 of Sister Françoise Fanchon who had requested vows, Louise identified her as the garden sister; in other requests for vows, she added distinguishing characteristics of the sisters as if to assist the stretched and overburdened Vincent in placing faces with names.⁵³ On 31 January 1657 she cited a sister's talents and suggested a new placement for her. At the end of the letter she added a postscript, "Please reply because Sister can get a ticket for the St.-Germain coach."⁵⁴

At other times Louise seemed to remind Vincent of his opinion as if he were forgetful, or just in case he might disagree with her. In 1659 she wrote: "Please remember that you don't approve of one Sister being placed all alone anywhere. Besides we have no sister available."⁵⁵ This

⁵⁰Ibid., no. 202 (17 January 1648).

⁵¹Ibid., no. 199 (20 November 1647).

⁵²Ibid., no. 304a (undated). z

⁵³Ibid., no. 252b (August 1649).

⁵⁴Ibid., no. 511 (31 January 1657).

⁵⁵Ibid., no. 612 (27 February 1659).

appears to have been a long-standing issue between them because in February 1641 Louise had tactfully objected to Vincent's plan of sending Sister Marie Joly alone to Sedan. She reminded him of the "resolution that it seems to me you have taken of never sending anyone off alone, so that it seems to me necessary to send someone with her." Louise then gave reasons why the sister should have a companion, even assuring Vincent that two sisters could live on what was earned by one. She concluded by requesting that if he approved, he should specify the day of their departure and whether seats on the coach should be reserved. She revealed a bit of insecurity though, adding a postscript: "The Sister I am suggesting as a companion to Sister Marie Joly knows how to read, but Sister Marie does not. She could teach little girls. If you have another Sister in mind, please name her, and in this way give our good Sister Marie a companion."⁵⁶ Vincent's answer, written on Mademoiselle's letter, was unenthusiastic and even a bit condescending: "Mademoiselle, I approve your idea of sending two Sisters if the second one can teach, which I doubt. You had better prepare her for this. I have another difficulty about their means of living. If that Sister can't keep school, it would be better to send someone else who is less necessary in this city. Good day, Mademoiselle; I am better, thank God, and am your humble servant."⁵⁷

Through the years Louise increased her scope of collaboration and took on more and more decision-making responsibility. She generally consulted with Vincent on serious community issues, as if she needed reassurance more than actual assistance. Concerning the loss of sisters, and there were many, Vincent became a sounding board and a support for her. Louise also sought his advice in matters of serious discipline. Such was the case of Sister Marthe Dauteuil, who was "somewhat cunning and secretive." She had studied surgical procedures on her own and had received a case of instruments from her mother. Having refused to give the scalpel to the sister servant (superioress), Marthe said she would give it to Louise but later reported that she had thrown the knife away. Louise detained her at the motherhouse and recommended to Vincent that "an example should be made for the future good of the Company. We must learn how to proceed in such matters with justice and charity." In a postscript she stated that she had not permitted the sister to receive the sacraments.⁵⁸

⁵⁶Ibid., no. 36b (9 February 1641).

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid., no. 165 (November 1646).

Louise's letters indicate that she frequently recommended conference topics to Vincent and appeared at times to send special requests to him. On one occasion she matter-of-factly requested him to "confirm if the subject of the conference is the complaint that I made to you that the Sisters are always wanting to be missioned."⁵⁹

Earlier she had sought his help on an even larger scale. "I also think it very necessary and beneficial that your charity should write a letter to all the Sisters, if you think it appropriate, scolding them a little and encouraging them a little. ... As for myself, I fear I will die in my hardness of heart if you don't help me."⁶⁰

B.3 Vincent as Intimate Friend.

Louise appreciated Vincent as the type of friend described in Ecclesiasticus, "a sturdy shelter ... a treasure ... beyond price" (Ecclesiasticus 6:14-15). The tender, spiritual quality of their relationship was summarized in a letter of March 1645. "I expect great help from your prayers and beg your angel to remind you of me."⁶¹ Louise's total openness to and reliance on Vincent are best revealed in the agitated references to her son Michel and in her concern for Vincent's health. Her letters were punctuated with diverse anxieties about her boy, such as his having a crucifix in his room at the Collège des Bons Enfants or about his liaisons with less than desirable women. For a time Louise was totally obsessed with his salvation. Although aware that she was taxing Vincent's patience, she had to have someone to unburden herself to. "I thank you for doing me so much good," she told him 1648. "When I let myself be carried away by apprehensions that weigh upon me like real afflictions, then I need to be shaken up a little. From my son's letter, which I enclose, you will see on the one hand, my weakness, and on the other, my constant reason for sorrow and the need I have of your charitable assistance."⁶² At times her overprotectiveness and unrealistic responsibility for Michel, who certainly lacked his mother's gifts of mind and spirit, appeared to frustrate Vincent. Still, their friendship was so deep that Louise continued to seek his help with the young man, and Vincent continued to exhaust all remedies available. It is interesting to note that Louise, Elizabeth Seton, and Jane Frances de Chantal each

⁵⁹Ibid., no. 253 (October [1649]).

⁶⁰Ibid., no. 173a (Easter Sunday [21 April] 1647).

⁶¹Ibid., no. 118a (March 1645).

⁶²Ibid., no. 206 ([1648]).

had difficulty with her children and that each was assisted in parenting by a priest, two of whom (Vincent and Francis de Sales) became saints.

The great tenderness Louise felt for Vincent is perhaps best revealed in the ubiquitous references to his health and her innumerable recommendations and remedies, which demonstrate her medical knowledge and skill. The lively, open manner in which she offered them shows the high comfort level which existed between the two. It also serves as a wonderful reminder of their simplicity.

I think you would get rid of your cold more easily if you went to bed a little earlier in the evening, because hard work and much standing heat up the blood.⁶³

Let me tell you that I think you could get relief from your wound if you had blood drawn from your arm on the same side—not much, just enough to prevent inflammation which could result from the disturbance of fluids caused by purgation. But I think it essential that you do without salt for a few weeks. I'm sending you an ointment that I've found very effective in preventing infection and soothing pain. Try it by applying it to the center of the sore.

Take a piece of linen folded about four times; dip it in warm water and apply it to the sore. You should change it at least twice a day. ... Be careful that it does not stick to the sore.⁶⁴

Permit me to tell you that it's absolutely essential that your leg should not dangle for more than a quarter of an hour, nor should it be exposed to the heat of the fire. If it gets cold, wrap it up in a warm scarf put over your stocking.⁶⁵

For the love of God please let me know the true state of your health, and don't be in a hurry to go out!⁶⁶

I think, my Most Honored Father, that for persons our age, the best time for a blood-letting is during the full moon; for laxatives, the waning moon is best, so that the evacuation won't be too violent.⁶⁷

For the love of God, let me inquire about your health. Is the swelling in your legs becoming worse? Are your pains lessening, and are you running a temperature? Speaking with the familiarity of a daughter to her Most Honored Father, I can't help saying that I think it is absolutely essential for you to purge yourself well, but gently, to make up for the deficiency of nature. Avoid perspiring; it's very dangerous to induce a

⁶³Ibid., no. 32 (1640).

⁶⁴Ibid., no. 301 (8 March [1651]).

⁶⁵Ibid., no. 462 (14 November 1655).

⁶⁶Ibid., no. 562 (1 February 1658).

⁶⁷Ibid., no. 591 (19 September 1658).

sweat by artificial means. It's necessary for you to take some nourishment in the evening when sick, omitting bread and wine. Herbs are a bitter remedy but they build good blood.⁶⁸

While very concerned about Vincent's health, Louise also gave him full reports on her own and generously shared remedies that had worked for her. She also confided to him what she could not tell others, especially about her mental states. In 1655, for instance, she admitted to being "somewhat depressed lately."⁶⁹

Because they were so intimate, Louise could also encourage Vincent to express and vent his feelings, which one suspects he generally kept to himself. She appears to have understood the psychosomatic nature of loss and grief. Her concern over the effect unexpressed grief might have on Vincent's health surfaced when a loved confrere died. "It seems that our Lord is the sole owner of the Congregation of the Mission, since He disposes of the good subjects He has given it this way," she wrote to Vincent. "... Am I not bold, my Most Honored Father, to mingle my tears with your customary submission to the decrees of Providence, my weakness with the strength God has given you to bear the large share of His sufferings our Lord so often gives you? For His sake, give nature what you owe it, because this is essential to your health."⁷⁰

Source C. Correspondence:

References about Vincent in Letters to Various Persons

Sprinkled throughout Louise's correspondence one finds many references about Vincent. Their frequency and the manner in which they are so easily woven into her thoughts suggest strongly that he was never far from her mind. In many references she cited him as her authority for directing or advising that the sisters do something. In others he appeared as her collaborator-supervisor in establishing or carrying on the works. In still others Louise revealed her love through her concern for his health or in seeking news of him. In these letters she portrayed Vincent not only as her support and friend but also as co-founder and collaborator.

⁶⁸Ibid., no. 649 (4 January 1660).

⁶⁹Ibid., no. 463a (December 1655)

⁷⁰Ibid., no. 516 (20 March 1657).

C.1 *Intimate Friend.*

One of Louise's most tender references to Vincent is found in a letter to Father Antoine Portail in which she unabashedly urged him to gather more information about the man both of them loved dearly. "Since you're going to Gascony, get all the information you can, because I'm going to ply you with questions so that I may know better the person *dearest to us* in all the world."⁷¹ The same tenderness marked her references to Vincent's health. Writing from Liancourt to Sister Élisabeth Hellot, who lived across from Saint-Lazare, Louise urged: "Please tell Brother Alexandre that it's about time to purge M. Vincent. I think he needs it, and I think chicory syrup and syrup of peach blossom would do him good. You'll know how to handle this." Before closing, she added, "If some of our Sisters see M. Vincent, tell them to extend my very humble greetings to him."⁷² In a 1648 letter to Sister Julienne Loret, Louise expressed concern about the frightful conditions in Paris and requested information of her loved ones in this very revealing order: "As soon as you can ... please give me news of M. Vincent, my son, and our Sisters."⁷³ In her last extant dispatch, written shortly before her death, Louise told Sister Jeanne Delacroix: "Redouble your prayers for our Most Honored Father. His legs are so painful he can't walk; because they're so weak he can celebrate Mass only rarely."⁷⁴

C.2. *Co-Founder and Collaborator.*

It becomes very obvious that Louise frequently relied on Vincent's spiritual authority when responding to the Sisters or when providing inspiration and guidance to those who were at the distance. A letter to the Sisters at Nantes reveals Vincent's authority as well as Louise's psychology.

Enclosed is a letter from M. Vincent which you must treasure dearly because God has given him the necessary time to write it, although he is constantly occupied with great and weighty affairs. It is necessary, my dear Sisters, that I tell you very simply the thoughts that came to me as I read that dear letter. O my Sisters, the sweetness of style, the remarks about the graces God has given to you and to us, the instruction which his charity gives you so calmly fills me with such dismay that I don't know what to say, thinking of the many times God has warned us of our

⁷¹Ibid., no. 148 (13 August 1646). Emphasis added.

⁷²Ibid., no. 173b ([23 April 1647]).

⁷³Ibid., no. 220 ([1648]).

⁷⁴Ibid., no. 656 (2 February 1660).

obligations through him. How often he knew but overlooked our faults and failings, always encouraging us with his fatherly concern and taking all this trouble for us as though we were worthy of merit!

And what return have we given him, barren soil that we are? Nothing but discontent and our infidelities to God for whom he tries so hard to win us. Some members of the Company have left or have committed grave faults against their vocation; sometimes the whole body has degenerated. How stupid we are! It seems that all the warnings God has given us have had no other effect than beating the air; and because they were spoken before God and His angels, they will turn to our confusion in the day of judgment. I'm sure you will agree that my heart had good reason to be touched with apprehension. I'm not trying to frighten you, nor am I speaking to you alone. I'm speaking for myself and all who have abused the graces of our holy vocation. I beg them, for love of the death of our dear Master, to renew themselves in His resurrection and enjoy the peace He has so often given to us through His apostles.⁷⁵

Using Vincent as authority, Louise advised the sisters at Angers who were suffering from "spiritual finickiness" not to seek out an extraordinary confessor when they found it difficult to communicate with the assigned priest.⁷⁶ The correspondence between Vincent and Louise as well as her letters to the Daughters, Portail, and Guy Lasnier, abbé de Vaux, clearly indicate that Vincent made the final decision on vows and that in the early days the sisters were very carefully scrutinized. A letter to Portail is illustrative: "The last time I spoke to M. Vincent about the vows, I saw that he was trying to decide if the recently clothed Sisters should pronounce them temporarily or forever. I think that by the mid-August feast he had made his decision; at that time he made several wait and told me to leave a note for M. Lambert to that effect." In that same document Louise cited Vincent as the authority for wearing the cornette in certain situations and for avoiding the color black.⁷⁷

The correspondence also shows that she depended heavily on Vincent when communicating with individual sisters. Early in 1647 Louise reminded the Daughters at Chars that their mail was to be "censored" and backed it up with reference to Vincent. "I talked to M. Vincent about your correspondence with Madame the Marquise," she told the superioress.

⁷⁵Ibid., no. 174 (8 May 1647).

⁷⁶Ibid., no. 116 (16 March 1645).

⁷⁷Ibid., no. 148 (13 August 1646)

He strongly advised me to inform you, my dear Sister, that neither you nor any of our Sisters may write to anyone at all without first sending the letter open to us. And to prove to you, my dear Sister, that this is an established custom among us, enclosed is a letter from Sister Barbe handled in this manner. Although the Sisters in Nantes and Angers live a long way off, they do the same thing. I attribute this fault of yours while you are at Chars to the fact that I didn't advise you on this point.⁷⁸

In a similar way she wrote to Sister Élisabeth Martin in July of 1647: "I was astonished to hear that you're at Angers; it must be for something very urgent, because you have stepped ahead of obedience. It would never have occurred to me that Sister Élisabeth would be guilty of such unfaithfulness. That's why M. Vincent has directed me to tell you to give us a good reason for this trip, and orders you not to leave Angers until you've written to us and received our answer."⁷⁹ A month later Louise wrote to Sisters Marie Lullen and Anne Hardemont, again citing Vincent's authority. "My God, my dear Sister, it must have been a great need that made you stay out all night! In the name of God take care, and give me an account of what happened so I can relate it to M. Vincent and find out if this should be done."⁸⁰

When, in August 1649, the sisters at Nantes were in danger of being dismissed from the hospital of Saint-René, Louise wrote to Sister Jeanne Lepintre: "M. Vincent praises God with all his heart and says you must depend on Divine Providence to solve the differences that have arisen. If you're dismissed, my dear Sisters, it's only just that they should pay the expenses of your journey. If we're forced to withdraw you, M. Vincent has already asked M. des Joncheres to give you whatever you need."⁸¹ Nantes had many problems. Louise's correspondence and the council minutes indicate that there were several disputes about the interpretation of the contract and complaints about the performance of the sisters.

Louise looked to Vincent in matters of the apostolate, even though, as indicated earlier, she was fully competent to make decisions. In these discussions, their complementary talents and mutual support are most apparent. Louise's account of her October 1646 visit to Nantes shows both the flow of authority and her own sensitivity.

⁷⁸Ibid., no. 169 (31 January [1647])

⁷⁹Ibid., no. 184 (10 July [1647]).²

⁸⁰Ibid., no. 217b (30 August [1647]).

⁸¹Ibid., no. 253 (18 August [1649]).

Having heard of the service rendered by our Sisters at Angers, the administrators and some of the prominent citizens asked M. Vincent, our Most Honored Father, for our Sisters for the Hospital. At the same time they asked for a copy of the contract and act of establishment of Angers and said they would be willing to accept the same conditions. ...

Our Most Honored Father very charitably gave us a conference on this subject the preceding Monday, towards the end of which he named the Sisters. The following Wednesday I went to get his orders for the journey and had the happiness of receiving his holy blessing. After I had expressed my fear of committing many faults during this journey, he ordered me to write down all we did and encountered during the trip.

Remembering his holy instruction and practices, my only intention was to submit to the holy will of God and the practice of our Rules. We entered the coach at Orleans and travelled along gaily. By the grace of God we didn't fail in our Rules except during the time for meditation and silence when we were overwhelmed by sleep; sometimes we blamed the heat for this.⁸²

Source D. Council Meetings: Founder and Superior General

The council minutes (twenty-nine meetings between 28 June 1646 and 27 November 1659)⁸³ provide not only an interesting insight into the governance of the early Company but also a perspective on Louise's view of Vincent as co-founder and superior general. The council, which often met at Saint-Lazare, generally included Louise, Vincent, and the officers; at times the senior sisters and the former officers were invited so that all could benefit from their experience on "extraordinary matters, and when it was judged necessary by the Superior General."⁸⁴ The range of topics was quite broad, as the following examples indicate: the problem of making new construction look old and poor; the management of the Company's resources; the acceptance of candidates into the Company; the dismissal of sisters; the readmission of sisters; the approbation of persons who wished to board in community houses; the wisdom of a sister's retaining rights over her property; the missioning of members; the appointment of sister servants (superiores); the handling of sister servants who tended to disregard directives from the motherhouse; the selection of new works; the matter of garb (in Poland, for instance, the sisters wanted a habit of different fabric and wished to wear a kerchief); the problem of a runaway sister; the frequency of access to an extraordinary confessor; the appointment of the seminary directress; the selection of a catechism (the Bellarmine) for use by the sisters.

⁸²Ibid., no. 159 (October 1646).

⁸³See Coste, *CED* 13; Marillac, *Spiritual Writings*, S. 1.

⁸⁴Coste, *CED*, 13:737.

Before examining the council minutes recorded in the collected works of Vincent, let me make a brief observation about Louise's notes on the meeting of 5 October 1655, which apparently was not attended by him. They show her graciousness and kindness. During that session the council discussed, among other issues, the reception to be given the sisters recently withdrawn from Nantes. Nothing was to be said about what had happened there. Moreover, if they arrived on foot, they were to be "given water in which fine herbs had been boiled to swab their legs."⁸⁵

In the first recorded meeting (28 June 1646), Vincent outlined the manner in which the council was to proceed. Louise was to present the matter for discussion and give the pros and cons; after listening to all opinions, she was to make her decision—the current method of handling consultative issues. In practice, however, Vincent generally assumed the role of presenter and acted as facilitator of the decision-making. In fact, he dominated the council and appears to have controlled the meetings, at least insofar as the minutes indicate. One does wonder if Louise and the other scribes focused more on his interventions so that his wisdom would be preserved. In many ways, the minutes often took on the character of a conference rather than the account of a meeting. Generally, at the opening, Vincent announced the topics, presumably recommended by Louise, and then framed the issues. He usually presented the positive and negative aspects of each question before seeking the opinion of the sisters and then of Mademoiselle.

It is interesting to note that there was a strong exception to this, obviously engineered by Louise. The council of 29 February 1658 occurred shortly after Vincent had suffered a serious accident in his carriage. Following the introductory comment about the participants, we read:

We first gave an account, *without having asked permission*, of the thoughts God had given us concerning the favor granted us. This was the preservation of Our Most Honored Father from a serious accident when his carriage collapsed. The damage was such that, ordinarily, he could not have escaped without serious injury. We remarked that, in this event, God had given the Little Company a salutary lesson. We realized that we had made ill use of the graces God had vouchsafed to the Company through our Father's charitable guidance, through his admirable devotedness to our interests, through his instructions on our obligations, so often given

⁸⁵Marillac, *Spiritual Writings*, S. 1.

with remarkable forbearance and kindness. We were obliged to cease speaking before we could enter into so much detail. Nevertheless, we managed to say that all had resolved, with God's grace, to heed Our Most Honored Father's word as the word of God, pointing out His will to us, and to be more faithful in putting it in practice.

We had surprised the humility of Our Most Honored Father; he began to address us in his usual manner concerning himself. "I am a miserable sinner; I only spoil everything. If there is any defect in the Company, I am the cause of it." He entered into himself, and his silence and recollection made us clearly understand that we had embarrassed him very much. But his forbearance, as usual, prevented him from reproving us.

Then, urged by the conviction of our obligations, we referred to the Epistle of the feast. From it, we learn the duty which Communities have of heeding their founder and of making use of his instructions. That is what the Apostles did while Our Lord was with them. When they no longer had Him present, and the problem of replacing Judas arose, they wished to do nothing of themselves; but as they had observed their Master's constant recourse to prayer, they imitated His example. Our Lord had revealed that He came not to destroy the law of Moses, but to fulfill it. Following His example, the Apostles found in the prophecies that another was to fill Judas' place. I beg Our Lord to grant to all the Company, which Our Most Honored Founder has established by God's will, the grace of possessing a like fidelity.

The first topic for discussion concerned our indecision in regard to a girl who had come to us from Troyes, on the recommendation of a good nun. We did not know whether to dismiss her or to give her the habit. The reasons for dismissing her were: since her arrival, she shows great levity of mind; she is very cautious, and wants to know everything; she is rather obstinate, and little inclined to submission; she has some other little ways contrary to the maxims of the Company. Some reasons for retaining her were: she has reached the age of discretion; she has no dangerous tendencies; though frivolous, she is very simple; after many instructions, she might acquire the spirit of the Company.

Our Most Honored Father said: "Sisters, before proceeding, I wish to stress the necessity of receiving into the Company only those persons who have a vocation; otherwise, the Company cannot subsist. And how could one not called by God do any good? That is why special attention must be paid to recognizing a vocation. Not that all vocations are alike: God uses different means of calling people to His service. Sometimes even trials and disgust for the world create a desire to leave it. And then, in such circumstances, the candidate has good dispositions, there is strong evidence of a true vocation."⁸⁶

One must be careful in interpreting at the distance of 350 years, but it seems very significant that this particular meeting had a more structured and direct approach than the others. Despite a sensitive, intuitive manner, Louise tended to be logical and crisp in her discourse,

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⁸⁶Coste, *CED*, 13:737-39. Emphasis added.

while Vincent was more convoluted, discursive, and allusive. Perhaps realizing that she had distracted him by referring to the accident, she appears to have taken over the meeting, first by discussing the day's Epistle. She then introduced the issue of whether or not to give the girl from Troyes the habit and presented the advantages and disadvantages, which was usually Vincent's role. Louise took control of the situation, but after this short interlude Vincent regained leadership of the meeting.

While Louise generally deferred to Vincent, who chaired the council meetings, she seemed at times to be something of a prompter or memory-jogger for him, a role already observed in her correspondence. Occasionally a meeting almost came to a close and then reopened at her comment, as if she were assisting the Vincent who sometimes seemed to forget or be distracted. She could usually bring him back on track and make him decisive, but she was not always successful as is seen in the council of 8 September 1655. Vincent had been delaying a decision about Nantes, and Louise reminded him of this when he tried to conclude the meeting. After additional discussion, he again delayed action and ended the session.

Although temperamentally deferential to Vincent, Louise could quietly hold her own as is shown in the council of 23 March 1659. Her ability to question and disagree reflected her personal maturity as well as the maturity of their relationship. At this meeting the members were to decide whether Sister Marguerite Moreau should stay with the Queen of Poland. Vincent had gone on for quite a while in his usual way, listing the advantages and disadvantages, developing the image of a cheap coin in a silver crown, and alluding to Jesuit missionaries. Then we read: "Mademoiselle proposed to our Most Honored Father that the letter of our Sister should be reread; it seemed to Mademoiselle that the only thing stated therein was that the Queen wanted Sister Marguerite to accompany her when she was traveling." After the letter was again read, the minutes show that Vincent immediately asked for the vote on the question "whether we should permit our Sister to accompany the Queen only on journeys or to stay with her always?" Again one wishes that we had an audio tape to assess the feeling tone behind Vincent's pursuing his own interpretation despite Mademoiselle's intervention. It is interesting to note that she persisted, commenting that it was well to stop at a decision about traveling with the Queen because "our sister had not even mentioned a longer stay." Then she added quickly that it was advisable to anticipate that issue as Vincent had stressed: "It was

much to be feared, however, that the Queen might broach that subject, since there were few French persons in her court who could satisfy her as the late Madame De Villers had done.⁸⁷ These were two respectful but strong personalities who sought the truth.

In a similar way on 11 June 1654 Louise showed her orientation toward reality when she challenged Vincent's expectations of the sisters to be sent to the new house at Châteaudun and engaged in a lively exchange. He insisted that those chosen had to be circumspect in speech, outgoing but not in the sense of seeking the company of externs, resistant to men's requests to enter their rooms, prudent about disclosing their feelings, not lovers of money, and not women who spent time in correspondence with family and friends. Louise responded simply that "it is very difficult to find sisters who have all the qualities you mentioned." "You see, Mademoiselle, they must have these," answered Vincent, "... and moreover they must be Daughters with good dispositions, prudent, and steady." Louise diplomatically observed that perhaps a sister "could acquire the dispositions in time." He countered, "Mademoiselle, I think I have told you before that we must always send the best in the beginning because the excellence of the foundation depends on that."⁸⁸

The meeting of 27 July 1656 shows the interplay of these two strong, competent personalities who respected each other but did on occasion disagree. At issue was whether the community should accept Madame Auclerc and her daughter. The mother, a sister of Jacques Tholard, one of Vincent's confreres, was willing to pay board to stay with her daughter, who had bad eyes but wanted to enter the Company. In very straightforward fashion, Vincent told Louise that to have a vocation one needed the requisite qualities of body and mind and that the Company should not accept boarders. He buttressed his observation with reference to the experience of others. As if she had not heard his comments, Louise expressed her willingness to accept the two not only because of their good will but also because of Father Tholard: "If you think that we should receive them for these reasons, even though they do not have the necessary qualifications, I shall do so gladly." Showing some impatience, Vincent responded, "No, Mademoiselle, we must do nothing contrary to our obligations."⁸⁹ The issue ended. One wishes that Lou-

⁸⁷Ibid., 746-51.

⁸⁸Ibid., 681-86.

⁸⁹Ibid., 724-25.

ise's final thoughts had been recorded because there were no further comments after Vincent's brief, strong words.

A similar situation arose in the council of 31 July 1659 when the politically astute Louise wanted to keep a candidate because of her family connections, but Vincent disagreed. Although Father Portail diplomatically suggested the compromise of a trial year, Vincent listed several reasons why she should leave and the minutes read, "M. Vincent decided that she should be dismissed." It is significant, though, that before the meeting ended, he praised Louise for her good management and administrative ability.⁹⁰ He seemed to affirm her personally when he disagreed with her viewpoint.

On the question of whether or not to readmit Sister Marie Joly, who had left the community after serving the poor for fourteen years, Vincent pulled out all the stops, giving examples from the Old and New Testaments as well as from the experience of other religious communities. He ended his lengthy observation and the meeting thus: "Therefore, I do not agree to receiving her because of what the older Sisters will say [namely, that they are happy to have people who watch over them and over the entire Company], because Superiors must be firm when God's interests are at stake. The compass of a vessel tossed by the winds does not cease to guide the ship; in like manner, Superiors, though disturbed by the current of various opinions, shall not cease to conduct affairs according to the inspirations of grace."⁹¹ Louise always seemed to be forgiving and hopeful for change in the individual sister, but Vincent, working from principle, was unyielding in his opinion. At least according to the minutes, Louise did not object. The discussion on the point ended, but one wonders about her reaction.

The council of 26 December 1656 presented another difficult issue: the dismissal of a sister. Vincent outlined the reasons for her letting go in strong, rapid observations. The minutes state, "All were of the opinion that she should go for the above reasons." Vincent said, "It remains now to be seen how to go about telling the Sister of her dismissal." "Father, I think it would be necessary for you to take the trouble to speak with her," countered Louise. He accepted but told Louise to arrange the visit.⁹²

The foregoing interactions between Vincent and Louise tempt one to speculate about the mutual effect of his strong, principled approach

⁹⁰Ibid., 752-57.

⁹¹Ibid., 725-30. The quotation is taken from 729-30; the part in brackets from 727. Ed.

⁹²Ibid., 730-33.

and her more relational, developmental approach. One wonders if they had further words in private.

It was Louise who generally assumed the blame for failures in the Company they had founded together. Sometimes she referred to herself as the Jonah who was bringing destruction on the ship of the Company and therefore should be cast overboard. She did, however, hold her own in the council of 8 April 1655 when Vincent seemed to challenge her unjustly after hearing a report of the bad situation at Nantes: "Mademoiselle, did you not know that when you went there?" Later in the meeting, Louise became a bit defensive when Vincent read from a letter reporting that she had moved a sister apothecary without notice and without sending money to defray the travel expense.

It is true that I did not think of sending any money; but even if I had thought of it, they are indebted to us for the journeys of those whom they sent back about two years ago for whom they paid nothing. As to the complaint that I did not write to them about recalling our sisters, I asked M. Truchar, the sisters' spiritual director, to inform them of it, so we have in no way acted contrary to our obligations. They are just making use of this pretext so that they can retain the sisters.⁹³

Louise respected Vincent, but she also had high regard for the truth of a situation and her own integrity.

While she generally referred all success to him, Vincent tried to find ways to return the favor. In the meeting of 8 September 1655 he observed that the Daughters were better provided for than any other community in Paris "and that is due, after God, to the good management of Mademoiselle." To which Louise replied, "Father, you and our Sisters know very well that if I have done anything, it has been due to the orders that you have given me."⁹⁴ He praised her management skill in similar fashion in the council of 31 July 1659 and included in this tribute the sisters who give all their surplus to the motherhouse for the support of the Company.

An example of their ability to collaborate surfaces in the council meeting of 9 November 1653. Louise must have sought Vincent's assistance in remedying low morale among the members of the council and residents of the motherhouse. He gave a long discourse on the value of being stationed there. "Sisters, if you only knew how well the

⁹³Ibid., 687-91.

⁹⁴Ibid., 695-96.

Sisters who work in this house can serve the Company. ... This sister does more than if she were in some place where she might work wonders, because here she is working for the Formation of the Company."⁹⁵

Sometimes Louise appeared to encourage Vincent to concretize his observations so that she could relate his spiritual comments to practical issues. In the council of 27 April 1656, for example, he remarked that the Company must achieve the condition of loving contempt. At her request for "solid means of acquiring this virtue," Vincent spoke of the value of having only what is necessary. At this, Louise commented that the repairs needed on the Daughters' house should be done with blackened stones so that the building would not appear rich. Vincent supported her. Noting that he was doing no repairs on his own place, he concluded, "I greatly fear that if you were to have a beautiful house, that might attract persons of rank and that would be disadvantageous."⁹⁶

Source E. Conferences of Saint Vincent to the Daughters: Vincent as Co-founder and Superior General

The last resource for studying Louise's relationship with Vincent is his conferences to the Daughters. It is important to remember that Louise was the scribe for some of these, so she probably downplayed references to herself. However, the occasional times when she did record Vincent's praise of her seem to indicate that she strove for objectivity and authenticity. Sister Mathurine Guerin stated in a memorandum to Sister Marguerite Chétif, Louise's successor, that their foundress "loved these poor manuscripts so dearly that she would not hear of their being re-written, as a kind of priest of Saint-Lazare proposed to do, lest he might alter the meaning of our blessed Father, for she preferred their simple, natural style to that of more polished discourses."⁹⁷

Because it would be impossible in this presentation to analyze the entire corpus, a method for gathering a representative sample was devised. Accordingly, every tenth conference in the canon—a total of twelve extending from 1642 to 1660—has been examined for both common themes and insights into Louise's perspective of Vincent. This limited survey reveals that the conferences served basically as Vin-

⁹⁵Ibid., 681.

⁹⁶Ibid., 716-717.

⁹⁷Quoted in Vincent de Paul, *Conferences*, 1:vi-vii.

cent's platform, and those from 1655 onward concentrated heavily on explanations of the rules. Louise played a very minor role in them as she usually shared her opinions after the other sisters, often in one sentence summaries. The facility with which she expressed herself when called upon shows that she either was very much at ease with her sisters before the superior general or had prepared written notes. One conference, that of 22 January 1645 on observance of the rules, has her comments appended. Because she was scribe for this meeting, the postscript may have been a method of keeping her own thoughts and resolutions within the context of Vincent's words, pointing out both her reliance on him as the guide of the company and their collaborative relationship.

Louise recommended to Vincent the topics of the conferences, so it is not surprising that at times his thoughts echoed hers. The conference on envy (24 June 1654) reveals not only Vincent's overall method but also their interaction. When called on, Louise presented her analysis of envy to a gnawing worm or to oil diffusing itself aimlessly. In his summation, Vincent used the image of a serpent and then depicted the sin in ordinary circumstances familiar to all the sisters. The two saints' style of expressing, while distinctive, seemed to converge over the years as their minds and spirits became more united.

An interesting interaction occurred in the long conference on the Common Rules (29 September 1655). Having lectured the sisters for some time, Vincent asked if they would be willing to go wherever sent. They replied in the affirmative; when questioned again, they all stood and declared their willingness, but Vincent went on and on. One senses that Louise saw that the session should take a different direction. "Mademoiselle Le Gras then told him in a low voice that she had never yet seen any of our Sisters disobey this rule and that they had always been ready to go and to return as soon as ever they were commanded."⁹⁸ There was something more protective than defensive in Louise's manner here. Vincent appears to have gotten into a rather negative, haranguing tone on the Judases and murderesses who would ruin the Company. It was almost as if Louise did not want the sisters to harbor a negative attitude toward him so she sought to put him on an upbeat track. One who has listened to a friend lecture or preach too long or too dogmatically can identify with this sentiment.

Louise was not only protective of the sisters but also insistent that Vincent fulfill his role as their superior. At the end of the very lengthy

⁹⁸Ibid., 3:103.

conference on the rules (30 May 1647), he refused to give a blessing because of all his faults, so he asked the Lord himself to bless the sisters and then kissed the ground. Louise and all the sisters, “deeply grieved that he was unwilling to impart his blessing, begged him several times to do so with such insistence and importunity that, in the end, he yielded.”⁹⁹

While the conferences, because of their nature, fail to give deep insight into Louise’s relationship with Vincent, scattered references do demonstrate her collaboration with and influence on him. She had struggled over the years to break down his resistance to being superior general of the Daughters and ultimately convinced him that they should always remain under the jurisdiction of the Vincentian general. The effect of her insistent but quiet persuasion is shown in the conference of 10 August 1659, when Vincent reminded the sisters about the superior general’s control over the appointment their confessors. “The Superior of the Daughters of Charity,” he told them, “is the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission or his deputy, and therefore he has spiritual jurisdiction over the entire Company and nobody else has, unless the Superior General gives it to him.”¹⁰⁰

After completing the study of this random sample of conferences, I discovered a list prepared by the late Sister Mary Basil Roarke. Entitled “Saint Louise in Dialogue with Vincent,” it specified forty interactions between the two in conferences in 1647 to 1659. In most instances Vincent simply asked Louise to give her thoughts, but a few exchanges deserve note. Speaking of the rule about electing the superioress every three years (30 May 1647), he hastened to remind the sisters that “that was to be understood after God had finished with Mademoiselle, who thereupon knelt down and asked that that practice might begin at once.” Vincent responded: “Your Sisters and I, Mademoiselle, are bound to beg God to give you many more long years of life. It is God’s usual method of acting to preserve, by extraordinary means, those who are necessary for the accomplishment of His works; and if you reflect, Mademoiselle, you will see that for more than ten years, you have not been really alive at least in the ordinary way.”¹⁰¹ One again wonders what were Louise’s thoughts as Vincent quickly continued his commentary.

⁹⁹Ibid., 1:293.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 4:258.

¹⁰¹Ibid., 1:288-89. Leonard notes that Vincent was referring to Louise’s constant state of ill health. On more than one occasion, the saint remarked that the prolongation of her life was in a way miraculous. Ed.

In another conference (3 June 1653) Vincent showed himself the thoughtful superior, and Louise the dedicated superioress. "Sisters, I think it is better not to ask any more questions for fear of distressing Mademoiselle Le Gras who is not well," he told them. When asked for her thoughts, however, Louise proceeded to talk at length, her words running a page and a quarter.¹⁰² In the conference of 17 June 1657, the insistent Louise reappeared, winning from Vincent a small concession. Speaking about the practice of asking for nothing and refusing nothing, he recommended that one person be responsible for provisions in the motherhouse just as at Saint-Lazare where a "brother looks after everything connected with poverty; it is his duty to ask each one what he needs and then give orders to have it supplied." Louise pointed out the difficulties of doing this among the Daughters because of "the different places from which the Sisters come and the different days they arrive here." For that reason she herself and another sister took care of all needs. The conference concludes quickly with Vincent telling Louise that she could continue this practice for those residing outside, but for those inside, she should introduce the recommended system.¹⁰³

Conclusion

It is impossible to chronicle adequately or completely the multifaceted, thirty-five year relationship of Louise de Marillac and Vincent de Paul or to capture definitively the generative mutuality of their friendship and the enduring fruit of their shared spirituality and collaborative ministries. And yet to reflect on these basic sources and the insights they offer is to evoke reassurance of these saints' struggling humanity, to deepen the respect for their developing sanctity, and to express gratitude for their vision which continues to inspire and motivate. We can conclude by echoing the Very Reverend Richard McCullen, successor of Saint Vincent, "Their collaboration ... became one of the most marvelous and fruitful witnesses to the complementarity between a man and woman, between a male and a female saint who placed all the resources of their widely divergent personalities at the service of the ideal."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰²Ibid., 2:234-36.

¹⁰³Ibid., 3:251.

¹⁰⁴Marillac, *Écrits Spirituels*, v.