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Vincentian Heritage Journal

Volume 8 | Issue 1 Article 1

Spring 1987

The Common Rules of the Daughters of Charity

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The Common Rules of the Daughters of Charity

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The rule of life: Like a summary of the gospel, accommodated to the usage which is best for uniting us to Jesus Christ and responding to his designs.

Saint Vincent[1]

The path followed by Saint Vincent in the formulation of the regulations, statutes, and common and particular rules has been sufficiently studied by some biographers of the saint and in some recent works.[2] Nevertheless, the steps from the common rules of Saint Vincent to their revision by Father René Alméras has only been hinted at by some historians.[3] So I am presenting this work which has those steps as its central theme.

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[1]Pierre Coste, *Saint Vincent de Paul: correspondance, entretiens, documents,* 14 vols. (Paris, 1920-1925), 12:129 (hereinafter cited as Coste, CED). See Coste, *M. Vincent: Le grand saint du grand siècle,* (Paris, ed. Desclée de Brouwer, 1934), 1:385-444. José María Román, *San Vicente de Paúl:* I. *Biografía* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1981), 468-76.

[2]See Roger Meyer and Luis Huerga, *Una institución original, el superior general de la C.M. y de las Hijas de la Caridad* (Salamanca, Ed. CEME, 1974). Sister Pilar Padriñas, "De los reglamentos a las Constituciones de las Hijas de la Caridad en S. Vicente de Paúl, *La inspiración permanente,* X semana vincenciana (Salamanca, ed. CEME, 1981), 177-314. Sister Delort, "Du règlement de Châtillon aux règles des Filles de la Charité," in *Vincent de Paul, actes du colloque international d'études vincentiennes, Paris, 1981* (Rome, Ed Vincenziane, 1983), 64-80.

[3]See Ponciano Nieto, *Historia de las Hijas de la Caridad* (Madrid, 1932), 1:84-92. *Notices sur les Pretres de la Mission,* 1°, III. *Petites annales de S. Vincent de Paul* III (1902), 88-94. *Circulaires des supérieurs généraux et des soeurs superieurs aux Filles de la Charité* (Paris, 1845), 556-68.

Father Alméras succeeded Saint Vincent at the head of the Vincentian double family: the Congregation of the Mission and the Company of the Daughters of Charity.[4] The successor to Saint Louise was Sister Marguerite Chetif (1660-1667). She was succeeded by Sister Mathurine Guérin who was the mother general for four terms of three years each.[5] As was to be expected, the successors of the founders intended to follow in their footsteps and to carry out the plans that death had prevented them from completing.

Among the questions that the founders left behind were two that merited the special concern of Father Alméras and Sister Mathurine: (1) papal approbation of the Company of the Daughters of Charity; (2) the definitive formulation of the collection of norms, that is, the statutes and common rules.

Papal Approbation of the Company of the Daughters of Charity

We know that in September 1659, Saint Vincent sent to Father Edmonde Jolly, then the superior of the Mission in Rome, all the documentation that he considered appropriate to begin working toward the papal approval of the Daughters of Charity.[6] When Saint Vincent died the following year,

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[4]For biographical data on Father Alméras see Coste, CED, 1:539, n. 5. *Notices sur les Prêtres de la Mission,* 3. On Father Almeras and the Daughters of Charity, see *Annali della Missione* 5 (1898), 160. It includes some additions to what Father Claude-Joseph Lacour said about Father Alméras in his history of the Congregation of the Mission. [*Histoire Générale de la Congrégation de la Mission à la morte du B. Vincent de Paul et finissant vers l'année 1720,* manuscript in the archive of the motherhouse of the Congregation of the Mission, Paris].

[5]For biographical data, see Coste, CED, 3:425, n. 8, which refers to the *Circulaires des supérieurs généraux et des soeurs supérieurs aux Filles de la Charité* (Paris, 1845), 556-68. *Petites annales de S. Vincent de Paul,* 3 (1902) 88-94.

[6]See Coste, CED, 8:138. *Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission* (1945-46), 199.

everything apparently remained where it was and no further steps were taken.

In 1668 it was announced that Cardinal Vendôme was coming as legate *a latere* (the highest classification of papal legates) of Pope Clement IX to be the godfather of the dauphin (oldest son of King Louis XIV) and to resolve some problems that were affecting religious communities.[7] The superior general and the mother general took advantage of the occasion in order to seek papal approval for the Community. It was Sister Mathurine who signed the petition and in it she asked: (1) that the Company of the Daughters of Charity be approved and confirmed by His Holiness with the current statutes and rules, thus putting it under the protection of the Holy See; (2) that the superior general of the Congregation of the Mission be the director and superior of the said Company; (3) that the superior general have the power, if he considered it advisable, to add appropriate norms to the statutes and rules.

Cardinal Vendôme signed the approbation on 8 July 1668.

> We approve and confirm with perpetual and unbreakable apostolic permanence the aforesaid Community or Congregation, its foundation and its constitutions, given to it by its founder Vincent, as well as those formulated and approved by the archbishop of Paris, Cardinal de Retz, since these are good and licit and not contrary to the sacred canons of Trent.[8]

One of the most important acts in the history of the Community had been obtained. By means of it the Community achieved the following: (1) the Community acquired the

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[7]See Meyer and Huerga, *Una institución original,* 119, the note in which reference is made to the mission of the cardinal legate.

[8]The text of the approbation can be found in Nieto, *Historia,* 2:395, and is reproduced in Meyer and Huerga, *Una Institución original,* 209.

universal ecclesial dimension that was appropriate to it by reason of its vocation; (2) it went beyond the juridical model of a confraternity to a place within the secular congregations of women that dedicated themselves to the apostolate; and (3) the constitutions and rules given them by their founder Vincent and those approved by the archbishop of Paris acquired apostolic permanence — that is to say, they would stay approved.

What, in fact, were these constitutions and rules?

1) The statutes and norms approved by the archbishop of Paris in 1646 and 1655.
2) The order of the day explained by Saint Vincent in 1658-1659.
3) The common rules that Saint Vincent commented on from 1655 to 1658.
4) The particular rules that were then in existence.[9]

Of the three petitions presented by Sister Mathurine, the third went unanswered. The power of the superior to add to the approved norms additional ones when the good government of the Company demanded it was neither affirmed nor denied. What was the reason for this silence? In my opinion there can be two hypotheses. (1) No answer was necessary. It could be supposed that every superior could enact norms when good government demanded it. (2) In order not to complicate matters in view of the overlapping and concurrent authority of the archbishop of Paris with his successors and the superior general of the Mission with his successors. The "technical" silence was preferable because it left room for acting without resolving the fundamental question. In point of fact, Father Alméras, as we shall see, would act on the statutes and the common rules.

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[9]See Nieto, 41.

In summary, by means of the papal approbation the Company of the Daughters of Charity was recognized as "a work of God, useful for the church and that its spirit, rules, and apostolate serve for personal sanctification and for the good of the poor." After the approbation it could be described in the words of the statutes as

> a society or congregation, secular, apostolic, of common life, of pontifical right, with its own superiors within it, and with its own legislation and with the special characteristic that the superior general of the Congregation of the Mission is also superior general of the Daughters of Charity and that he will govern together with a mother general.

Finalizing the Norms

We are going to turn our attention first to the statutes--although briefly--and then more fully to the common rules. Finally I will say something about the particular rules.

The statutes. Father Alméras made a new revision of the Community's statutes that had been approved by the archbishop. There is no doubt about that. We have a note from the sister secretary of Father Alméras to Sister Mathurine which says, "I have had Father Jolly look at articles 26, 31, and 34 which have been added to your statutes...You will make a copy that you should sign together with the officers and those older sisters whom you consider capable."[10]

If we compare the archbishop's revision and the one that we have now, dated 1718, (during the generalate of Father Jean Bonnet), we will see that there are more changes than just the articles mentioned. The explanation for these changes, which are more substantial in both form and content, is found in the note that was written at the end of the manuscript of 1718.

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[10]See *Mémoires A: La communauté des Filles de la Charité, 1634-1900,* 60 [typewritten copy, 1912, archive of the general curia of the Congregation of the Mission, Rome].

> ...And since our said founders did not leave them to us in writing, except in resume form, they have been explained and revised more fully, at our insistence and request, through the care of our late and very honored Father Superior Alméras, second superior general of the Congregation of the Mission, shortly before his death, and even afterwards attentively revised and examined by Father Jolly, his successor in the office of superior general of the Congregation of our Community, in order that the sisters who come after us may by this means be fully instructed in all the things that have been established in a holy way for the good order of our Community and be compelled to keep them always in force, as very important for preserving it in its original spirit.[11]

The phrase "explained and revised more extensively" can be misleading, giving rise to the idea that there were no profound changes. There were, even to the extent that the document seems different and totally new. Father Alméras included in the statutes only the juridical elements: admission to the Company and government. His development of these points is comprehensive. The rest he remanded to the common rules. From that point on it can be considered as a new document.

This work cannot go more deeply into the changes that were introduced. What has been said is enough to see how Father Alméras understood the "technical silence" of the papal approbation.

The Common Rules. Since June 1674, the date on which Father Jolly sent Father Alméras's common rules to all the houses of the Company because "they were now in a condition to be communicated," the Daughters of Charity have read at the end of the aforesaid common rules, "Signed: René Alméras and sealed with his seal."

It was Father Alméras who ordered the revision of the

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[11]See *Statuts de la Compagnie des Filles de la Charité*, copy printed in 1718, in the archive of the motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity, Paris.

common rules that the Daughters of Charity had at that time, who gave them the form and content that they have had until the present day, except for the changes that were demanded by later canonical dispositions.[12] He was the formal author of this new version.[13]

Reasons for the revision. The first question that arises from this fact is: why did the superiors general of the Company, Father Alméras and Sister Mathurine Guérin, revise the common rules received from Saint Vincent? Did not the respect owed to the founders, still present in the memory of the sisters, demand that the text handed down should be retained, even though it may not have been perfect? In actual fact it was revised and given new form and new content.

Let us look at the motives.

Saint Vincent himself admitted to a missionary who asked him for a copy of the common rules of the Daughters of Charity that they were not yet in a condition to be shown.[14] He wrote this on 26 August 1656. Three years later, 11 August 1659, he was still in doubt as to whether they were ready for printing or should continue to be copied by hand. In point of fact they were not printed and they continued to be copied by hand. The result of copying them by hand was that each copy contained variations and they were not always complete. In the life of Sister Mathurine we read that "it was very difficult

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[12]These changes involved communion, confession, freedom of conscience, and other dispositions no longer in use.

[13]The material authors were Father Jolly and Father François Fournier. Father Jolly apparently intervened more in the revision of the statutes and Father Fournier in the rules. For the biography of Father Jolly, see Coste, CED, 4:231, in the note, and *Notices sur les Prêtres de la Mission*, 3. On Father Fournier, see Coste, CED, 3:470, in the note, and the *Notices sur les Prêtres de la Mission*, 1:247.

[14]Coste, CED, 6:66; see also, *Le grand saint du grand siècle*, 1:426.

to find a complete copy."[15] In addition there were copies in circulation outside the community, taken by sisters who had left.

At first Father Alméras intended to remedy this by ordering all the copies to be gathered together and to give back as valid only those that carried the signature of the mother general or of the officials and sealed with the seal of the Company. There was to be only one copy for each house, under lock and key, for the sister superior who would read them at the appointed times.

This procedure demanded a fixed text as the model to which all the other copies had to be adjusted. This model copy could have been the one that they received from Saint Vincent and on which he commented in the conferences or they could redact an entirely new one. The proper thing, according to Coste, would have been the first but the second was chosen.[16] This new option gives rise to a new question: why did they decide on a new text? The answer, in my opinion, lies in the fact that Saint Vincent's text was not completely satisfactory. Saint Vincent himself was not satisfied with it. The new superiors general certainly knew his opinion. They undertook the task of revision and presented the Company with a new text of the common rules.

Arrangement of the text

The most visible change is that of the arrangement of the text. Saint Vincent's common rules contained forty-three continuous articles, without any external division, although it is clear that there was an internal division. Father Alméras's common rules are divided into nine chapters with a grand total

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[15]See *Circulaires des supérieurs*, 2:565.

[16]Coste, *Le grand saint du grand siècle*, 1:426.

of seventy-five articles. There was an increase of thirty-two articles. This increase is explained by the fact that all twenty-seven articles on the order of the day, which Saint Vincent did not include, and other articles taken from other places--such as article 2 of chapter 1 which covers article 2 of the rules for the sisters in parishes--were included. Father Alméras put this famous text in the common rules when Saint Vincent intended it only for the sisters in the parishes. Other articles added were those that dealt with idleness, on not watching over the sick outside the house and even less with the rich, on not admitting servant girls to their employments nor pensioners in the house, etc.

Of course these were not the only variations. We can say that the majority of the articles had their variations, sometimes by way of redaction and at other times because of important and significant nuances.

To present a detailed study of all these variations between the common rules of Saint Vincent and those of Father Alméras would be very interesting but it would require much time and space. Nevertheless, one example will suffice and we offer it, taking into account article 1 of Saint Vincent's Common rules and article 1 of Father Alméras's, noting that it is not the one that offers the most variations.

Common Rules of Saint Vincent	**Common Rules of Father Alméras**
1. They will think often that the principal end for which God has called them and gathered them together is to honor Our Lord Jesus Christ, *their master*, serving him corporally and spiritually in the person of the poor, whether child-	1. The principal end for which God called and established the Daughters of Charity, is to honor Our Lord Jesus Christ as the source and model of all charity, serving him corporally and spiritually in the person of the poor,

ren, the needy, the sick, the imprisoned; and in order to be worthy of such a holy *employment* and of such a perfect master, they will try to live holily and to work carefully for their own perfection and for that purpose they will do everything possible to carry out the present rules which are one of the very great means for achieving this.

whether sick, children, prisoners, or others who, through shame, dare not make known their wants. Therefore, that they may worthily correspond to so holy a vocation and imitate so perfect a model, they should strive to live in a holy manner and to labor with great care to attain their own perfection; uniting the interior exercises of a spiritual life with the exterior duties of Christian charity toward the poor according to the present rules which they will endeavor to practice with great fidelity, as the surest means of attaining this end.

The variations are interesting. "To honor their master" is a constant theme in the rules of Saint Vincent. Here it disappears and is replaced by another thought, "to honor Our Lord the source and model of all charity." This phrase was apparently never used, at least in these words, by Saint Vincent. The term "employment" is replaced by "vocation." There is a call in the second version that does not exist in the first--that is, the call to unity between the interior and exterior exercises. In almost all the articles, Father Almeras's version offers us the same thing: a more careful and detailed elaboration, not betraying Vincent's meaning, but rather keeping in mind the commentaries of the founders.

Another aspect that I think should be highlighted is the

vision that each chapter gives on the material that is dealt with.

When chapter 1 of Father Alméras's common rules gives us as its title *On the end and the fundamental virtues of the Institute* there is a clear intention of affirming the basic theological elements of the identity of the Daughters of Charity. The idea is reinforced with article 2 which was taken, as we have said, from the rule for the sisters in parishes. It offers us the special image of the Daughter of Charity and the elements for distinguishing her from religious. The secularity peculiar to the Daughter of Charity is clearly seen as it was understood by the founders. Saint Vincent's text, intended for the sisters in the parishes, was introduced by Father Alméras into the common rules. This has been a determining factor in knowing what the Daughter of Charity is in the church and in today's world. It is worth transcribing here:

> (The sisters) will consider that although they do not belong to a religious order, that state not being compatible with the duties of their vocation; yet, as they are much more exposed to the world than nuns--their monastery being generally no other than the abode of the sick; their cell a hired room; their chapel, the parish church; their cloister, the public streets or the wards of hospitals; their enclosure, obedience; their grate, the fear of God, and their veil, holy modesty;--they are obliged on this account, to lead as virtuous a life, as if they were professed in a religious order; to conduct themselves wherever they mingle with the world, with as much recollection, purity of heart and body, detachment from creatures; and to give as much edification as religious in the seclusion of their monasteries.

Another example would be the reference to chastity: the vision that Saint Vincent gives us and one that Father Alméras's version gives us.

In his common rules Saint Vincent devoted two articles to this, numbers 18 and 19. This latter deals with modesty which Saint Vincent considered a means for being faithful to chastity. It is an appropriate and measured vision.

Father Alméras devoted all of chapter 3 to it with the title

On Chastity and it comprises eleven articles, the longest of all, except for the ninth dedicated to the order of the day. Father Almeras gathered together everything that Saint Vincent had said, but he added some new considerations. At times he completed and rounded out Saint Vincent's thoughts and at others introduced new ideas.

Within the context of chastity he placed the references to idleness, which he described as "the mother of all vices and especially of impurity." That brings to mind what Saint Vincent said to the missionaries, also in the context of chastity, that idleness is "the stepmother of all virtues, especially of hastity." It is in reference to idleness that an allusion is made to not having "small animals as pets," such as dogs and birds, something that Saint Francis de Sales also forbade to the Visitation nuns.[17]

In this same context of chastity is the treatment of making and receiving visits; moderation in eating and drinking; the prohibition against drinking wine without permission; the use of mortifications, both ordinary and extraordinary; having a companion on leaving the house or when serving the poor; and the special care observed with some persons: ecclesiastics, doctors, surgeons, etc.

Father Alméras's version opens up a wide field to chastity. It is not that Saint Vincent did not deal with the same themes. He dealt with them but as matters that deserved to be considered in themselves and not necessarily under the aspect of chastity.

Evaluation

It is logical to ask whether or not the common rules, in Father Alméras's version, are in accord to the thinking of Saint Vincent.

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[17]See Francois de Sales, *Oeuvres complètes,* (Lyons, 1868) 4:641.

Apparently there were protests at first. We read in the life of Sister Mathurine that "some spirits (*mal faits*), which raised their voices in criticism of her behavior, said that the rules were not those of Saint Vincent and Mlle. Legras but that of Sister Mathurine who, they believed, reformed them as she wanted." Her biographer did not agree with this judgment and condemned it, saying, "That was not the case, because she did not change anything, and only contributed to their arrangement with her good advice and with the light that she was able to bring to the extent that she was asked."[18]

Father Jolly, in his circular letter of 1674, presented the new version to the sisters, saying:

> You will not find anything new that you have not practiced and seen practiced by the most observant, the majority of whom have received example and formation from the first sisters, and especially from the late Mlle. Legras, your beloved mother, whose memory we bless. The only thing that has been done is to put in order what they have left us, the counsels of our venerable founder, M. Vincent, so that the written redaction of your rules is in a real sense a compilation of their thoughts and feelings on how you ought to act.[19]

Father Jolly glossed over a great deal in this letter, but we believe that he was correct in affirming that it was a question not of copying literally the common rules left by Saint Vincent, but of setting in order, after the manner of compilation of norms, what Saint Vincent thought and felt about the conduct of the Daughters of Charity.

We have another fact: the mother general, Sister Mathurine, had a meeting with the officals and thirty-five sisters among the sister servants and the older sisters from Paris and its environs, in order that they might sign and attest that the

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[18]See *Circulaires des supérieurs*, 2:565.
[19]See *Circulaires des supérieurs*, 2:2-3.

revision corresponded to the rules of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise, except that they were "revised with exactitude and put in order" and in order that they not be changed.[20]

Studying all the teachings of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise about the conduct of the Daughters of Charity, one can affirm that there is nothing that does not correspond to the thought of the founders, although we may find literal expressions that they did not use.

The history of the next three hundred years, once the first protests had been quieted, has considered the rules of Father Alméras as Vincentian, even to the point of considering them as Saint Vincent's own.

Was Father Alméras's version approved by the Holy See?

Father Nieto, in his history of the Daughters of Charity, considered Father Alméras's version to have been approved by the papal legate and was surprised that in a document directed to the Holy See at the end of the last century, it is flatly asserted that the institute of the Daughters of Charity did not have rules approved by the Holy See.[21] Father Nieto based his argument on the fact that the version was finished when the papal legate approved the community on 8 June 1668.

It is surprising that we do not find explicit testimony of their approval by the Holy See in Father Jolly's circular letter mentioned above nor in the testimony of the sisters concerning the fidelity of the new version. To this silence can be added a piece of evidence by which we know that Father Alméras wanted to present the rules for approval by Archbishop Harlay

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[20]See *Mémoires A*, 65.

[21]See Nieto, *Historia*, 1:90, n. 2. The reference is to a letter of Father Antoine Fiat to the Holy See. See *Genèse de la Compagnie*, 69-70.

de Chanvamon. And Father Nieto added the note, "without doubt he intended to submit the rules to this formality because he was determined to seal them a few days before his death."

Another note by the brother secretary to Father Alméras, sent to Sister Mathurine, said, "he has just signed your rules out of fear, he says, of not being alive tomorrow...If you come tomorrow, I will give you the rules *revised, signed, and sealed.*"[22]

I think, on the basis of what has been said, that Father Fiat, the superior general, was correct in affirming in the letter that he sent to the Holy See, 20 July 1883, that the common rules of the community of the Daughters of Charity had never been explicitly approved by the Holy See, at least so far as this compilation is concerned. This is not the case if the norms or ideas that were incorporated were approved in what Cardinal Vendôme approved.

The Rules of the Daughters of Charity and Those of the Missionaries

It is not surprising to find identical echos of the spiritual doctrine of Saint Vincent in both common rules. It is the same founder, the same spirit that animates them, the creator of the same spirituality, constantly concerned, although without haste, with giving the rules to both communities, without losing sight of the characteristics of each one of them. We cannot say that the norms are the same nor that what was said to the missionaries applied to the Daughters of Charity. There was a considerable difference.

Nevertheless, there are also concrete points in common. I am going to give some examples, taking into account the

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[22]See *Mémoires A*, 64-65.

version of Father Alméras and comparing it with the common rules of the Congregation of the Mission. I will go by chapters.

On disinterestedness and detachment

Daughters	**Missionaries**
They will not be attached to any created thing, particularly to places, employments, persons; not even their relatives and confessors; and they shall always be ready to leave everything when obedience requires it. (c. 1:6)	We will not become attached with an inordinate affection either to ministries or persons or places, especially our native country, or to any perishable thing. Rather, we ought always to be ready and quick to leave all this on the order and even the simple wish of the superior. (c. 2:10)

The context in both cases is that of the fundamental principle of the life of the Daughters of Charity and the missionary, that is, detachment. In the common rules of the Daughters of Charity the motivation is the following of Christ: we are not worthy of him if we do not leave father, mother, etc., if we do not renounce ourselves and everything in the world to follow him. In the common rules of the missionaries the motivation is the indifference practiced by Christ and the saints.

"Ask for nothing, refuse nothing"

Daughters	**Missionaries**
They shall do their utmost to acquire that holy practice so much recommended by the saints and so strictly observed in well regulated communities, namely, that of neither asking for nor ref-	We shall strive to see that there is always alive among us the salutary practice of asking for nothing and refusing nothing. Nevertheless, when someone realizes that something is harmful

using anything in temporal matters. Nevertheless, should a sister really stand in need of something, she may mention it simply and with indifference to those who should attend to it, and then rest satisfied, whether it be given her or not. (c. 2:2).

or necessary for him, he will consider before the Lord whether or not he ought to explain it to the superior. He will seek to be indifferent with regard to the response...Once it is known, he will remain at peace. (c. 5:4)

The maxim is the same, but in the common rules of the sisters it is placed within the context of poverty, while in those of the missionaries in the context of obedience.

On uniformity and singularity

Daughters	**Missionaries**
They should, as much as possible, preserve uniformity in all things, as the means of maintaining, not only the spirit of poverty, but also union and regularity in the community; and they should shun all singularity as the source of discord and disorder. (c. 2:5)	We will practice uniformity in every thing insofar as possible. We shall see it as the guardian of order and union among ourselves. We shall flee from singularity as the root of envy and division. (c. 2:11)

The same idea but the contexts are different. For the missionaries uniformity is a general principle of life. For the sisters the context is poverty.

On avoiding every suspicion against chastity

Daughters	**Missionaries**
In a word, they shall avoid all that might give their neighbor the least cause to	We will make an effort to prevent, if we can, that anyone can have against any

suspect them of being ever so little inclined to the contrary vice; such a suspicion alone, though quite unfounded, being more prejudicial to their Company and its holy employments than all the other crimes that might falsely be imputed to them. (c. 3:1)

of us even the lightest suspicion concerning the contrary vice. For the suspicion alone, although totally unjust, would do more harm to the Congregation and its ministries than any other evil that we can be falsely accused of. (c. 4:4)

On idleness

Daughters

They shall carefully avoid idleness as the mother of all vices and especially of impurity. (c. 3:3)

Missionaries

And because idleness is the stepmother of all virtues, but especially of chastity, they will avoid this vice. (c. 4:5)

Here again, the context is the virtue of chastity.

Friendships and enmities

Daughters

Although they should entertain much love for one another, they should carefully avoid particular friendships, which are the more dangerous as they appear less so; because they are ordinarily concealed under the mantle of charity. . . therefore, they shall avoid them with as much, or even more care than aversions: these two vicious

Missionaries

We will treat each other with great respect as friends who love one another . . . We will very carefully avoid both particular friendships and aversions toward anyone, since experience shows that these two vices are the source of division and the ruin of the congregations. (c.8:2).

extremes being capable of ruining in a short time a whole Company. (c. 6:1)

Father Almēras put this article in the context of the means for preserving unity and fraternal charity. Saint Vincent prescribed it for his missionaries in an identical context when he dealt with mutual relationships.

Observance of rules

Daughters

All will have a great esteem for the rules and the holy practices and praiseworthy customs that they have observed up to now, considering them as means for going forward in perfection and for achieving their salvation more easily. (c. 9:18)

Missionaries

We will all venerate from our hearts our rules and constitutions, including those that we may think of lesser importance. We will look on them as means that God has given us to acquire the perfection proper to our vocation and to achieve salvation. (c. 12:13)

The context is the same in both rules.

The above are only a few clear examples of how the rules coincide, although not always, as I have indicated, in the context within which the norm is framed.

Particular Rules

The particular rules, which we have mentioned previously, complete the thought of Saint Vincent. If on the one hand Saint Vincent defends uniformity because it is the road to unity, he is also sensitive to the diversity of situations of persons, of poverty, and of works in order that they might be effective. In this sense the particular rules cannot be underestimated nor the advice given to the daughters who were entrusted with determined offices.

Among particular rules the one that most deserves attention is that of the parishes. The Daughters of Charity, on breaking with the unity of the monastery, will have for monasteries "the abode of the sick" and on breaking with the solitude of the cell they will have for "their cell a hired room." They create a new situation in the woman who consecrates herself in community to a diversified apostolate because "they will not have any wretchedness that is foreign to them," something that supposes a new style of community and apostolic life. This idea, original or not, Saint Vincent put in concrete form by setting up a juridical structure, and he organized it by means of the common and particular norms. Hence the suitability, not to say the necessity, of taking both into account in order to know the realism of Saint Vincent as lawgiver and spiritual director.

The Common Rules of the Daughters of Charity and the Later Constitutions

The common rules in Father Almēras's version were in force among the Daughters of Charity until the constitutions of 1953, except for some changes due to the requirements of the universal law of the church, as I have already mentioned.

At this point we are interested in knowing the relationship of the common rules to the later collections of laws proper to the Company of the Daughters of Charity. After the promulgation of the code of 1917, the Holy See ordered that particular sets of norms be adjusted to it.[23] The company of the Daughters of Charity did not do so until 1954. On 1 June 1954, the prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Religious and its secretary signed the constitutions. The decree said that the norms of canon law demanded the revision of the constitutions and

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[23]See *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* (1921), 312.

rules of the Daughters of Charity. The Sacred Congregation had made such a revision with care. The structure peculiar to the community was kept intact, with the introduction of some changes that were considered good for the purpose of making the community, founded by Saint Vincent, flourish even more and that it be made capable of harvesting more abundant fruit and greater merits.[24] In reality it was a new compilation that abolished all previous norms. This raises the question of the place that they leave for the common rules, so meritorious in the history of the community.

The adaptation of the particular norms to the code was made in accord with the criteria that the same Sacred Congregation of Religious established.[25] Juridical criteria prevailed over spiritual ones. Despite this the rules were explicitly cited in thirteen articles. [26] The most important was number 175 which laid down the obligation referring to the rules. "The Daughters of Charity, the superiors, and the sisters, each and every one, not only ought to keep faithfully the vows taken, but to conform their lives to the constitutions and the rules of the Community and thus to reach out to the perfection of their state." The sister servant was commanded to maintain among her sisters the observance of the rules and the constitutions (art. 153) and in the same way to order that they be publicly read once a month. (art. 177).

The superior general, Father William Slattery, on promulgating the constitutions, included the same volume the text of the common rules with the changes demanded.[27]

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[24]See *Constitutions des Filles de la Charité de S. Vincent de Paul* (Paris, 1954), 1-2.

[25]See *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* (1921), 312.

[26]See *Consitutions des Filles de la Charité de S. Vincent de Paul* (Paris, 1954), art. 3, 48, 62, 66-80.102, 106.11.1, 125, 4, 153, 159, 177.

[27]See *Constitutions des Filles de la Charité* (Paris 1954). Beginning on page

Vatican II sought a new revision and adaptation of the constitutions. The Daughters of Charity generously seconded the wish of the church in the assemblies of 1968-69, 1974, and 1980. The definitive text was approved by the Holy See on 2 February 1983. The new concept of the constitutions, an equilibrium between theological and juridical principles, between the hortatory and the obligatory, moves us to ask again about the place that the traditional rules of the community have kept.

The present constitutions have, without doubt, a great Vincentian flavor. The entire constitutional framework is sprinkled with texts from the founders. Nevertheless, from Father Almeras's version of the common rules, they cite only part of article 1 from chapter 1, as a preamble to chapter 1, article 4, which explains the fundamental features of the identity of a Daughter of Charity. Not even in the matter of secularity has recourse been had to Father Almēras's text of the common rules but to that of Saint Vincent, as he explained it in the conference of 24 August 1659.[28] All in all, statute 11, in which it is said, "they read from time to time the first rules of the community which they consider as the testament of their founders" is important. As the only ones published are those of Father Almēras, we suppose that the "first" refers to them. The sentence is definitely confusing.

The rules will continue to be the best summary of the spirituality of the Daughter of Charity in those fundamental and inspiring points. The concretizations will be the fruit of fidelity and creativity, both necessary to keep alive the inherited charism.

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63 are the *Règles des Filles de la Charité Servantes des Pauvres Malades.* Beginning on page 105 are the *Règles particulières des Filles de la Charité.*

[28]See *Filles de la Charité de Saint Vincent de Paul, Constitutions* (1983), c. 1, 9.

The Spread of the Rules outside the Community of the Daughters of Charity

Saint Vincent's influence, as the inspirer of many communities, is more than sufficiently known. Andrē Dodin says in his book, *Saint Vincent et la charitē,*

> the majority of religious communities of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries adopted a new way of life. Monastic practices stopped being so numerous among them, individual and collective asceticism was organized beginning with the often exhausting demands of the modern apostolate: to leave God for God ... Whether or not these new communities of men or women copied the rules of the missionaries or the Daughters of Charity ... when they took Saint Vincent as patron or protector, all gave themselves the end that Saint Vincent would propose today and they put into motion methods that he would not deny."[29]

Dodin is not content with general affirmations, he cites specific communities. But it is Father Raymond Chalumeau who gives us the list of communities that are spiritual descendants of Saint Vincent. He classifies them in seven categories, three of which are of special interest to us. They are:

(1) those which were founded by former Daughters of Charity;

(2) those which in their origins felt the influence of the Daughters of Charity;

(3) those which, by their own testimony, are bound, at least in spirit and spirituality, to the Daughters of Charity.

Those could be added which were founded by missionaries or because these intervened in some way in their foundation.[30]

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[29]See André Dodin, *Saint Vincent de Paul et la charité* (Paris, 1976), 3rd ed., 99.

[30]See Raymond Chalumeău, "Descendencia espiritual de S. Vicente de Paúl," in *Anales de la Congregación de la Misión y de las Hijas de la Caridad*

Chalumeau's list is limited, as he says, to France. It can be completed with the list that Father Nicolás Mas has drawn up with the foundations in Spain in mind. Even so the list is incomplete. There are many other geographical areas in which the Vincentian influence has existence both in the old and the new worlds.

Even today Saint Vincent's genius is credited with the ability to give life to other, weaker institutions similar to his.[31] His spiritual and apostolic personality still bears the signs of relevance. Certainly the influence of his spiritual and apostolic intuition does not suppose that it has been transmitted solely by the rules given by him or directly assumed by his rules. There are other sources of Vincent's spirituality, but it is very possible that the founders, almost always concerned with leaving a wise and already experienced norm, did not forget the Vincentian rules, since it is almost certain that Saint Vincent himself studied and took into account the experience of other founders.

Just within the limits of Spain, the influence of the rules of the Daughters of Charity is evident in the following communities: the Hospitaller Sisterhood of the Holy Cross (Barcelona); the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Consolation; the religious of the Holy Family of Urgel; the Institute of Charity of the Immaculate Heart of Mary; the Sisters of Charity of Saint Ann; the Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent

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(1979), 244. On p. 248 are added other communities of Spanish origin taken from Father Nicolás Mas, *Fundación de las Hijas de la Caridad en España*, in *Anales*, 85, later published separately.

[31]See J. M. R. Tillard, *Religiosos en camino para el evangelio* (Madrid, Publicaciones Claretianas, 1977) 211. It is a translation of the French *Religieux: un chemin d'évangile* (Brussels, 1975).

de Paul of Mallorca; the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception.[32]

Conclusion

Saint Vincent was convinced that the observance of the rules would be a sign of what interest there was in being holy, credible, and effective apostles.

Let me end with what he said to the sisters, "to carry out the rules is to accept what the Lord said: the kingdom of heaven suffers violence and the violent carry it away."[33]

Remain at peace until Divine Providence makes known what He wants of you.

Saint Louise de Marillac

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[32]See Nicolás Mas, *Fundación de las Hijas de la Caridad en España*, chapter 8, titled "Influencia de las Hijas de la Caridad en la fundación de otras congregaciones," 106-48. María Esperanza Casaus Cascan, *Historia de las Hermanas de la Consolación*, 3:248.

[33]*Constitutions des Filles de la Charité de S. Vincent de Paul* (1954), in *Règles des Filles de la Charité*, IX, 18, 103.

Bitterness serves only to embitter.

Saint Vincent de Paul

Distrust of your own powers is the foundation of the confidence you should have in God.

Saint Vincent de Paul

The saints repressed nature which loves display and reputation by preferrring hidden employments to pompous ones, and abjection to honor.

Saint Vincent de Paul