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# Saint Vincent and Poland

[*Św. Wincenty A Polska*]\*

By

Maria Świątecka

TRANSLATED

BY

STEPHEN MINKIEL, C.M.

The apostle of the villages, the reformer of the clergy, society's helper in a period of wars and disturbances, and a defender of the purity of faith in the face of heretical Jansenism. Saint Vincent lived to see the expansion of his works not only in France but beyond her borders into Italy, Poland, Ireland, Madagascar and all those places in the world to which missionaries he trained would be sent.

Poland was one of the first. He watched over it with profound solicitude. At the same time he was very interested in what was going on in the country. This deep concern was his not only because Poland was the first country to which, in his lifetime, he sent members of the two congregations he founded (the Priests of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity) to evangelize in turbulent times. He was indebted to Queen Louise-Marie for her generosity and support, without which he could never have succeeded. His entire life was occupied by a constant readiness to bring aid to people in need.

Poland was experiencing difficulties in this period, during which they were invaded by enemies. Its recent existence as a kingdom was seriously placed in jeopardy. So too their Catholic faith was gravely threatened because the enemies of Poland were also the enemies of the Church. Vincent could not stand idly by watching the oncoming disaster. He dedicated himself to be a tireless apostle in whatever way he could.

To understand more clearly what this saint wanted for Poland, we must first consider the conditions in France at the time.

## Saint Vincent in France

The title of the voluminous biography of Vincent for which

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\* *Maria Świątecka, "Św. Wincenty a Polska," originally appeared in Nasza Przeszłość: Studia z dziejów Kościoła i kultury katolickiej w Polsce [Our Past: Studies from Works of the Church and the Catholic culture in Poland], ed. Rev. Jan Dukała (Kraków, 1959), 11: 35-100.*

the French Academy awarded Pierre Coste a prize was "The Great Saint of a Great Age." This great age witnessed France's emergence from a state of total chaos to the heights of the political, economical and cultural power of the "Sun King," Louis XIV. It would never shine again so magnificently, the road paved by Richelieu and Mazarin. The building of a naval fleet and army and the total control of matters controlled by a king were elements that broke the power of any internal opposition, and limited the external threat of the Habsburgs. The institution of the French Academy fostered the growth of knowledge, art and literature. All of these elements required a great outlay of financial planning. The shoulders of the poor peasants carried the burden of these investments. Taxes rose constantly.

Along with the elegant salons, which Moliere, with his dazzling wit and lightning force of intelligence, called "savantique," were those hovels of the poor which La Bruyere vividly described more as dens of wild animals than homes for people.

Should we not recall the state of justice in such a society? As he was accused of collecting taxes without the approval of the king, while Marie Medici was regent during the childhood of Louis XIII, the Count of Nevers ordered the Treasurer of Champagne to drive from town to town dressed as an idiot. In these instances one could only appeal to one's conscience or intended good will.

A son of a Gasconne farmer from Pouy,<sup>1</sup> near Dax, took upon himself the task of weighing the needs of the times. His name was Vincent Depaul,<sup>2</sup> known today as Vincent de Paul. His role in society took shape during the barbarous management by two ministers of government who were cardinals.

In his early years Vincent was a shepherd of his father's cattle. Did he dream that the queen, as regent, would rule the country and make him her spiritual director? Five years after his priestly ordination an unusually broad mountain of daily experiences would enrich him when he came face to face with Turkish corsairs who captured him and sold him as a slave to work in the fields on the northern shores of Africa for two years. Later in life he never mentioned

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<sup>1</sup> Now, Berceau-de-Saint-Vincent-de-Paul.

<sup>2</sup> Vincent wrote his name as Depaul. The only date we are certain of is 27 September 1660. There is no agreement on the date of his birth. According to his first biographers it was 1576. In 1628, during the process of the beatification of Saint Frances De Sales, Vincent claimed to be about 48 years old and we could presume he was born around 1580. Cf. Jean Calvet, *Vincent de Paul* (Warsaw, 1954), 31.

these nightmarish times. In the opinion of biographers his humility prevented him from doing so. However, eventually he wrote a letter which dealt with those turbulent times. The following is an account of the sale of slaves:

First they undressed us until we were naked and then gave each of us pants, a flaxen coat and hat. Then they paraded us around Tunis, where they planned to sell us. Having done so five or six times with a chain around our necks, they brought us back to the ship so that the buyers could come and examine us as to who could eat or not eat, and learn if we had wounds which were not mortal. When they had done all this they brought us out on the square where the buyers could look us over fully to see if we could work with horses or oxen. They had us open our mouths to check our teeth. They told us to walk, to stamp our feet and to run. They inspected the sides of our bodies. Then they made us carry heavy burdens and would wrestle with us to know the strength of each and we endured thousands of other brutalities.<sup>3</sup>

Vincent never forgot these scenes. He escaped from slavery along with a renegade Christian, his master, whom he had converted. Then he made a short visit to Rome, where he received favors from the cardinals and the Pope, and eventually he returned to France with a secret mission to Henry IV. In place of humiliations he received more favors. He was appointed chaplain to Queen Margaret and entered very refined company. Yet he did not lose contact with the needy. He would intervene for their needs with permission of the queen. Philip Emmanuel de Gondi, the commander of the royal galleys, appointed him chaplain of the galley slaves and several years later put him in charge of educating his sons.

Slowly his vocation in life crystallized. He was to bring material and moral help to all in need, especially those people living in the country, overwhelmed by misery and the darkness of ignorance.

Vincent was gifted with the genius of organization. He

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<sup>3</sup> Letter 1, Saint Vincent to Comet, *Saint Vincent de Paul. Correspondance, Entretiens, Documents*, ed. Pierre Coste, C.M., 14 volumes (Paris, 1920-1925), 1: 5 (hereinafter cited as CED). Also, Calvet, *Vincent*, 43.



Engraving of Vincent with the Daughters of Charity.  
*Collection of the Vincentian Studies Institute*

standardized the immediate means of helping the poor. With the help of practical experience, he issued fixed principles of action. He brought together people of good will and through them could reach those most forgotten and neglected. Thus two new congregations were formed in the church, the Priests of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity. Their beginnings were almost accidental. On one occasion, Madame de Gondi asked Vincent to speak to her workers in the fields, those who were totally indifferent to matters of faith. The result was amazing. Those who had suffered their sins for years, and never heard such words of faith, simple and yet so convincing, now came forward in droves to make their general confessions. Then, on one of the most memorable days of his life, 25 January 1617, the feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul, Vincent preached his first popular mission.

It is at this point that Vincent discovered the catastrophic ignorance of the priests, some of whom did not know the words of absolution. The reforms of the Council of Trent had not reached France. A huge new avenue of work now opened for Vincent. His "private initiative" would direct him and his congregation to assume

the reform of most of the major seminaries in France. The missionaries also organized many monthly spiritual retreats for the ordinands, the future priests preparing for ordination.

However, much of this was in the distant future, for which Vincent never took on any broad plans. He solely fulfilled, with the breadth and depth of his soul, the demands of the love of God and neighbor. Madame de Gondi was so enthused, seeing the success of popular parish missions, that she tried to find several priests to conduct these devotions. She went from one religious community to another with no success. In heart she was seeking the will of the Lord. Finally, after a long period of reflection Vincent agreed to go with the first three companions to preach the word of the Lord to the country folk. That was 1625, the founding year of "The Congregation of the Mission."

The Confraternity of Mercy began in like fashion. In 1617 Vincent was the active pastor of a small church in Châtillon-les-Dombes. Leaving for Mass one day he came across a family without the necessities for life. All were sick and no one could take care of them. Immediately he informed his parishioners, and in the afternoon went to them to fulfill his priestly obligations. On the way he marveled to see processions of people either going to help others or returning from doing so. These spontaneous acts of sympathy led him to organize various forms of action, properly established and managed. After all, it was not just one family that needed help.

This was the beginning of the Confraternity of Mercy. Later, whenever the priests of Saint Vincent preached popular missions they left behind a lasting trail of such parochial societies.

Saint Vincent also founded the Ladies of Charity after several women offered to bring back order and care for the neglected patients in the hospital "Hôtel-Dieu" in Paris. This association of women grew in popularity among the aristocracy. Twenty years later, their founder said the following:

Feeding and teaching the poor in the Hôtel-Dieu, taking care of the foundlings, looking after the spiritual and bodily needs of the criminals on the galleys, aiding towns on the border and the provinces, supporting the missions in the East, the West and the South, these are assigned tasks of this association.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Document 198, 11 July 1657, *CED*, 13: 818; Calvet, *Vincent*, 111.

One member of these Ladies of Charity was Louise-Marie Gonzaga, the future Queen of Poland.

Vincent noticed that the Ladies of Charity, however dignified they may be, and although never consumed with financial problems, at times were overwhelmed by their many burdensome services to the poor. Vincent recognized the problem and decided to organize ordinary, prudent young women, strengthened from hard work. He found and organized them, with the help of Madame le Gras, into a new religious congregation called "The Daughters of Charity," known to us in Poland by the name, "szarytki" (Sisters of Charity).

With the spread of wars, hunger and disease their help was badly needed. The ensuing misery is hard to describe. Over thirty years of constant warring on the borders of Lotaryngia led to such a degree of destruction and savagery that cannibalism was rampant. The Fronde and the war with Spain brought about similar devastation.

Vincent tried to intervene with those responsible for the wars. Richelieu, and later Mazarin, did not pay much attention to whatever was proposed by the priest whose heart ached over human misery. Matters of state demanded crushing the enemy, and war was waged with total disregard of the price. If peasants revolted, they were suppressed with the brute force of the army. When Vincent was convinced that efforts to forestall wars were fruitless, he resolved at least to diminish the horrors endured.

With the help of the Ladies of Charity he organized relief. Paris was divided into districts which would monitor the needs of specific provinces. Leaflets describing the situations were disseminated into those regions which were affected by instruments of war. Priests with their sermons, and Daughters of Charity and Confraternity of Charity with their generosity, took part in bringing help. Alms were distributed only to those who could not work. Others received tools to work with and seeds for sowing. To avoid mistakes and cheating they created a method of investigating claims.

Preparing a means of help is but a part of the task. In times of war it was necessary to have a good bit of courage and ingenuity to deliver help to the designated regions, especially when in every place there was war there also lurked the fear of greed. Vincent managed to have proven and cooperative workers with him in such circumstances. The extent of aid to the badly ruined provinces is described in the following fragment of a letter from aldermen in Rethel, which reached Vincent's desk in May or September, 1651:

To this day no one with the exception of your honor and your people had any sympathy for our bad luck. Thanks to you, Father, for the gifts you sent which kept our cities surviving. Our country would have ended up being abandoned. All of our citizens would have died from hunger, if you, Father, did not prevent all this by sending one of your brothers, who in obedience to your orders showed us such charity and help to take us out of the greatest suffering and to keep us alive. The whole country is eternally grateful.<sup>5</sup>

The governor of Saint-Quentin begged Vincent to continue being the father who protected the lives of innumerable people who were dying or suffering.<sup>6</sup>

When the fires of the Fronde were finally extinguished, relative peace prevailed. However, Vincent was not to be at peace. For a second time he experienced the threat of war, hunger and disease which were devastating the kingdom of Poland.

### **The Founding of French Congregations in Poland**

Several years after the departure of Queen Louise-Marie for Poland the foot-soldiers of Saint Vincent followed, missionaries, Daughters of Charity and the Sisters of the Visitation whom their founder, Saint Francis de Sales, placed under his care.

Vincent planned all of his projects down to the smallest detail. He put heart and care into directing the mission in Poland which was established thanks to the initiative of Queen Louise-Marie Gonzaga, wife of the last two kings of the Vasa dynasty on the Polish throne. She displayed a bottomless generosity to support good works. It would seem that working with Vincent in Paris she exhibited lasting and endearing qualities in her disposition and inclinations. Vincent was happy, thanked God for her gifts and considered her a model queen.

Queen Louise-Marie was even able to satisfy Mazarin, who was proud of her as his pupil in politics. This was the other area of

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<sup>5</sup> Letter 1363, Aldermen of Rethel to Saint Vincent, 22 May 1651, *CED*, 4: 200; Calvet, *Vincent*, 181.

<sup>6</sup> Letter 1871, M. de la Font to Saint Vincent, *CED*, 5: 378.



her work to which she sacrificed so much energy and ardor, yet which aroused in her many reservations which were not always verified. In their prejudices, historians went so far in their severe judgments of her politics that they were often inclined to attribute all the misfortunes which came to Poland as undeniable consequences of her actions.<sup>7</sup>

Louise-Marie Gonzaga, the French blossom of Italian descent, with her gift of outstanding intelligence and marvelous qualities of character, surrounded herself in Poland with a predominantly French court which introduced French fashions and lifestyles. Her life, to which she had grown accustomed, centered not only upon the atmosphere of the salon but also the quiet of the cloister to which she escaped from the court and its circles of intrigue.

#### *A) The Arrival of the Sisters of the Visitation*

Louise-Marie befriended the Sisters of the Visitation in Paris and asked for rooms in their monastery reserved for her disposal. Once she was settled in Poland, she decided to ask the sisters to come to Poland. She foresaw that their moderate religious rules would allow for a more monastic life for those women who had to resign from more austere communities, such as the Carmelites, the Sisters of Saint Bridget and the Bernardines. The queen was planning to assign them to some important and difficult tasks of which she wrote to her friend, Madame de la Moignon, 12 May 1649.

These foundations would be a great boon for Poland.  
Here, women who have yielded to their terrible  
passions and to insubordination have no recourse for

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<sup>7</sup> For example, I add the following from Tadeusz Korzon who could not believe that “from such a soul, prayer could be made to heaven so that alms and good works for monasteries would flow from the heart, filled with love. A woman who liked to theorize simply wanted to ensure that after death she would have a suitable place in the other world, and she would bribe the ministers of God just as she had done ministers of the republic and leaders of the army.” Korzon, *The fate and misfortunes of John Sobieski* (Krakow), vol.1: 540.

The disinclination of the historian is also found in another citation, “If she were born in a village hut she would wallop her husband and, striking him in the side, she would push herself through the crowd with an unrestrained mouth. But because she came from the highest level of French society, she learned the way one controls an elephant will help you gain domestic grandeur.” Korzon, *Sobieski*, 535.

help, no haven. They are abandoned and forgotten so that in order to survive they are forced into prostitution, and so they continue in sin. There was once an old Polish custom to impress on others the horror of such a manner of life. Women who were prostitutes were seized and forcibly placed in the houses of executioners where they were forced to serve as a toy for anyone who desired them. Very often their terrible sacrifices ended their lives in the most horrible dungeons where their bodies were crushed by disease, and no one brought them any help because each person would then consider himself degraded after trying to help such unfortunate people.<sup>8</sup>

From 1629 the Sisters of Visitation in Paris were in charge of several homes which had been erected in 1618 as cloisters for Magdalenes.<sup>9</sup> These were built for the conversion of immoral women, and for this reason the queen turned to the sisters with her proposal to put them in charge.

Vincent, as their patron, not only supported this project but encouraged them to sign a formal agreement, which he himself witnessed.<sup>10</sup> When everything was ready for their departure, without even a hint of his decision, the archbishop of Paris, de Gondi, stepped in and canceled the queen's project for many years.<sup>11</sup>

Despite losing the hope of acquiring a home for the Magdalenes, the queen never gave up her plan to bring the Sisters of the Visitation to Poland. She wrote to their mother house in Annecy, which was not subject to the jurisdiction of the archbishop of Paris, and asked them to send several nuns who would be able to take up the education of poor girls.

The sisters faced difficulties in procuring passage by ship but in the end they at last reached Poland on 30 June 1654. Their letter to various monasteries of the order describes how deeply they were

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<sup>8</sup> Edward Raczyński, *Portfolio of Queen Louise* (Poznań, 1844), fol. 1, 63-64.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>10</sup> Letter 1502, Saint Vincent to Lambert, 17 May 1652, *CED*, 4: 387; Letter 1511, Saint Vincent to Lambert, 21 June 1652, *CED*, 4: 403-404; Letter 1516, Saint Vincent to Lambert, 5 July 1652, *CED*, 4: 419.

<sup>11</sup> Such a house of correction was founded twenty years later: Rev. F. Kurowski, *Memoirs of Warsaw* (Warsaw, 1949), vol. 2, 154.

amazed and delighted with the generosity of the queen. Their letter reads:

Our reception at the border of the kingdom of our incomparable queen was something like the rise of a dawn of the happiest presentiments of the future for our hearts. What will then be when we see her highness, the queen? It seemed like a benevolent sun which exhilarates all of nature and dissipates any storm and its remnants with a view of weary cattle resting after a long battle.<sup>12</sup>

The queen had shown us many signs of a most tender concern and took us into her care as if we were her children to such extent that she insisted we take an apartment close to her bedroom. She lets us use her closet for our belongings.

The Polish court in spite of the display of great wealth and truly regal magnificence was also a temple of holiness. With a glance it would be difficult to realize that here dwells one of the most powerful rulers in the world. When we stop to think about it, we are reminded of the praise that Holy Scripture gives to Solomon the Great.<sup>13</sup>

The sisters could never envision that within a year they would have to flee from this kingdom because of the invasion of the Swedish army.<sup>14</sup>

Madame de Gletain, in charge of their home in Warsaw, wrote to Paris, 9 August 1654:

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<sup>12</sup> Portfolio, vol. 1: 57 and 134.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 141-142.

<sup>14</sup> The duchy, Opolsko-Raciborskie, to which John fled was temporarily in the hands of Poland. The deed to this claim came from Cecilia Renaty, the first wife of Wladyslaw IV.

We left the palace of the king with anguish and fear, not for loss of the pleasures of life, but solely because we were to be separated from so many beloved people whose every step and act edified each of us. The good examples of Christian virtues, which we saw daily at the court, will be for the rest of our life a stimulus to sanctify our vocation with similar behavior.<sup>15</sup>

The Sisters of the Visitation were especially moved by the generosity of the queen for the poor and they wondered in what way the royal treasury could cover all the expenses.<sup>16</sup>

They admired many things in the months after their arrival:

Some people would have us characterize the Polish people as barbarians, with idols and obscenities. But we found them totally different. Poland can yield nothing to France. It is a very spacious country with an abundance of grain and all the products needed for life and ease. They were astounded at the magnificence of the churches, their beauty and wealth. Truly they confessed that there can be no country like Poland.<sup>17</sup>

The queen took such good care of them that Vincent could be at peace as to their future. He rejoiced in their lot and asked God to bless their foundation and asked the sisters to pray for him and for his community. He often sent his greeting to them through his own confreres.

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<sup>15</sup> Portfolio, vol. 1: 169. Des Noyers, the queen's secretary, gave a very different description: "He surrounds him with dwarfs, small birds, dogs and monkeys. In his quarters the conversation customarily has for its theme, licentiousness. On Good Friday and every other day he is in his carriage with five or six Jesuits. But this is not something useful. He carries with him a picture of the Blessed Mother, which people say is miraculous. If there is not a church nearby, he has devotions to her even in the antechamber of his quarters. However, he never attends Mass." Czermaka, *Jan Kazimierz, Characteric Proofs* (Kwart. Hist. R.3, 1889), 16.

<sup>16</sup> Portfolio, vol. 1: 170.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 171-173.



Louise-Marie Gonzaga (1611-1667). Portrait by Daniel Schultz the Younger, before  
 may 1667, National Museum, Warsaw, Poland.

*Public Domain*

*B) The arrival of the missionaries and their first labors*

Because the successful conclusion of efforts to bring the Sisters of the Visitation took so much time the queen could no longer wait. She turned to Saint Vincent with the request to send missionaries to Poland. She knew of the extraordinary results of their efforts to reform the clergy in France, and because of this she wanted them to do the same in Poland. Proof of the great need for reform is found in a letter from an official in the Vatican in which he described their view of the Polish clergy. Thirty years before the coming of the missionaries, Cardinal Ludovisio wrote to the papal nuncio in Poland, Reverend Torezza:

We do not have many good pastors in any country and so what can we say about Poland. There are very few clergymen who are not greedy nor very well educated. I must advise you that the decrees of the Council of Trent stress the importance to increase the number of seminaries. To this date only two were constructed.<sup>18</sup>

The low level of the clergy was the illness of the church. Torrez, the papal nuncio wrote later:

All heresies began with the corruption of the morals of both the diocesan clergy and religious orders, some of whose former members became the first heretics and founders of sects. To this day it is still found in the life of monks who follow and support the diocesan clergy in such views. Whoever visits Germany or Poland is convinced that the heretics, seeing these scandals, are themselves strengthened in their errors from which they can never be completely converted, unless proper measures can be employed to bring about a return of a strict observance of their rules to the monasteries. Similar measures must be found to improve the habits of the secular clergy. The heretics no longer rest on their dogmas, nor do they threaten the matter of scholasticism. They merely look at the good or bad examples in the conduct of one or the other.<sup>19</sup>

Vincent reached the same conclusion, believing that all the losses in the church were mainly due to bad priests. In one of his conferences with the confreres in 1655 he spoke about the Swedish invasion of Poland:

There is no doubt that the immorality of the clergy is the primary cause of the losses in God's church. We priests are the cause of this devastation which

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<sup>18</sup> *The Report of Apostolic Nuncios and other Persons in Poland, 1548-1690* (Berlin, 1864), vol. 2: 121.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

has come upon the church, from the deplorable degradation so prevalent in so many places, almost total in Asia and Africa but even in many places in Europe. Even Poland has been badly infected. Meanwhile, the invasion by the King of Sweden threatens the loss of faith for more people. The seizure of this great kingdom by the Swedish king in less than four months forces us to fear that God has permitted these events to punish us for our sins. So great a kingdom in a twinkling of the eye, in less than four months, is almost entirely occupied! O Lord! Who can tell if this threatening conqueror will stop at this much. Who knows? Let us find the means to improve the state of our own clergy because bad priests are the reason for all of these disasters. It is they who bring harm to the church.<sup>20</sup>

The queen's plan to obtain good priests for Poland could only warm Vincent's heart. We do not know which group of priests were being prepared for the journey in August of 1650. However, the need for mobilization for a new war against the Cossacks under Chmielnicki prevented the queen from dealing with this matter directly. Only after the successful battle near Beresteczek could the queen turn her attention once more to the needs of the priests. In September of 1651 a few missionaries departed for the distant posts for which they would be responsible. From now on they would carry with them the prayers, the heartfelt concern and the counsel of their holy founder.

Reverend Lambert aux Couteaux, one of the first and closest partners of their holy founder, was placed in charge of these missionaries. Vincent deeply felt the pain of this separation.

In one of the letters to Lambert, Vincent admitted: "I have suffered a lot since I have not had you near me, but I recognize the hand of the Lord here who took you from us and who tells me I must offer him this sacrifice."<sup>21</sup>

Vincent rejoiced on receiving letters from Lambert, whose words gave proof of his esteem and cordiality. Lambert was perhaps the most faithful image of Vincent's virtues. Even as a young cleric he resolved to imitate his master in everything. He regarded him as the

<sup>20</sup> Conference 141, September 1655, *CED*, 11: 308-310.

<sup>21</sup> Letter 1479, Saint Vincent to Lambert, 29 March 1652, *CED*, 4: 350.

living image of Christian perfection. He deprived himself not only of all pleasures but also his own free will. Even Vincent could never determine what work most suited him. His exercise of self-control helped him grow in virtue.

To imitate the poor, during winter Lambert wore no warm clothing other than his cassock. He loved to take on the lowest menial tasks of the congregation. If he was aware that he offended anybody he humbly begged forgiveness, even if it was one who was under his supervision. Level headed, and at peace in the face of opposition, he spoke with great fervor and inflamed the hearts of his listeners.

He was always respectful and meek in his relationships with others, but it was a constant battle with his impetuous French temperament. All of this helped him to conquer hearts, even of the most difficult people.<sup>22</sup> Knowing his natural qualities, Vincent often chose him to take on the most difficult tasks.

Lambert came to Warsaw with four confreres, Reverends Wilhelm Desdames and Nicholas Guillot,<sup>23</sup> Stanislaw Zelazowski<sup>24</sup> and Brother Jakub Posny.

Desdames was a zealous priest who desired to conduct popular parish missions. He never disappointed anyone's trust in him. His courage and perseverance were especially evident in his care of parishioners of the Holy Cross Parish, particularly when the Swedish army plundered and burned the city only to return a few months later. Vincent often expressed his admiration for these fearless missionaries in Warsaw as models of virtue for his whole congregation.

However, on several occasions others caused their founder profound grief. Guillot could not adjust to the conditions in Poland. Zelazowski found it very difficult to obey the strict rules of the community. Posny offended the priest who was queen's confessor, who then insisted on his being sent back to France. To replace them, Vincent sent new and proven workers in the harvest.

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<sup>22</sup> M.A. Kamocki and G. Perboyre, *Memoires de la Congregation de la Mission* (Paris, 1863), vol. 1: 2-9.

<sup>23</sup> I follow Wdowicki, who disputes the view on the letters of Saint Vincent that Guillot was already a priest and not a subdeacon. Rev. W. Wdowicki, *Historia Zgromadzenia Ksiezy Misjonarzy w Polsce: Pierwszych lat dziesiec od r. 1651-1661* (The History of the Congregation of the Mission in Poland: the First Ten Years, 1651-1661) [Krakow, 102], 13.

<sup>24</sup> The spelling of his name in "The Catalog of those who resided in the house in Warsaw" are a fascicle of the missions in the archives of the Priests of the Mission in Krakow, on Stradom Street. In the letters and correspondence of Saint Vincent, the spelling is Zelazewski.



Only Zelazowski spoke Polish. The rest did not. Although most Poles knew Latin and could communicate with the missionaries. Therefore, in a letter to the queen, Vincent suggested they first build a seminary and dedicate themselves to the education of young Polish priests. Then, after a year of training, these priests conducted parish missions under the direction of experienced missionaries. They preached to peasants, “of whom the majority was ignorant of the means necessary for salvation and would therefore remain in danger of losing their souls because of this ignorance.”<sup>25</sup>

Vincent heard of the virtuous life of bishop Jerzy Tyszkiewicz<sup>26</sup> and was willing to open a seminary in his diocese, unless the queen should prefer to have it in Warsaw. Vincent encouraged the queen to approve his plan, reminding her of examples in France. The queen was well aware of their success. One of the bishops informed Vincent that he rejoiced as he viewed the reform of the clergy. He attributed it to the success of the seminary, which was staffed for eight or ten years by four missionaries.<sup>27</sup>

The queen was also thinking of establishing a seminary in the diocese of Wilno and bestowing on the confreres the benefice of Sokolka, near Grodno.<sup>28</sup> Desdames was appointed pastor. Bishop Tyszkiewicz greeted him and Lambert with great joy. Vincent rejoiced at hearing this.<sup>29</sup> When the bishop came to Warsaw he wanted to bring them to Wilno but something came up and the plans changed.<sup>30</sup> There were apparent objections and difficulties voiced by “‘a powerful religious order’ who suspected that the newly ordained priests had leanings toward Jansenism because of the influence of their teachers.”<sup>31</sup> This powerful religious order was the Jesuits.

<sup>25</sup> Letter 1401, Saint Vincent to Queen Louise-Marie, 6 September 1651, *CED*, 4: 247.

<sup>26</sup> Jerzy Tyszkiewicz, 1656. Bishop of Zmudzka from 1633; Bishop of Wilno from 1649. Visconti, the nuntio, wrote about him in 1636: “He always led a very spiritual life, both as a simple priest and as the suffragan bishop. It must have been his way of living, despite outside pressure. Even the enemies of the church regarded him as a model. He was tireless in his ecclesiastical duties, and he never missed demonstrating what a good pastor must do. He was educated and skilled in theology, to which he was dedicated.” *Reports of the Papal Nuncio*, fol. II, page 243.

<sup>27</sup> Letter 1401, Saint Vincent to Queen Louise-Marie, 6 September 1651, *CED*, 4: 247.

<sup>28</sup> Letter 1423, Queen Louise-Marie to Saint Vincent, 13 November 1651, *CED*, 4: 272.

<sup>29</sup> Letter of 1463, Vincent to Lambert, 1 March 1652, *CED*, 4: 325.

<sup>30</sup> Letter 1502, Vincent to Lambert, 17 May 1652, *CED*, 4: 387.

<sup>31</sup> Pierre Coste, C.M., *Le Grand Saint du Grand Siècle, Monsieur Vincent*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1934), 2: 208.

There were, however, other reasons. The year the confreres arrived, a terrible plague engulfed Poland and laid waste to the whole country until 1663.<sup>32</sup> Because of insufficient fundamental sanitary conditions diseases were not rare, and with the advance of war and hunger they increased. Epidemics became common in Poland throughout the entire seventeenth century. The populace was totally defenseless in the face of weakened intelligence and the neglect of previous proven rules of sanitation. The course of new forms of disease accompanied other factors arising from the stormy rule of King John Casimir. It appeared first in the army, which suffered terribly from lack of food during the war with the Cossacks. Hundreds of corpses lay unburied after the battle at Beresteck, further generating diseases.

The ills of the East came flowing into the territory of Poland. The plague reached Krakow in December and remained rampant until October of the following year. By 1652 it encompassed the whole of Poland. At the same time it ravaged Austria, Germany, Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands and France, but none so badly as Poland.

After their victory in Eastern Poland the Tartars suddenly retreated, leaving behind all their spoils for fear of the plague. Prince Jeremi Wisniowiecki, who massacred Russian peasants, died in prison. The plague reached the royal court. The queen's almoner brought it to the palace and several died. The queen became sick and soon the king was also in danger of death.<sup>33</sup> The sessions of parliament which had begun in July were suddenly ended.

In such circumstances the public life of the country stopped and those who could fled to deserted regions of the land. Huge walls surrounded cities, cutting off all contact with the outside world. Even the delivery of food was curtailed. The result was poverty. There was no more work because no one needed help. Without money people lacked the means to live.

In such conditions the indefatigable activities of the missionaries led by Reverend Lambert came to the fore. In April 1652 they made their way to Krakow, the center of the epidemic. He recalled Reverend Desdames from Sokolki and Zelazowski. Then Reverend Guillot and Brother Posny replaced them. Without any rest

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<sup>32</sup> L. Kuhala, *Szkice Historyczne* (Historical Sketches), series II (1896), 155-169. S. Namaczynska, *Kronika Klesk Elementarnych w Polsce iw Krajach Sasiednich w latach 1648-1696* (Chronicles of Elementary Plagues in Poland and Neighboring Countries In The Years 1648-1696) [Lwow, 1937].

<sup>33</sup> A.S. Radziwill, *Pamietniki* (Memoirs), E. Raczynski (Poznan, 1839), vol. 2, 472.

Lambert worked on and on. Vincent was glad to hear how all of them continued to help the sick.<sup>34</sup> With the support of the queen, their work proved to be an example and model of well-planned care for the poor, described in a letter to Bishop Solminihac.<sup>35</sup>

### C) *The Arrival of the Daughters of Charity*

When the missionaries could not manage everything that was needed, the queen turned to Vincent and asked him to send the Daughters of Charity. In July they were ready and waited for the opportunity to leave. They left on the sixth of September 1652.<sup>36</sup> In a farewell conference, Vincent said to them:

My Daughters, the work that you are undertaking is also what the Son of God was doing to save souls. With your virtues and self-denial, seek only the glory of God, living together with great love and agreement, joined together by your rules.<sup>37</sup>

Two days after their arrival Queen Louise-Marie wrote Vincent that she was gratified. The Daughters had made a good impression.<sup>38</sup> The first three Daughters of Charity in Poland were: Margaret Moreau, Magdalene Drugeon and Frances Douelle. Margaret was so well received by the queen that she wanted to have her by her side, and the other two were sent to Reverend Lambert. Margaret's response surprised Vincent. When the queen asked her to stay, the very young sister servant excused herself by explaining that there were only three sisters here to help the poor, whereas the queen had so many others, and more gifted to serve her. "My dear sister, you do not wish to serve?" asked the astonished queen. She replied: "My lady, God has called us to serve the poor." Vincent asked: "Wasn't that beautiful, my sisters?"<sup>39</sup> Margaret then joined the others, as she wished, and Lambert put her in charge of the assigned work.

<sup>34</sup> Letter 1565, Saint Vincent to Étienne Blatiron, 25 October 1652, *CED*, 4: 512.

<sup>35</sup> Letter 1572, Saint Vincent to Alain de Solminihac, November 1652, *CED*, 4: 521-522.

<sup>36</sup> "Daughters of Charity In the Province of Warsaw in the First Eight Years," *Roczniki Obydwoch Zgromadzen Sw. Wincentego* (Annuals of the Two Congregations of Saint Vincent de Paul) [1904], R. 10, 38.

<sup>37</sup> A. Schletz, *Prowincja Warszawaska Siostr Milosierdzia* (Daughters of Charity in the Province of Warsaw), *Caritas* (1949), R. 5, number 1: 2.

<sup>38</sup> Letter 1556, Queen Louise-Marie to Saint Vincent, September 1652, *CED*, 4: 487.

<sup>39</sup> Conference 50, 2 February 1653, *CED*, 9: 589.

The sisters left the queen in Lowicz, where she had retired to flee from the plague. Then Margaret rented a small home in Warsaw near Holy Cross Church. She went out through the streets taking care of those from whom others were fleeing for fear of being infected with the plague. Vincent was informed of the dangers of those days and he pressed the community "to pray for the afflicted."<sup>40</sup>

In this apostolate we have the beginnings of that complete dedication of the sisters which continues even today. At the age of 37 years Sister Margaret Moreau paid for her dedication with her life as she died from the plague on 17 September 1660, ten days before Saint Vincent died. She died far from home amid people whose language and customs were foreign to her, yet who shared the same suffering. After her death, Reverend d'Horgny, the director of the sisters, reflected in a conference in their mother house in Paris:

I admired her courage and zeal, with which she went so far to serve the poor with love of God. She went to a foreign country devastated by war. She shed no blood but she risked her life for the love of Jesus and found death amid the suffering souls she wanted to save. This is true martyrdom. God called her to himself because he did not count her years spent on earth but her fidelity to her calling so worthy of reward.<sup>41</sup>

Sister Moreau waited through eight years of hard work in Poland before she gained her reward.

The plague reached Warsaw in July 1652, and Reverend Lambert rushed to help. What he was able to do we learn from Saint Vincent himself as he wrote to Reverend Coglee, the superior in Sedan, saying he did not have time to describe it more completely. To this day we do not have the complete picture of this event.

He wrote:

God's blessing accompanies the work of the missionaries in Poland. When the plague broke out in Warsaw, all the people who could escape

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 590.

<sup>41</sup> "Daughters of Charity in the Province of Warsaw," 85.

abandoned the city. In this city more than any other place the plague hit, there was no order but total anarchy because no one was burying the dead. They are found on the streets where dogs devour them. Whoever falls sick because of the plague is pushed out on the street where he is condemned to death since no one feeds him.

Poor workers, servants, widows and orphans are totally abandoned. They find no work nor any persons they could beg for bread, because all of the rich have abandoned the city. Father Lambert was sent to this hopeless crisis in this large city to assess what could be done to aid the poor. He succeeded in doing precisely that. He had the dead buried. The sick and the abandoned people were brought to healthy homes where their bodies as well as their souls could be taken care of. He also helped other poor people who had illnesses not related to the plague. In the end he prepared to bring some to almshouses, in which men were separated from women and children. The queen's generous alms sustained them in this crisis.<sup>42</sup>

Meanwhile, the queen told Lambert to move into the royal rooms of the castle. She made sure that he received everything he needed for the current situation. She often warned him not to expose himself to danger.<sup>43</sup> He found it difficult to adhere to these warnings, while at the same time he hastened to bring help. Reverend Lambert, who already had a fever in Krakow, did not survive long doing such punishing work. When the plague's progress diminished with the coming of winter, he went to the royal court in Lithuania. He took the occasion to visit Reverend Desdames in Sokol and there, after three days of severe illness, died on 31 January 1653.

When Vincent learned of this painful loss he sent a lengthy laudatory account of Lambert's life to all the houses of the congregation. The opinion of the deceased from the queen's confessor, Reverend Fleury, was also included: "In the realm of human judgments it would be difficult to find a priest more excellent and dedicated to the works

<sup>42</sup> Letter 1579, Saint Vincent to Marc Coglée, 10 December 1652, *CED*, 4: 533-534.

<sup>43</sup> Letter 1556, Queen Louise-Marie to Saint Vincent, September 1652, *CED*, 4: 487.

of God. He sought only God. No one has earned the respect and gifts of the king and queen in so short a time as he had."

Vincent found the loss of such a priest especially painful because "of the extraordinary needs of this kingdom where the attitudes are very good and remaining workers are strong enough."<sup>44</sup>

### **The Missionaries in Holy Cross Parish**

A year later Reverend Ozenne came to Warsaw as superior of the house there. The queen arranged for financial support of the missionaries by appointing them pastors in the parish of Sokol, which they would hold as long as she was alive. Some years previous to this she also planned to have them settle in Warsaw, in the parish of Holy Cross, which was well cared for and located near the palace. These were the queen's plans even when Reverend Lambert was still alive. She had the staff plant an orchard and garden next to the church, with a separate building for maintenance of the property. However, the plague prevented her from completing the project.

In 1653 there were various transactions and agreements dealing with the appointment of the pastor of Holy Cross Church. After a few months, the missionaries and Bishop Florian Czaratoryski signed a contract which ratified the appointment of the office of pastor along with granting the benefice of the Holy Cross Church.

Vincent was pleased, although not entirely. He would have preferred a more permanent contract which would ensure the appointment of a missionary as pastor and the funding necessary for the support of the priests. To forestall any possibility of future problems, Vincent worked very hard to have them recognize that the church now and always would be under the control of the community, which would have the right to change pastors. For this purpose he sent Richelieu a model of the document he wished to ratify and then asked Reverend Fleury to support approval. He also asked Ozenne to employ all means to bring the matter to a successful conclusion.

The matter of the permanent settlement of the missionaries in Warsaw was not solved without problems. The support which they gained from the queen aroused the opposition of, once again, "a powerful religious order" (the Jesuits) whose name Vincent did not reveal in his letters.

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<sup>44</sup> Letter 1597, Saint Vincent to Edme Menestrier, 23 March 1653, *CED*, 4: 561.

It was well known that the queen had sympathy for some who espoused Jansenism. Reverend Fleury also had met with them. The Jesuits laughed at the “provincialism” of Pascal. Besides doctrinal considerations, they had other reasons to oppose the new heresy. Reverend Lambert felt this ‘other order’ was jealous. In their antipathy the Jesuits judged the missionaries, although protected by the queen and Reverend Fleury, guilty before God. The missionaries informed Vincent. Once more he reminded them of the proper behavior they were to display. What did he counsel? Respect, love and courtesy in every event, no matter how much greater is the evil they would have to endure.<sup>45</sup>

He was not surprised that “members of a religious order of whom we speak would wish to prevent the community from having the position of being pastor. They could have good intentions. But God ordinarily allows such difficulties in such good plans so that we could recognize that it is He who accomplished it.”<sup>46</sup>

In May of 1654 he advised Reverend Ozenne to behave in the same way that the community in France does with such priests:

Even if they threw mud in your face, I am convinced that we should not be offended nor should we break off our relationship with them, nor diminish our respect and reverence before God. Do not be surprised with what happens but be disposed to recognize their good acts. There had been arguments among the apostles and even among the angels, however without offending God. For each one acts according to one’s own enlightenment which God at times allows. In some circumstances his servants do not agree with one another but one congregation should not persecute another. It would be much better thinking about these things. Furthermore, there is always something good for those who humble themselves and do not manifest any opposition. O that God would give us these graces so that we would be of their number.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Letter 1511, Saint Vincent to Lambert, 21 June 1652, *CED*, 4: 405.

<sup>46</sup> Letter 1706, Saint Vincent to Guillot, 20 February 1654, *CED*, 5: 77.

<sup>47</sup> Letter 1743, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 22 May 1654, *CED*, 5: 138.

The conditions lasted several years and, in amazement, Vincent asked:

Is it possible that those good priests acted in such a way as you say? It is hard for me to believe this. If such was the case, be advised then not to talk about it nor complain to others for that would be worse. One must overcome evil with goodness. This also means that we should not neglect to visit them at every opportunity as we had done in the past, and serve them if God should give us the occasion.<sup>48</sup>

However, it seems that all of this did not help matters and Vincent promised in the end that he himself would discuss these matters with the Jesuits in France and ask them to intervene.<sup>49</sup>

If the Jesuits feared that the queen might be inclined to some aspects of the spirit of Jansenism, or even that she would openly discuss their main thesis, then one must admit that they were right in their fears.<sup>50</sup> Although Vincent had trained the missionaries they need not fear, in the end the opposite occurred. In the face of the universal good behavior of the missionaries, and the official documents of the Church, the queen and her confessor could no longer embrace such obviously erroneous teachings.

More distressing was the news of an external crisis in the house of Warsaw. Reverend Guillot wanted to return to France and Reverend Zelazowski wished to leave the congregation. From his letters we can sense the grief in Vincent's heart, and how he tried to forestall their decisions. In June of 1653 he encouraged Guillot to persevere and convinced him that "it is obvious that God has great plans for the spread of our holy faith in that kingdom. Consequently He has given his person the opportunity to improve the state of the clergy and laity and to make them holy because God inspired the king and queen with zeal, so that from their state of life they would continue to support projects as they had before."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Letter 1807, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 27 June 1654, *CED*, 5: 232.

<sup>49</sup> Letter 1825, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 8 January 1655, *CED*, 5: 257.

<sup>50</sup> Letter 1482, Saint Vincent to Lambert, 12 April 1652, *CED*, 4: 355.

<sup>51</sup> Letter 1624, Saint Vincent to Guillot, 6 June 1653, *CED*, 4: 599-600.



Vincent tried to instill compassion for Poland in Guillot, where “darkness and sin and so many heresies have established their thrones.” He urged him to persist. He spoke to him of the loftiness of his vocation and encouraged him to continue his work. He reminded him to remember the blessing which God bestowed on his work in Warsaw, and to ask God to give him his spirit.<sup>52</sup>

Because Guillot was set in his plans, Vincent never stopped trying to change his mind:

O Father, how all of this grieves me! Is it possible since Our Lord was so good to you that he now allows you to abandon His work in this way? O! How sorry you will be on the day of judgment, having deserted the ranks of the Lord. In the name of God, dear Father, let us not bring about the end of our mission. Offer your cares to the Lord and ask Him to give you his spirit and the graces that you would respond to His eternal intentions.<sup>53</sup>

In a subsequent letter he renewed his request “on my knees with tears in my eyes.”<sup>54</sup> Guillot was not moved.

It was worse with Zelazowski, who wanted to leave the congregation. In such a confrontation, one must really be a saint with an endless supply of goodness, patience and subtlety. Vincent repeatedly demonstrated this in dealing with his troublesome first Polish-born seminarian. It is clear that in trying to save the vocation of this intractable priest, Vincent displayed his deep love for him and for the country he represented.

The unstable character of Zelazowski surfaced on his very arrival in Poland. He initially left the community but soon after came to his senses. In March of 1652 Vincent wrote to tell Zelazowski how happy he was to hear of his return and for this he thanked God many times. At the end of the letter he added “in a very special way, bowing low to his feet, deeply with a joy which I cannot describe.”<sup>55</sup> However,

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Letter 1706, Saint Vincent to Guillot, 20 February 1654, *CED*, 5: 78.

<sup>54</sup> Letter 1709, Saint Vincent to Guillot, 27 February 1654, *CED*, 5: 87.

<sup>55</sup> Letter 1479, Saint Vincent to Lambert, 29 March 1652, *CED*, 4: 351.

this joy did not last as only months later Zelazowski was still thinking of leaving. For a time the whole matter quieted down, and he could return in two years at the very time that Guillot left Poland.

For the missionaries named pastors of Holy Cross Church the loss was very painful. However, Reverend Ozenne now took up the work in the parish and planned to conduct parish missions. Vincent asked God to bless them in this "so that the first grace would serve as a seed from which would come an unending harvest of fruit."<sup>56</sup>

He worried how this could be done when the two priests had gone. At the time Brother Posny was to return to France at the request of Reverend Fleury. That left only Reverend Ozenne, Reverend Desdames, and Duperroy, the seminarian who came to Poland with Reverend Ozenne in 1653. Vincent did not doubt that Ozenne would utilize every tactic possible to persuade Zelazowski to return.

Once more Vincent wrote to the incorrigible priest. First he cordially greeted him, saying "Your letter gave me joy from one whom I esteem and love very much."<sup>57</sup> Then he addressed a detailed examination of his doubts. At the top of the list was the spirit of self-will, in as much as it was prevalent in Polish society. Zelazowski would not have been the son of this epoch had he sacrificed his desire for total freedom, even from creative rigors. Surely he was somewhat attached to the congregation as by choice he took part in its work, dressed as and lived with the confreres. Vincent could not agree with his decision.<sup>58</sup> He could at least comfort Ozenne in difficult circumstances, but he himself suffered the situation. Vincent wrote "I do not know how I can cleanse my conscience of my fault, if they were to abandon God's work, half-way to its completion and with such a good foundation at its very beginning."<sup>59</sup>

Meanwhile he recommended the ordination of a young cleric, Duperroy, convinced that "one good soldier is worth more than ten. God surely will bless your small group before any loss ensues, which you fear would happen. God called you to Poland. He has pointed out to you the bountiful harvest and wishes you now to dedicate yourselves to the task, with profound confidence of receiving His

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<sup>56</sup> Letter 1717, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 13 March 1654, *CED*, 5: 98.

<sup>57</sup> Letter 1721, Saint Vincent to Zelazewski, 27 March 1654, *CED*, 5: 104.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 106-107.

<sup>59</sup> Letter 1722, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 27 March 1654, *CED*, 5: 108.

grace. It will not be by your own strength merely, which by the way is not much."<sup>60</sup>

The future would show that this courageous missionary did not disappoint the hope they put in him. He became the pride of the congregation, a model of patience and stability in the midst of the most difficult circumstances. Such news would arouse the Holy Founder's admiration.

To strengthen the weakened staff of the community in Warsaw, Vincent promised to send them help on the first available occasion, namely a brother, a priest and if possible, a cleric capable of studying in the seminary.

In spite of requests, prayers and persuasion, the disobedient priest went his own way. Vincent begged God's forgiveness and with deep sorrow wrote Ozenne:

I am amazed how a soldier faithful to his commander would dare to retreat when one should fight, nor leave him without permission under the threat of punishment for deserters. A man of honor would never think of abandoning his friend in need, especially in a foreign country. Why? Because he feared being called a vile and disrespectful person.

I am amazed to see such dedication from people only out of human respect, more than in Christians and priests who act of out love for God, and for their neighbor in the good works they had undertaken. When I think of the acts of these two priests who were called to be the first foundation of the Congregation of the Mission in that broad kingdom, in which one could have achieved so much good and where all the circumstances fell into their plans for a joyful harvest. Yet in spite of all this they abandon God's work which they began so beautifully. In spite of their various proposals and arguments, I do not know what to say or think.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 108-109.

<sup>61</sup> Letter 1724, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 3 April 1654, *CED*, 5: 111-112.

Nevertheless, Vincent could rejoice in the work of the missionaries who remained, and who made such great progress in learning the Polish language. Reverend Desdames even began to preach in Polish. He wrote "I expect with time that you will learn to speak colloquially. God will bless you in all your endeavors since they tend toward Him. He will also bless your family and the difficulties encountered in the service of the Church and for the consolation of their kings."<sup>62</sup>

Vincent put pressure on them to master the language of the new kingdom since "without this they would be useless in Poland and would disappoint the Queen and even God himself."<sup>63</sup>

All of them devoted themselves to this task and made steady progress. To facilitate this, Vincent allowed them to live for a time with a religious community, insofar as it did not bring about any problems.<sup>64</sup> In April 1654, he chose two clerics for the mission in Poland. "I searched everywhere among those we have and have chosen them to bring glory to God, satisfaction for the queen and help for you."<sup>65</sup> He chose Simon and Eveillard, clerics who would work responsibly and handle managerial duties in the congregation, providing many valuable services.<sup>66</sup>

A few months later Vincent decided to have Durand and Guillot accompany them.<sup>67</sup> The latter had problems of conscience which did not allow him to stay in France. Vincent expected that they would be able to leave by the middle of July, although they ultimately left at the beginning of August. A month later they were in Warsaw.

Zelazowski was also thinking of returning to Poland, but he constantly had problems with his superiors due to his behavior. Vincent asked them, in the name of God, to dismiss his faults and yet

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Letter 1880, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 4 June 1655, *CED*, 5: 389.

<sup>64</sup> Letter 1893, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 23 July 1655, *CED*, 5: 398.

<sup>65</sup> Letter 1733, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 17 April 1654, *CED*, 5: 121.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. Rene Simon was given the office of Visitor of the Italian Province of the Congregation of the Mission, thanks to his contacts in the Apostolic See.

Jacques Eveillard was the superior of the house in Warsaw (1674-1679). He inaugurated the internal seminary and the major seminary near the Church of the Holy Cross for the education of future missionaries and the diocesan clergy. Eveillard was a skilled organizer but he was headstrong, ambitious, self-willed and eventually dismissed from his office. He left the community in 1689. Cf. A. Schletz, "Eveillard, Jacques," article in *Polski Słownik Biograficzny* (The Polish Biographical Dictionary), vol. 6: 322-3.

<sup>67</sup> Letter 1755, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 26 June 1654, *CED*, 5: 159.

warn him with kindness once in a while, privately in the presence of God, if it was necessary.

I heard that one can win over the Polish people more quickly with a warm and good heart than with rudeness. I expect that slowly one can give him some small duties. But if that does not work, then God himself will manage to free us of him. In such a situation it would better that he would praise us for our proper handling of him rather than having him leave dissatisfied.<sup>68</sup>

A few weeks later he returned to the same matter:

With regards to Zelazowski, I have nothing to tell you other than I ask God that he would have him return to his primitive spirit, in which from the beginning he seemed to be have the spirit of Saint Hyacinth. I do not know what God will do with him but I have not lost hope that the goodness of God will receive from him the service and the glory which He has planned from all ages.<sup>69</sup>

It would seem that the way of meekness and goodness succeeded. A half-a-year later Vincent greeted Zelazowski very cordially and asked Ozenne to use every available means to help him carry his cross.<sup>70</sup> In spite of the greatest good will of the superior, Zelazowski left the congregation and brought great sorrow to the Holy Founder.<sup>71</sup> But this time he did not completely leave the congregation. Vincent could not find words to guide him. He only asked God that He be his guide and director.<sup>72</sup> In spite of all of this, Vincent did not wane in his hope that "God would give him His own spirit for his salvation and the sanctification of his countrymen, as did Saint Hyacinth."<sup>73</sup> However, the kindness, patience and understanding

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<sup>68</sup> Letter 1760, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 10 July 1654, *CED*, 5: 165-166.

<sup>69</sup> Letter 1764, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 31 July 1654, *CED*, 5: 173.

<sup>70</sup> Letter 1825, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 8 January 1655, *CED*, 5: 257.

<sup>71</sup> Letter 1840, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 12 February 1655, *CED*, 5: 314.

<sup>72</sup> Letter 1853, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 19 March 1655, *CED*, 5: 340.

<sup>73</sup> Letter 1870, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 7 May 1655, *CED*, 5: 376.

turned out to be futile. Vincent concluded that further tolerance of self-will could bring too much harm to the congregation.

It is time to prevent this. We should ask him to leave completely, so that we would have no further contact with him. However if something of his earlier calling remains, he would be obliged to live as a true missionary and obey all the rules. You will treat him with kindness and gentleness, as he turned to Ozenne, with an outward bond but also with the determination as to what must finally be achieved.<sup>74</sup>

In Vincent's letters the epilogue of this case was the caution: "Do not be puzzled by the complaints and aggravation of Reverend Zelazowski. This is the ordinary manner of behavior in those who are leaving."<sup>75</sup>

However, in the end, Vincent was victorious. Many years after Vincent's death, Zelazowski once again, and finally, entered the congregation in Cracow<sup>76</sup> to fulfill "the eternal plans of God" and to beg Him for forgiveness, in much the same way the famous adventurer of those times, Cardinal de Retz, did.<sup>77</sup> As had been pledged, until his death Vincent had shown him friendship and loyalty.

Before these matters were settled, near the end of 1654, the house in Warsaw had eight priests counting the new group of clerics who had come there and were ordained in the first half of October. They were able to work a year in supporting the parish's popular mission. Once more words failed Vincent when, with joy, he heard of their success. Again he begged God to bless this work.<sup>78</sup> In his later letters he wished to be informed of the results of these missions.<sup>79</sup>

Joy was the predominant tone of his letters in these times. He was happy that God was blessing the mission and other apostolic works, and that Durand, Simon and Eveillard had made such progress in learning to speak Polish. Duperroy could even catechize in Polish.<sup>80</sup> He was pleased with the generosity and patronage for

<sup>74</sup> Letter 1924, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 24 September 1655, *CED*, 5: 428.

<sup>75</sup> Letter 1977, Saint Vincent to Étienne Blatiron, 17 December 1655, *CED*, 5: 486.

<sup>76</sup> The Diary of the Act of the House in Warsaw, Holy Cross Church, rkpsAMW, 100.

<sup>77</sup> Cardinal Retz, *Pamietniki* (Memoirs) [Warsaw, 1958], vol. 2: 465.

<sup>78</sup> Letter 1784, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 16 October 1654, *CED*, 5: 201.

<sup>79</sup> Letter 1807, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 27 November 1654, *CED*, 5: 232; and Letter 1810, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 4 December 1654, *CED*, 5: 236.

<sup>80</sup> Letter 1803, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 20 November 1654, *CED*, 5: 227-228.

his sons which the queen, her confessor Reverend Fleury, and other benefactors manifested. He was also glad to hear of the good and heartfelt relationship with Bishop Tyszkiewicz, the bishop of Wilno. Various new projects met with growing popularity in areas which had previously been unsuccessful. For example, the bishop of Poznan planned to have the missionaries direct retreats prior to ordination to the priesthood.<sup>81</sup> These retreats were being planned for even before their arrival from France at Pentecost.<sup>82</sup> But the missionaries encountered opposition from "a certain community."<sup>83</sup> Reverend Ozenne feared this would happen. To avoid such difficulties, Vincent advised that he greet these priests with deference and respect, and that he find occasions for being of service to them.

"Should they wish to sink "our small boat," then we should suffer it for the love of God, who is capable of guarding it from sinking and who can bring us peace after the storm."<sup>84</sup>

Similar difficulties occurred when his sons were giving parish missions. We read about an incident in one of Vincent's letters wherein he rejoiced at the kindness the missionaries showed these venerable fathers, at the same time thanking Conrad, the queen's physician, for his intervention in clearing the names of the priests when they encountered various objections. Thanks to Conrad's help they could continue giving parish missions.<sup>85</sup>

The number of missionaries began to increase, as well as their significance and fruitfulness. The queen took it upon herself to safeguard their material needs. From the very beginning she gave them Sokolka. She arranged that they become pastors of the church of the Holy Cross. She was instrumental in their obtaining the parish church, a country house, and a mill and workers in Skuly, a large and wealthy village.<sup>86</sup> In 1655 the king and queen were also thinking of giving them Wiskitek, but war prevented them.

It is difficult to count all the small acts of generosity they received, especially from the queen, the king and many other benefactors.

<sup>81</sup> Letter 1764, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 31 July 1654, *CED*, 5: 173.

<sup>82</sup> Letter 1743, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 22 May 1654, *CED*, 5: 137.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>85</sup> Letter 1828, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 22 January 1655, *CED*, 5: 263.

<sup>86</sup> Wdowicki, *Historia*, 45-46.

Those who were interested in drawing attention to themselves in the presence of the queen were wont to have French priests in their company. There was the danger that the missionaries would also try to become fashionable and popular, although not necessarily with deeper motives.

With a resolved tone of voice, Vincent displayed his sensitivity to such dangers. He called them back to discipline and a faithful observance of the traditions of the congregation. The patron saint of Christian mercy could become harsh and firm when it came to keeping the rules, especially with people who lacked common sense and goodness. Ozenne replied with what seemed to be an innocent question: "Should we permit our missionaries to accept invitations to public banquets?" The question inspired a negative response and Vincent was astonished that even a shadow of doubt should arise.

On the matter of this evil Ozenne called the priests together to discuss it further. Even here, because one never discusses the accepted practices of the congregation, Vincent recognized the weakening of discipline. Obviously upset, he sent them a letter omitting even his ordinarily gracious greeting.<sup>87</sup> Starting with a brief salutation, he came directly to the matter at hand.

This is the reply to the questions in your last letter... you ask if the Company (I mean your family) should go to the banquets to which some of them are invited. Now, my reply, Monsieur, is that they will do well to stay away and never go to them under any pretext whatsoever.

With great detail he responded, naming the general principles and also the special rules dealing with the Polish mission:

Because by this means you deprive God of the glory He expected from the Company in calling it to Poland to be of service in either eliminating entirely or moderating the excesses committed at banquets.

He anticipated the argument that in some countries this could be considered as something acceptable.

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<sup>87</sup> Letter 1857, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 2 April 1655, *CED*, 5: 344-352.



Custom can never prescribe things that are contrary to the prohibitions God makes of them. Thus, custom does not excuse you before God, and if the priests and monks act otherwise, perhaps they are more virtuous than we are in disciplining themselves at those banquets. Despite all that, I still insist that the family not go to them any more.

Disappointed with discussing these matters with the priests, who viewed the practice as acceptable, he appointed two assistants to help Ozenne. Through them he would quell any doubts that arose in the future. At least once a week their letters to him described matters dealing with the conduct of the house.

In the same spirit he answered other questions. For example, he received a letter asking if they should follow the Polish or the Roman custom dealing with Lenten prescriptions. Vincent told them to follow the Roman customs found elsewhere in the Christian world, and so they were to fast every day except Sunday. They were to have but one good meal at dinner and only a light meal in the evening. He could not restrain himself when there were such outcries: "Shame on us, when we see nuns who fast eight months of the year and eat only a bit of bread with water in the evening!"

In the same letter he warned them to be careful when they visited sick parishioners, especially women. When they had to deal with matters outside of the house, he forbade them to go out alone. He added: "It does not matter that there are just a few of you. It is better not to go so often to the city."

To see a certain breach of discipline was painful to Vincent, more so because the missionaries had been called precisely to the matter of healing the state of priests in the church. To corroborate this point, he related the opinion of a pastor from Brittany who reported evidence was strong that the greatest enemies of the church are bad priests. Vincent added that God gave His spirit to the missionaries to prevent such disasters and to work effectively.

Regarding the project of setting up a residence in Cracow, and the behavior of certain priests advocating this, Vincent reminded:

The congregation has this firm principle, namely, not to go out and search any permanent settlement.

Furthermore we must adapt ourselves to the present situation with the grace of God, to whom we turn so that He would find us a place and settle us where He pleases. We must be called by a bishop or some founder. Your family should work zealously to learn how to preach missions effectively to the people in the country, and to set up seminaries. Then, and only then, will you be prepared to expand your work.

Vincent wrote this letter so quickly that he did not have time to re-read it. He regarded it as a grave warning, so important that he wanted it in document form with a copy sent to him.

Time and again he came back to the same problem. He wanted to foster zeal in his sons. A week later he wrote to Ozenne:

Believe me, Father. For those who came to Poland for their own personal gain in this kingdom, the spirit of Our Lord and the apostles has not sunk in and they accomplish nothing or at most not much. Too bad! Who will give us the zeal of the Dominicans and Jesuits, who were first called to this kingdom? It is Our Lord who during our meditation speaks directly to our hearts. Our greatest foe, as I see it, is the spirit of the world and the flesh.<sup>88</sup>

Vincent asked that they take this matter under consideration at a special conference.

On another occasion Ozenne thought it wise to send the young priests into the country so that they could master the language more quickly. Vincent opposed this because he foresaw the danger of dissipation. He felt that journeys into the countryside should only be done to preach the parish missions.<sup>89</sup>

At the beginning of May, Vincent informed the queen that he was going to send a new group of missionaries to Poland. They waited to depart but never reached Poland. The Swedish invasion began a new epoch in the life of the missionaries.

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<sup>88</sup> Letter 1861, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 9 April 1655, *CED*, 5: 358.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

### Saint Vincent and Queen Louise-Marie Gonzaga and the Mission in Poland

Saint Vincent truly believed that God called the missionaries to Poland, but he never forgot for a moment that it was God who moved the queen to join this mission. Because of her generosity the missionaries were indebted for their material well-being and growth. In almost every letter he sent to Poland, he reminded the missionaries to pray for the intention of so great a benefactress, and for the kingdom she ruled at the side of her weak and completely submissive king. Often Vincent reminded himself of his obligation to thank the missionaries in Poland for their zeal.

Vincent's relationship to the queen was in a certain sense uncritical. This position was chosen carefully, as he mentioned in a letter to Guillot on 15 August 1653: "It is a crime to criticize the actions and motives of the powerful. Those in our state are obliged because of the virtue of piety to think well and speak well of them, to whom we are obliged."<sup>90</sup>

This obligation to the queen was viewed so broadly that more than once Vincent yielded to her, even in internal matters of the congregation. There are many examples of this.

Everyone could see how Vincent showed Reverend Zelazowski patience, understanding and love. Once, when the forbearance of Zelazowski's caprices threatened serious harm, Vincent demanded that he either obey the demands of the rule or face dismissal from the community. Zelazowski, through the intervention of the queen, desired an agreement with the congregation to remain in an external status without rigor. Vincent asked that they come to an agreement dealing with this ever tiring situation. In the end, though, he conceded: "However, if her highness thinks otherwise, she has the power to command and we will proceed in this and other matters in accord with her wish."<sup>91</sup>

He further added: "I thank God for the goodness which she shows, dealing with you with such an open heart. One must never show that we are unworthy of her grace. We ought to deal with her with respect, sincerity, trust, simplicity, and great deference and agreement, as I know you do."<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Letter 1648, Saint Vincent to Guillot, 15 August 1653, *CED*, 5: 4.

<sup>91</sup> Letter 1733, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 17 April 1654, *CED*, 5: 123.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*



Charles X. Gustavus (1622-1660). Gustavus reigned as King of Sweden from 1654 until his death in 1660, and oversaw the invasion of Poland.

Portrait by Sébastien Bourdon, dated 1653.

*Public Domain*

It would appear Vincent also yielded to the will of the queen in accepting foundations. He fundamentally opposed anything that would weaken their situation in Warsaw and tried to dissuade the missionaries from settling in Cracow. If, however, the queen did not agree, he was ready to yield.

He wrote again to Ozenne about the projects in Sokolko:

We should be completely obedient to the queen in everything. Of course one could be afraid that the transfer of some of our members to Sokolko and other places might separate them from ourselves and might extinguish or at least weaken the spirit of mission especially of those who would live alone. Young plants do not bear fruit in a short time and the wise stewards prune them to free the trunk from their weight. Oh, Fathers, how beautiful it would be if five or six months of recollection and application to the study of the language would bring such blessing for

your small family. However if her majesty wishes that Father Desdames should spend some time at Sokolko and perhaps another priest be with him, then may they go in the name of the Lord.<sup>93</sup>

The queen was not parsimonious with her money but she also had her demands, as one learns from her letter regarding the Daughters of Charity in Warsaw. The primary reason for the letter was to reveal the friction that arose between one of the daughters with the omnipotent almoner of the queen, Madame De Villers. The queen stood completely by the side of her protégé. She also wished that other sisters be sent from France as soon as possible. They were to appoint one of them as the sister-servant and someone was to teach them how to behave themselves, especially in the presence of Madame De Villers:

Dear Father, I ask you and Madame Le Gras to instruct the sister you send as the sister-servant who should arrange all things with Madame De Villers. I have a very urgent request, namely, to see that my expenditures be properly used. Otherwise, I will not be able to continue to support them as I have been doing in the past. I expect that the new sisters whom you send will not ignore the spirit of obedience.

However, all of this should be done in a way that does not change their rules and their direction by the Priests of the Mission. I speak openly because without this I cannot sustain my plan to settle them here. Thus far I cannot find anything I would call reliable conduct.<sup>94</sup>

One could surmise that these last words were dictated with some impatience and antipathy toward Sister Françoise, whose rude and impetuous disposition she could not tolerate. We should not be surprised at the queen, since even the missionaries could not agree with her. This is evident from Vincent's letters in 1658 when

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<sup>93</sup> Letter 1861, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 9 April 1655, *CED*, 5: 357-358.

<sup>94</sup> Letter 1757, Queen Louise-Marie to Saint Vincent, 30 June 1654, *CED*, 162-63.

Ozenne was forced to isolate the superior from other sisters.<sup>95</sup> The priest who succeeded Reverend Desdames even wanted to send her back to France. However, Vincent was of a different mind. He called everyone to avoid harmful publicity and scandal and to consider the dangers, cost of travel and other difficulties which would accompany them. He counseled them to separate her from the others and to keep her busy in a hospital or elsewhere, so as to prevent any contact with Sister Magdalene.<sup>96</sup>

In spite of the means they utilized to remedy the situation, difficulties still remained, so many that half-a-year later Vincent agreed to have Sister Françoise return to France as soon as possible.<sup>97</sup>

Her departure never occurred. Sister Françoise remained in Poland and outlived her first companions by many years. She mastered the Polish language so well that people thought she was born a Pole. As treasurer she rendered many services to the community.<sup>98</sup> Ultimately it was a case of becoming accustomed to new circumstances, before which she tried the patience of her superiors and queen.

If ever the queen had any reservations in regard to the other sisters, time improved the situation greatly. In October 1656, at a conference, Vincent spoke of the queen's benevolence to the sisters. Once more the queen asked to have Sister Margaret near her, and she was entrusted with the care of the poor after the death of Madame De Villers.<sup>99</sup>

At another time Vincent mentioned that the queen, on returning from a long journey, was so pleased with the work of the sisters in that they were attracting other women to join them that with great joy she remained in their home and showed them extraordinary affection.<sup>100</sup>

Vincent then replied to her letter with a few of his own requests. He wished to carry these out as best he could, but it would not be easy for him to find a sister who, in Ozenne's opinion, would be "gentle, very respectful, hard-working, prudent in her speech, pleasant in her behavior and a good housekeeper"<sup>101</sup> because it pleased

<sup>95</sup> Letter 2594, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 24 May 1658, *CED*, 7: 161.

<sup>96</sup> Letter 2748, Saint Vincent to Desdames, 13 December 1658, *CED*, 7: 401.

<sup>97</sup> Letter 2879, Saint Vincent to Desdames, 20 June 1659, *CED*, 7: 613.

<sup>98</sup> "Daughters of Charity in the Province of Warsaw," 88.

<sup>99</sup> Conference 113, 19 October 1659, *CED*, 10: 668.

<sup>100</sup> Conference 118, 3 July 1660, *CED*, 10: 718.

<sup>101</sup> Letter 1810, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 4 December 1654, *CED*, 5: 236.

God to form a small congregation with persons of a lower social class with only an ordinary intellectual capacity.”<sup>102</sup>

After several months Vincent wrote that in the opinion of Madame Le Gras one of the sisters appointed to go to Poland should be of a suitable character to fulfill the requirements.<sup>103</sup> The sisters, however, never arrived because of the outbreak of war with Sweden. Sister Chetif was to be that sister-servant. Her choice witnesses to the care that Vincent and Louise took in naming a person with whom the queen would be satisfied. Five years later, after the death of Louise de Marillac, who with Vincent founded the community, Sister Chetif became the Mother General of the Daughters of Charity. In his effort to satisfy all of the requests of the queen he demonstrated his gratitude mainly through prayer, including her private intentions and those of the kingdom in whose affairs she was so totally absorbed.

In 1650 before the arrival of the missionaries in Poland, and on the occasion of the news from the royal court, Vincent wrote to Reverend Fleury:

We ask God to bless and sanctify the king and queen and that He give them children who would continue the royal blood and who will give Poland kings until the end of time.<sup>104</sup>

The king’s daughter lived barely a year and the prince, born 9 January 1652, died a month later. At the loss of such a son, so desired by the kingdom, Vincent made no attempt to console them for he knew that only God could do that. He could only increase his prayers for them.<sup>105</sup>

Louise-Marie was the ideal queen for Vincent, one of the best in the world.<sup>106</sup> He regarded her life as especially precious for the country and “for the poor members of Jesus Christ.”<sup>107</sup> “Her exemplary good deeds performed for different people revealed to the whole world the goodness of God and the limitless obligations which

<sup>102</sup> Letter 1831, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 28 January 1655, *CED*, 5: 266.

<sup>103</sup> Letter 1861, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 9 April 1655, *CED*, 5: 359.

<sup>104</sup> Letter 1246, Saint Vincent to François de Fleury, 19 August 1650, *CED*, 4: 57.

<sup>105</sup> Letter 1479, Saint Vincent to Lambert, 29 March 1652, *CED*, 4: 349.

<sup>106</sup> Letter 1401, Saint Vincent to Queen Louise-Marie, 6 September 1651, *CED*, 4: 248.

<sup>107</sup> Letter 1584, Saint Vincent to Lambert, 3 January 1653, *CED*, 4: 538.

Poland has to Him who gave her one of the best queens that ever lived on earth."<sup>108</sup>

Time and again Vincent reminded the missionaries of their duty to express gratitude for all the good shown them by the king and queen. He encouraged them to dedicate themselves to greater zeal in working for the glory of God and the salvation of their neighbor. It is precisely this for which they were called.<sup>109</sup> In so many circumstances he saw how the queen was a good mother for them, and he wished that the missionaries be good servants and true missionaries.<sup>110</sup>

He wrote to Ozenne:

If we strenuously express our gratitude and carry out what she asks of us, this would not be enough to repay her for the good deeds whose results you daily encounter.<sup>111</sup> Gratitude so filled my heart that God alone could reveal it. How her highness doubles her generosity to the community. The congregation continues to pray to God to protect the king and bless his army and give him victory over the enemies of his kingdom.<sup>112</sup>

He often said that words failed to express his gratitude for the king and queen.

It is better to stand in awe and be silent at the sight of so many unparalleled and royal examples of kindness than to try to thank them. We ask God to bless their souls and all of their kingdom and I will do this for all the days of my life.<sup>113</sup>

Assurances of prayer for the intention of the king, the queen and their kingdom are repeated in each of Vincent's letters directed to Poland. There were a large number of letters, even from the first months after the departure of the missionaries. Vincent made sure he

<sup>108</sup> Letter 1548, Saint Vincent to Queen Louise-Marie, September 1652, *CED*, 4: 470.

<sup>109</sup> Letter 1705, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 13 February 1654, *CED*, 5: 74.

<sup>110</sup> Letter 1717, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 13 March 1654, *CED*, 5: 98.

<sup>111</sup> Letter 1760, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 10 January 1654, *CED*, 5: 167.

<sup>112</sup> Letter 1803, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 20 November 1654, *CED*, 5: 227.

<sup>113</sup> Letter 1828, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 22 January 1655, *CED*, 5: 263.



received them each week and he would reply on Friday. He continued to write to them even when he did not receive news.<sup>114</sup>

How he longed to hear from them was evident in the words directed to Reverend Lambert in May of 1652: "As Thursday approaches I am a bit impatient to receive their letters, because ordinarily I get them by this day."<sup>115</sup>

In that time there was no regular mail and Vincent profited from the mediation of people whom the queen used to keep in constant contact with France. His frequent and copious correspondence began to be a burden for his mediators. In March of 1655 he informed Ozenne that due to the repeated complaint that his copious missives put a burden on messengers he planned in future to limit his letters and write in smaller print. He asked that the community follow his lead and write only out of necessity, and briefly at that.<sup>116</sup>

In a letter dated 1658 Vincent informed Ozenne that, even though he would prefer to do so, he would not write separately to each. He did not want to increase his mailings as the messengers were complaining.<sup>117</sup> Even with such difficulties he willingly capitalized upon any occasion that would allow him to write at length.<sup>118</sup>

In May of 1659, disturbed by a lack of news, he wrote to Reverend Desdames: "For the last five or six weeks I have not received your letter and it is difficult for me to believe that you have not written to me. Oh well, patience! Perhaps I will get three or four of them together."<sup>119</sup>

He complained that time weighed heavily on him when he received no news.<sup>120</sup> Nevertheless he was happy at the delivery of late word. "Nothing is lost. I received four of your letters together. If I suffered because they were late, I was rewarded for my restlessness with double and triple the consolation."<sup>121</sup>

Vincent not only was interested with matters pertaining to the missionaries, the queen, Reverend Fleury and the benefactors of the

<sup>114</sup> Letter 1463, Saint Vincent to Lambert, 1 March 1652, *CED*, 4: 326.

<sup>115</sup> Letter 1494, Saint Vincent to Lambert, 3 May 1652, *CED*, 4: 376-377.

<sup>116</sup> Letter 1851, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 12 March 1655, *CED*, 5: 338.

<sup>117</sup> Letter 2554, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 16 March 1658, *CED*, 7: 108.

<sup>118</sup> Very warm string of three letters: Letter 2425, Saint Vincent to Desdames, 22 October 1657, *CED*, 6: 551-553; Letter 2426, Saint Vincent to Duperroy, 22 October 1657, *CED*, 6: 553-554; Letter 2427, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 22 October 1657, *CED*, 6: 554-556.

<sup>119</sup> Letter 2834, Saint Vincent to Desdames, 9 May 1659, *CED*, 7: 535.

<sup>120</sup> Letter 3063, Saint Vincent to Desdames, 9 January 1660, *CED*, 8: 218.

<sup>121</sup> Letter 2652, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 30 August 1658, *CED*, 7: 249-251.

community, but also with what was happening in Poland. He was saddened by news of any unjust action against Poland, especially when perpetrated by enemies of the church. Whether it was the rebellion of the Cossacks under Chmielnicki, the invasion of the armies of Moscow or later war with Sweden, Vincent always doubled his prayers and roused his congregation with the conviction that matters of Catholic Poland were closely tied to matters of the Church.

The collected conferences of Vincent to the missionaries in France bear witness to the fact that the difficulties in Poland were discussed frequently. On 13 June 1655 he said: "I encourage you to pray for the kingdom of Poland which is now in serious danger because of so many attacks by its enemies. Fathers, please, insofar as it would be possible, offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass as soon as you can and may our lay brothers offer their Holy Communion for these intentions."<sup>122</sup>

### **Saint Vincent and the Swedish Invasion**

Instead of long desired peace, Poland would face a new war, far more menacing than the previous, namely, war with Sweden. On 24 August Vincent received news of the treason of the Polish magnates and invasion of the Swedish army. The following day he spoke to his community:

You are now aware of the sad state of affairs which befell this poor kingdom. Now we have many more reasons to beg God that He protect the king, the queen and their kingdom. The Muscovites from one side, the Cossacks from the other, and all the Orthodox, Lutherans and schismatics. You know what is coming to that poor kingdom if God himself does not intervene.<sup>123</sup>

Vincent heard of the invasion by the Swedes from religious persons, and for this reason he asked his community:

I wish you would be aware of the sad state of affairs of this poor kingdom. The glory of God and the

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<sup>122</sup> Conference 121, 13 June 1655, *CED*, 11: 189.

<sup>123</sup> Conference 138, 25 August 1655, *CED*, 11: 303-304.

Catholic faith could be scandalized. Truly when I received this news I was very disturbed, and yet I do not know if I have ever been distressed to this extent. At this moment as I speak to you, I feel very bad.<sup>124</sup>

Two days later Vincent wrote to Ozenne:

I received your two letters. You say nothing about the horrible events which distress us immensely. We pray to God and I encourage others to pray that He would turn the storm away from their kingdom, and care for both the king and the queen.<sup>125</sup>

Vincent prayed that they would have peace, "such that only God can give."

Constant concern for the houses of the congregation, even some recently established in Warsaw, meant that he could not stop saying prayers. At the time France had a good relationship with Sweden as both had a common enemy, the Habsburgs. Vincent wrote to Baron d'Avaugour, the French ambassador to Sweden, asking the king for an assurance of safety for the Sisters of the Visitation, the Daughters of Charity and the missionaries, insofar as the need arose. He truly hoped that the Swedes would not go so far as to endanger the sisters and priests. However, anxiety led him to use all available means of protecting his family. He quickly wrote to Rouen to recall Reverend Berthe who had left for Poland the week before with a group of missionaries and sisters.

At the end of the letter to Ozenne he wrote with his own pen: "I never in my life have felt such pain as the news of the situation in Poland and yet never felt with greater trust that the Savior would take care of both the king, the queen and the kingdom."<sup>126</sup>

Within a week he again wrote:

I received your letter and with it the great sense of pain from the news of the disaster for Poland, the king and the queen. I confess that I have not felt this bad before, not only for them but also for the suffering

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Letter 1907, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 27 August 1655, *CED*, 5: 411.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 413.

Church. That is why we pray to God and ask others everywhere to do the same, so that God will care for the kingdom and bless the army and plans of their king. I have a particular trust that He will do so even if Warsaw is occupied. We pray for all of you living there so that nothing evil will come to you.<sup>127</sup>

Vincent counted on the intervention of the French ambassador and the chivalry of Charles Gustavus. Vincent had heard that in the previous war with the Germans, the Swedes did not harm any priests. He foresaw clearly what might happen later. Charles Gustavus unexpectedly advanced very quickly. On 7 August the queen left Warsaw with her court, the Sisters of the Visitation, Daughters of Charity and Reverend Ozenne. Meanwhile, Reverends Guillot, Durand, Simon and Eveillard left for France because the queen did not want them to experience the ravages of war. Desdames and Duperry remained in the parish of the Holy Cross.

Viewing with anxiety the increasing number of casualties, Vincent never lost hope that sooner or later God would bring about the return of peace. He prayed that wherever they were, missionaries would continue to serve God and their neighbor insofar as it was possible. He expected further zeal, courage, and fidelity.<sup>128</sup>

Those who remained in Warsaw acted courageously and faithfully. Ozenne and the Daughters of Charity accompanied the queen and continued to serve her. Vincent's letters brought them spiritual comfort, and they provided medical assistance to the soldiers during the siege of Warsaw and Cracow.

Over the years people became accustomed to seeing the Daughters of Charity working among the wounded and sick. Soon 'sister' applied also to secular nurses. In those times it was truly something extraordinary. If a woman wished to be close to God by following the evangelical counsels she entered a cloistered religious order. Saint Francis de Sales and Saint Joan de Chantal unsuccessfully attempted to break with this custom. From the beginning both of these saints intended to dedicate the Sisters of the Visitation to the active service of the poor and sick. However, they failed to receive the permission of Rome for what they had hoped to do. Things turned out more favorably for Vincent than Francis de Sales when the Daughters

<sup>127</sup> Letter 1912, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 3 September 1655, *CED*, 5: 416-417.

<sup>128</sup> Letter 1924, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 24 September 1655, *CED*, 5: 428.

of Charity were approved as an active society in the church, serving the needs of the poor.

For many years the daughters worked to cure the sick, and also took care of wounded soldiers. It appeared to Vincent to be an extraordinary and wonderful thing. In August 1657, when he heard of the queen's decision to send one of the daughters to help during the siege of Warsaw, Vincent was deeply moved in the course of a conference:

Can you hear of this without a feeling of great joy? Oh! My dear sisters, how happy I was on receiving this news! That our sisters had the courage to work near the army! Oh! My dear sisters, was there anything like this before? Did you ever hear about women going to work in caring for wounded soldiers? I have never seen the like. I do not know if there ever was a community that undertook such a task, which God achieves through you.<sup>129</sup>

The outbreak of war marked the end of a regular exchange of letters. Vincent never stopped writing and continued each week to secure news of that which was so dear to him. Soon disturbing news reached Paris, and at first Vincent put no faith in it because it was so unbelievable.<sup>130</sup> Even the Swedes were amazed at the ease of their successes.

On 8 September 1655 the gates of Warsaw were opened to the Swedes without a shot being fired. In his letters Vincent tried to retain hope for a better future. He gave examples of similar events in France when on the surface it seemed there was no way out, when "for three or four years we saw three armies in the vicinity of Paris, the king overthrown and the entire kingdom in rebellion. Everything then returned to normal, and the king returned never more in control than now."<sup>131</sup>

Vincent would survey maps intently. The maps showed him that Ozenne, in Cracow, was not that far from Vienna. Perhaps it would be an easier route for him to mail the letters. He asked that

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<sup>129</sup> Conference 84, 8 September 1657, *CED*, 10: 326.

<sup>130</sup> Letter 1939, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 8 October 1655, *CED*, 5: 443.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*



"The March of the Swedes for Kiejdan." By Jozef Brant. 1889.  
*Private collection*

they not lose the opportunity.<sup>132</sup> In the middle of October, he wrote to Ozenne:

Three months have passed and I have not received your letters. We hear different rumors which hold us between fear and hope. When I think of the piety of the king and queen and of the prayers which the Church offers to God to protect their kingdom and religion, I cannot doubt that this will happen. No matter what people say, I trust even when hope is lacking that their rightfulness will outweigh the power and unlawfulness of their opponents. This morning I asked the community to renew their prayers and to double their mortification. My God! Dear father, how I will be disturbed until I receive your next letter.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 443-444.

<sup>133</sup> Letter 1942, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 15 October 1655, *CED*, 5: 447.

He encouraged Ozenne to place a greater trust in divine providence, for “the storm will pass and a greater and pleasant peace will follow than ever before.”<sup>134</sup>

Not many of the letters sent to Poland remain today. From October 1655 to March of the following year we have salvaged only one letter, written in December. Much was the same as before. Vincent expressed a constant anxiety and simultaneously hoped for a better future. Vincent asked Ozenne to support the spirit of the Sisters of the Visitation and the Daughters of Charity. He also never forgot to remind Ozenne to take care in performing the ordinary and daily matters. He wrote to Des Noyers, the queen’s secretary, with a request that he send money to Ozenne if there was need and he would repay him.<sup>135</sup>

Vincent, even in this most difficult time, in his weakening hope, could not write the queen. He was convinced that “ordinarily sympathy renews the pain rather than assuages it.”<sup>136</sup> However, when the situation improved, he planned to write the queen to express “his enormous joy that some success had occurred. It certainly belongs among that deeply felt delight which on this earth we can experience.”<sup>137</sup>

Meanwhile, he wrote to the queen, telling her about the prayers, the public devotions and penances offered with great piety by the prelates of Paris, “to beg God.” He also informed the queen of the prayers for the deliverance of the church from the dangers threatening it. “All of this allows one to hope that the Savior will bring back the Church to the holiness of the past and return the kingdom to the king and queen.”<sup>138</sup>

True to himself, Vincent sought material help for Poland. He spoke to several prelates who promised to raise this issue at the general convocation of the French clergy.<sup>139</sup> Vincent reassured the queen that he would “not miss the occasion to serve her.” A few weeks later he wrote Ozenne:

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<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 448.

<sup>135</sup> Letter 1976, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 17 December 1655, *CED*, 5: 486.

<sup>136</sup> Letter 2018, Saint Vincent to Queen Louise-Marie, 3 March 1656, *CED*, 5: 561.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 562.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> Although the issue was examined, Vincent’s initiatives were not successful. In the following year the letter of Queen Louise-Marie influenced the community to consider the matter but it bore no positive result.

Let us not recite only our ordinary prayers but double them for the good of Poland. When the king is fighting his enemies who are also the enemies of God and of the Church, we raise our hands to heaven as Moses did and live in the hope that God will bless the rightfulness of the matters and that with time peace will return.<sup>140</sup>

On another occasion he wrote:

I have great joy on hearing the good news you sent me but it pains me to hear of the evil which the king and queen are enduring. Oh, that God would take these matters into his hands and join in the battle against their enemies for they are also enemies of the Church!<sup>141</sup>

Always willing to help the queen, Vincent assumed the task of mediator in the deliberations on the heir to the throne. At a time when the very existence of Poland as a kingdom was in serious danger, some proposed to offer the crown to a leader of another country in return for help in defeating the invaders. Even Czar Alexander and Rakoczy were considered. They also discussed Henry, the Count de Langueville, a blood relative of the Polish queen, as a possible candidate. In September 1656, Vincent wrote to Reverend Aubert, the almoner of the Count, promising to work with Madame des Essarts, the queen's broker on this matter, to determine whether all of this was but a passing thought or part of a well-planned concrete proposal.<sup>142</sup> It proved to be only a casual proposal. Yet Vincent did not lose hope, saying that if "God allowed it, it might be realized because with God there is nothing casual." Convinced, he desired to contact Aubert with Madame des Essarts.<sup>143</sup>

Vincent zealously continued to pursue the issue, but with no success. In April 1657 he shared the following in a letter to Aubert: "The

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<sup>140</sup> Letter 2029, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 17 March 1656, *CED*, and also in St. Vincent, 5: 571.

<sup>141</sup> Letter 2043, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 6 April 1656, *CED*, 5: 588.

<sup>142</sup> Letter 2139, Saint Vincent to Aubert, 17 September 1656, *CED*, 6: 82.

<sup>143</sup> Letter 2141, Saint Vincent to Aubert, 20 September 1656, *CED*, 6: 85-86.



news coming from Poland is not very auspicious. The matter of which we spoke was not successful and will no longer be undertaken."<sup>144</sup>

The failure of the project did not prevent Vincent, through the mediation of Aubert, contacting Count de Langueville to ask for help for Poland:

The king lacks strength and money unless he gets some help. As I write my heart is filled with pain at the sight of the Church in such grave danger in a kingdom twice the size of France. It would be a great gesture of a truly Christian gentleman who is a relative of the queen, a woman in distress. He might be willing to lend a hand to those in adversity. I have learned that 30,000 livres would help them in enlisting more officers which they terribly need. I have never seen a more generous and noble person in the world as I see in the one whose help is so useful and suitable.<sup>145</sup>

### **The Period of the Battle for Warsaw**

The gaps in Vincent's letters prevent a close following of contact with the mediators of the missionaries who remained in Warsaw after the outbreak of the war with Sweden. Correspondence with the mediators was very difficult after the capture of the capital by the Swedes at the beginning of September 1655. The occupation gave inhabitants a painful taste of what was to happen when Benedict Oxenstierna, the governor of Warsaw, Mazowsze and Wielkopolski, along with King Charles Gustavus, tried to win over the people with an appearance of benignity. It did not matter to them that the castle, the residences of the magnates and the most wealthy homes in the city, as well as churches and monasteries were plundered.

The connection of the city to the suburbs was under strict control, and hunger broke out along with an epidemic of diseases. This tragic plague decreased with the onset of winter. In April 1656, the Polish army entered the outskirts of Warsaw. Charles Gustavus assigned Wittenberg, who had earlier been appointed as governor

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<sup>144</sup> Letter 2244, Saint Vincent to Aubert, 7 April 1657, *CED*, 6: 275.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 276.

of Cracow, to defend the city. This was the tyrant, infamous for his cruelty and rapine. In May the Polish army began the siege of Warsaw. Hunger reigned in the city, devastating not only the populace but also the Swedish garrison.

Meanwhile, the deputies of the czar, Baron Lisola and Count Pottingen, resided in the quarters of Old Warsaw. They escaped from the city and sought refuge with the Polish army outside of Warsaw. They fled because they could not stand the cries of the dying and the repulsive smell of buried corpses and carrion.<sup>146</sup>

The epidemic did not spare the missionaries. Vincent was distressed by their suffering, especially that of Reverend Desdames. On 7 July Vincent informed them that the community, all of whom were alarmed by the spread of disease, would not cease calling on the Lord until it was certain the danger had passed. Meanwhile, "he was not able to express his gratitude and joy at the news of the success of the Polish army" for which he endlessly thanked God.<sup>147</sup>

His primary concern was to carry out the wishes of the king and queen. Realist that he was, he recognized that with blood and bones anything was possible.

The obligations to the king and queen weighed so heavily on my heart that I would want to be some kind of powerful king to help them. Certainly there is no way that I could possibly repay them or, as being but a good priest, I could ever earn their gratitude.<sup>148</sup>

These public affairs were intimately connected to Vincent's anxiety about his family, the missionaries in Poland. However, he beamed with joy when he learned that Reverend Desdames' health had improved. He wrote Reverend Duperroy in July 1656:

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<sup>146</sup> J. Wegner, *Warszawa w Latach Potopu Szwedzkiego, 1655-1657* (Warsaw in the Years of the Swedish Flood) [Wrocław, 1957], 78.

<sup>147</sup> Letter 2092, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 7 July 1656, *CED*, 6: 4.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

With great affection we thanked God for two graces, his goodness for things in general and then specifically, when at last we saw that God would not sadden the congregation with the loss of such a good worker.<sup>149</sup>

Vincent shared his feelings of compassion with both priests because they were exposed to external dangers while at the same time fighting deadly attacks of disease. He had not heard what was happening in the siege of Warsaw and wanted to reassure them:

We fear what is happening to you as we wait with longing and patience for the latest news. O Savior, would that there may be good news which would soon reunite our dispersed family. We are in accord with your will, so that with renewed strength we can serve God and the public according to our first plans.<sup>150</sup>

As of 28 July he was still awaiting news about the fall of Warsaw.<sup>151</sup> It had toppled four months earlier only to be recaptured by the Poles, before the Swedes took it once more. Outside Warsaw the battle lasted three days and ended with a rather strange and inexplicable retreat by the Poles. The Swedish army could not call it their victory.

The queen, who wished to be informed about everything that had to do with Warsaw, spoke out excitedly: "If the king with his army is thinking of abandoning the capital, I will defend it with my maids of honor."<sup>152</sup>

Meanwhile, it might have been better for her to have fled quickly to a safe place. For a long time the queen could not calm down and on 11 August, from Lancut, she wrote to her dear friend, Madame de Choisy:

There is nothing more strange than what happened outside of Warsaw. I would never have believed it even if I saw it. I left Warsaw with such anger that

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<sup>149</sup> Letter 2107, Saint Vincent to Duperry, 21 July 1656, *CED*, 6: 36.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>151</sup> Letter 2113, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 28 July 1656, *CED*, 6: 49.

<sup>152</sup> Wegner, *Warszawa*, 112.

I could not possibly explain it. Three times the king of Sweden was almost in the hands of the Poles and instead of destroying him completely they gave him time to refurbish his forces.<sup>153</sup>

At first, Vincent could not believe the rumors. In the middle of September, six weeks after the humiliating loss, he had not yet received any news of these happenings. The last letter he had from Poland was in June. Distressed by news that seemed to be true but realizing that it also could be hearsay, Vincent admitted that he did not know what to say or think but trusted that whatever happened God would eventually restore Poland when He judged it proper. He reassured them of many prayers for this intention and added: "I do not see one good Catholic who would not do the same as all of us and must be saddened by the tragedy of that kingdom."<sup>154</sup>

In a September conference he told the community that he was convinced that it was their sins which hindered God's granting the fervent prayers of so many.

Oh, Father! My brothers! How deeply ashamed must we be that our sins hindered the good purposes of our prayers. Let us be overwhelmed with sorrow for this great kingdom is about to fall, if our news is true. If the king is defeated, the church will then cease to exist in that country because religion can only survive with the support of the king. The Church in that kingdom will then be in the hands of the enemy. The disaster that is before our eyes is deplorable. Six kingdoms are already lost to the Church, namely, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, England, Scotland and Ireland. Beside these, so too, are a part of the Netherlands which is part of Germany and many Hanseatic cities. O God! What a loss! After this, before us we see the loss of a great kingdom. Only God in his mercy can save us from that. It is true that the Son of God promised to be with

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<sup>153</sup> L. Grangier de la Maziniere, *Zdobycie Warszawy przez Szwedow r. 1656, opisane w Listach Krolowej Polski Ludwiki Marii* (The Capture of Warsaw by the Swedes in 1656, Described from the letters of the Queen of Poland Louise-Marie) trans. Przedziecki, for *Biblioteka Warszawska* (The Warsaw Library), vol. 3: 205-206.

<sup>154</sup> Letter 2137, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 15 September 1656, *CED*, 6: 80.

his Church to the end of the world, but he did not promise that this church will be in France, or in Italy or the other lands.<sup>155</sup>

In a letter of Vincent to Ozenne, dated 29 August we read: "Just think how we are distressed not knowing anything about you or Fathers Desdames and Duperroy. We only heard the bad news that describes what is happening in Warsaw and in Poland in general."<sup>156</sup> The loss of Warsaw was heart rending. In the so-called "conquered capital city" the Swedes sought revenge with cruelty, maltreatment and pillaging.

The secretary of the queen, Pierre des Noyers, wrote from Lancut:

The Swedes looted Warsaw and loaded six or seven large ships with the best of the plunder. Then they claimed that this will be used to pay the soldiers for the hard work they did in burning all the suburbs and churches to the ground.<sup>157</sup>

The missionaries erroneously believed that as Frenchmen they could count on certain considerations to save their church. They were brutally shaken from their illusion. Reverend Duperroy resisted and paid the price with a severe beating, such that the Swedes "left him

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<sup>155</sup> Conference 154, September 1656, *CED*, 11: 352-353.

<sup>156</sup> Letter 2149, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 29 September 1656, *CED*, 6: 96.

<sup>157</sup> Portfolio, vol. 2: 72.

apparently dead. If Father Desdames had not intervened, he probably would not have survived.”<sup>158</sup>

When Vincent was convinced that the hard-to-believe rumors unfortunately were true, his thoughts and prayers centered on the missionaries in Poland and he tried to raise their spirits: “Something dreadful is always with me, yet I cannot hide it from you. I know that our brothers are in great danger. Who would not be saddened by this?” At the same time he tried to cheer them, reminding:

After the storm comes the beautiful day, God allows death but also brings life. God brings joy after suffering. His power does not disappoint those who trusted his goodness. The success of evil men ends in shame. The misfortunes of good are changed into glory. If his highness, as king of Poland, shared in the sufferings of Our Lord, so will He grant him the power finally to rule in peace after so many convulsive events. We constantly ask God for the grace that He would protect them.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Pierre des Noyers, *Lettres de secretaire de la rein de Pologne Louise-Marie de Gonzague, princesse de Mantoue et de Nevers, pour servir a histoire de Pologne et de Suede de 1655 a 1659* (Berlin, 1859), 230. The contemporary translation has been repeated many times in various writings, but in context there is only one meaning I find hard not to accept as original. The text reads: “The Swedes became impatient with the objections of the above mentioned priest, M. du Paroy (Duperroy), who was so badly beaten that they left him for dead and without any help from *M. des Dames*, who perhaps had not come back.”

The French phrase *M. des Dames* has been translated differently. Here are several examples: Raczynski, in his translation of *Portfolio*, vol. 2: 72, refers to “the care of *plci pieknej*.” Wegner, *Warszawa*, 119, agrees with Raczynski. Wdowicki, *Historia*, 67, prefers *poczciwymi niewiastami* (some good hearted women) to *plci pieknej* (the beautiful sex). Kamocki and Perboyre’s *Memoires*, vol. 1: 35, translate *M. des Dames* as “a large number of women from the neighborhood who came to take care of him.”

Even Coste, in his footnotes to *Le Grande Saint du grand siecle*, vol. 2: 214, repeats the same translation: “He owed his life, as they say, to merciful women from the neighborhood who came immediately after his assailants left, to help him.”

[Translator’s note: our author, Maria Swiatecka, in her translation of the phrase *M. des Dames*, says the context clearly indicates that we should join the words together. Thereby, we identify Monsieur Desdames, a priest of the congregation who helped Duperroy, his confrere. This footnote illustrates that those who work with original texts need to know the context of what is written, the people and history involved, and those around them.]

<sup>159</sup> Letter 2166, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 10 November 1656, *CED*, 6: 123.

The second Swedish occupation of Warsaw lasted only one month and devastated the rest of the city. Even the parquet floors of the royal palace were ripped out and taken. In capturing the capital city of the kingdom, they realized that it did not involve a successful series of military maneuvers, and so there was nothing to boast about. Charles Gustavus then ordered his armies to retreat into Prussia. Meanwhile, as the Swedes could not carry away the heavy weight of their spoils, they loaded them on ships. However, the low level of the water on the Vistula river forced them to leave their plunder. They scuttled the lot.

On 3 November 1656, King John Casimir negotiated a treaty with Moscovites, who in turn attacked the Swedes in Inflant. At the beginning of December Charles Gustavus joined George II Rakoczy in a pact against Poland. In January 1657 the general rushed into Poland with an army of 40,000 men and was in Cracow by 28 February. At the time John Casimir secured military help from Austria with help from Ferdinand III, ratified by his successor, Leopold.

Vincent was gratified with the good news and encouraged the missionaries to profit from all these events in accord to God's will to "maintain internal peace in spite of adversity."<sup>160</sup>

Vincent's blessed memory of these events was necessary, as beside the usual dangers of war he had to face unproved objections and aspersions. We learn from a letter he wrote in April that he hoped that "the bishop of Poznan would not punish Desdames before he heard him out. If it should prove otherwise, God in mercy will protect him so that he would be cleared of these calumnies and injustices the people heard."<sup>161</sup>

However, the problems of the missionaries which upset him deeply were not tragedies. He wrote to Ozenne:

The greatest anguish I ever had is that we suffer now from the present state of affairs. Judge for yourself with how much love I beg God in his goodness to help and strengthen that kingdom, our religion and the persons of the king and queen in this strange persecution. But in the end I hoped that God's majesty

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<sup>160</sup> Letter 2192, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 19 January 1657, *CED*, 162-63; Letter 2210, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 16 February 1657, *CED*, 186.

<sup>161</sup> Letter 2245, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 13 April 1657, *CED*, 6: 277-278.

would prevail because truth is wholly on their side, as well as on the side of the affairs of the Church. It is important to ask God, with community prayers without interruption, not only for these matters but many others.<sup>162</sup>

Vincent's letters, sent to Poland at the time, are full of misgivings. In May when he received information (which really was false) of the occupation of Warsaw by the Swedes, he wrote Reverend Desdames:

My God! How sorry I am to know nothing of the circumstances you find yourselves in. The kind information I receive about your circumstances saddens us all the more when it deals with matters of the Church and of his majesty. We must redouble our prayers that the Lord will improve things and continue to care for all of you everywhere and in all circumstances.<sup>163</sup>

Duperroy was very ill and went to Opole where the queen and Ozenne were staying. The community even thought of sending him to France to be cured. Vincent would have none of it. He feared that difficulties encountered in traveling would worsen his condition. Vincent would have been happy to see his courageous confrere after so many years of absence, but he did not dare invite him to come because the state of his health demanded the utmost care. He told them to consult the queen and Reverend Ozenne on this matter.<sup>164</sup>

Desdames remained alone in Warsaw with only limited help from a local priest. Vincent, who up to this time kept in contact with the missionaries primarily through Ozenne, now began to write each of them separately. Desdames received more words of sympathy. All of them were astonished at his extraordinary perseverance:

There is not a person who would not be edified by your actions. You can imagine for yourself the fervor with which we thank the Lord for this grace, and how

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<sup>162</sup> Letter 2249, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 20 April 1657, *CED*, 6: 281-282.

<sup>163</sup> Letter 2265, Saint Vincent to Desdames, 11 May 1657, *CED*, 6: 297-298.

<sup>164</sup> Letter 2276, Saint Vincent to Duperroy, 1 June 1657, *CED*, 6: 311.



we have the deepest feeling of affection and respect for you as we recognize your patience and fidelity. But, on the other hand, God knows how distressed we are to see your suffering in body and soul in your duties in the parishes in the midst of such fears, anxiety, persecutions, insults, and poverty, all which surround you. They pierce my heart with such pain every time they tell me of the dangers in which you find yourself. The love of God and zeal of a pastor teach you to bear it all with courage and constancy.

Oh, that God in his infinite goodness would bring the glory, power and the trust which He would bestow on you as he leads you from virtue to virtue. In this way you would reach that stage of perfection to which he calls you. I also pray that He would bring peace to the poor and suffering in Poland and restore the pristine strength needed by the suffering Church. These are our petitions we bring to God. We shall continue to beg God's help for as long as it takes to have these matters change for the better.<sup>165</sup>

Vincent also remembered the usual and daily needs of the priests:

In the name of our Lord, I ask you to take care such that you do not lack those things necessary for your health. You must raise some money and then find a merchant to sell you these things. Perhaps you might meet a Frenchman who would agree to get them for you on his return from France. However, if you do not have these opportunities then you should turn to Father Ozenne who could easily find ways to get them.<sup>166</sup>

I need not tell you how all that you do or suffer lifts the spirits of the missionaries in their battles. There

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<sup>165</sup> Letter 2278, Saint Vincent to Desdames, 8 June 1657, *CED*, 6: 313-314.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

are many such priests who ask to be sent to foreign lands.<sup>167</sup>

Vincent wrote to Duperroy, asking him about his health: "My God! Father, how do you feel? Does the diet help you? Have the wounds healed? Are you strong enough to walk? O how I ask God from the bottom of my heart that your health returns."<sup>168</sup>

Meanwhile, he reassured Ozenne:

We have not stopped praying for the king, the queen and their army, and also for the Church. We pray for a successful conclusion in these matters, because the affairs of the Church are closely linked with those of the kingdom.<sup>169</sup>

The diocesan clergy and monasteries were of the same persuasion, evidenced by their conduct during the siege of Warsaw by the army of Prince Rakoczy. At the market square and on the streets they called on people to offer their acts of penance. They urged the people to confront the heretics. The faithful reacted by filling the confessionals of the city.<sup>170</sup>

Rakoczy erred when he presumed that he would receive a triumphal entry into the city without a further battle. This time Warsaw decided to fight, but the opposition was quickly crushed. The city fell in three days. Hunger, and help from the Swedish army, helped Rakoczy. However, the new occupation did not last long. Rakoczy faced threats from his own realm, and was hurt by the sudden withdrawal of the Swedes. He abandoned the city after a few days. Meanwhile, Warsaw came face to face with the dreadful sight of what was left:

Manure carried for weeks by wagons, driven by horses and oxen, with ten to fifteen workers spreading it over the ground as in the city and suburbs a mountain of corpses lay on the ground.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Letter 2288, Saint Vincent to Desdames, 21 June 1657, *CED*, 6: 325.

<sup>168</sup> Letter 2297, Saint Vincent to Duperroy, 6 July 1657, *CED*, 6: 339.

<sup>169</sup> Letter 2298, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 6 July 1657, *CED*, 6: 342.

<sup>170</sup> Wegner, *Warszawa*, 132-133.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 145-146.

The devastation did not spare the residences of the missionaries. In a letter to Ozenne, Vincent related the details he received from Desdames:

By God's grace I am alive. All that I had was my cassock and coat. All the rest was stolen by the Swedes. May God be praised that nothing worse met me and that, when they arrived, those tigers did not find me at the parish of Holy Cross. Just think of what happened in the suburbs where the barbarians killed or wounded so many and maltreated the rest. I alone was able to flee. I consider this a special gift of God's care for me, thanks to the prayers of Father Superior and the whole congregation.

The Swedes killed the pastor in Skula, burned the church, our home, barn and five homes of the village. In Warsaw our home, garden and barn are in ruins. I cannot rebuild them since I am now poor. After the departure of these devils, all I have left is 17 or 18 livres. For 14 or 15 livres I bought some clothing, since I had but the shirt on my back. I wrote a letter to Father Fleury with a request for help because it is not possible to borrow money as each has an excuse that he has his own needs, and the numbers of those who beg or wish to borrow outnumber those who will help. I also need a surplice since I have none. I would like to celebrate Mass in some church but I do not have a consecrated chalice. To borrow one is very difficult since each church has barely enough to do what is necessary. The altar is in a terrible state, the tabernacle ripped open, the painting over the main altar stolen and the frame standing alone. The devastation is so great, ravaged by the barbarians. The new section of the city was burned with the church and monastery of the Bernadines, the beautiful palace of the Ossolinski family, besides so much else that it would take too much time to describe.<sup>172</sup>

<sup>172</sup> Kamocki and Perboyre, *Memoirs*, vol. 1: 21-19; also Wdowicki, *Historia*, 71-73.

In spite of all these disasters, Desdames did not lose heart but rather took to fulfilling his duties in the parish, rejoicing with the hope that things would be better in the future. The queen, who was fully informed, publicly praised Desdames in a letter to Vincent, who in turn informed all the missionaries:

Father Desdames has lost everything in Warsaw. The perseverance of this missionary is awesome since he did not choose to leave his post in spite of war, disease, poverty or anything else, even when he was attacked and the queen urged him to depart.<sup>173</sup>

### **After the Retreat of the Swedish Army**

After the last occupation Warsaw, and all of Poland, could finally let out a deep sigh of relief. However, in reality, moved from the core of Poland the war continued on. With the change in circumstances, Vincent's letters took on a different tone. He was happy to see a better turn of events that encouraged people to agree and obey with the king.<sup>174</sup> Vincent wrote about how the Poles regained Cracow. Then came the solemn entrance of the king and queen into the city. He attributed the wisdom of the king and the devotion of the queen in handling the affairs and ensuring they ended well.<sup>175</sup>

The heavy burden on the missionaries ended. Duperroy was in good health, and all three hoped they would be able to work together. Vincent told them to have Desdames join them, having been isolated from them for so long.

Oh, what good news! I am deeply moved. But I would be very happy if I knew that you are pleased to be with them, enjoying such peace after the long, painful and perplexing events which separated all of

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<sup>173</sup> Letter 2355, Saint Vincent to Firmin Get, 31 August 1657, *CED*, 6: 427; Letter 2358, Saint Vincent to Blatiron, 31 August 1657, *CED*, 6: 433; Letter 2371, Saint Vincent to Pierre de Beaumont, 9 September 1657, *CED*, 6: 451; Letter 2372, Saint Vincent to Edme Menestrier, 9 September 1657, *CED*, 6: 453; Letter 2382, Saint Vincent to Louis Rivet, 16 September 1657, *CED*, 6: 475; Letter 2388, Saint Vincent to Louis Serre, 22 September 1657, *CED*, 6: 484.

<sup>174</sup> Letter 2368, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 7 September 1657, *CED*, 6: 445.

<sup>175</sup> Letter 2418, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 19 October 1657, *CED*, 6: 540.

you. May God grant all of you the necessary grace to work together and give all of you the strength of body and soul, indispensable in fulfilling God's will. I have no doubt that the perseverance which you displayed in the midst of so many dangers will be the foundation on which the congregation in Poland will ground itself. The good service which you rendered in so many experiences will rain blessings on the congregation and its plans. You have edified us all with your patience and demeanor. I always think of you with heartfelt affection and gratitude to God for His gifts.<sup>176</sup>

That very day he told Reverend Duperroy that he and the community would fulfill the promises of the community to pray for him. Vincent was concerned about his health and urged him to do everything necessary for its improvement.

I also asked Father Ozenne to spare nothing in helping you return to good health. I expect that God will not refuse us this grace because it deals with service to Him. It seems that now more than ever before we can plan to give missionaries the desired opportunity to work in Poland.<sup>177</sup>

Vincent hoped that his letters would reach all of the missionaries in Warsaw:

If I were certain of that, then it would give me unequalled joy. This hope pleases me very much. God usually works this way: he divides and then unites, he leaves and then returns, so that nothing is left permanently the same in life and no one remains always in the same state. Blessed be the name of the Lord, the storm has passed and peace has returned. If all three of you are together, joined in heart, then God will be praised in you and through you. The

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<sup>176</sup> Letter 2425, Saint Vincent to Desdames, 22 October 1657, *CED*, 6: 552.

<sup>177</sup> Letter 2426, Saint Vincent to Duperroy, 22 October 1657, *CED*, 6: 554.

result will be relief and consolation. It is possible that the long awaited hour has come in which you begin to work as true missionaries in the spirit of your vocation.<sup>178</sup>

It was now necessary to begin putting things in order with good planning. The invaders left nothing. Vincent knew of the losses but wanted to proceed with care since it would not be proper for the missionaries to be seen as totally free of the afflictions others were suffering. He trusted that "God, who allowed these things to happen, will reveal his goodness and come to terms with the losses in the proper time, if it be his will."<sup>179</sup> This trust was easier because God was the infallible patron watching over the congregation. Swiftly the thought came to Vincent: "Oh, how good is the queen in that she sends such gifts for your church, on seeing it totally in ruins! Our Savior, whom she worships in all things, will not disregard this generosity without a reward."<sup>180</sup>

The missionaries had to start all over from the beginning. As there were only three of them, and one of them was ill, they needed much strength for the work. Where would they look for help, if not from Vincent? Ozenne wanted the young priests to return. They were sent back to France at the very beginning of the war. They knew something of the language and condition of the place. However, things were not so straightforward. Vincent had sent his best priests to Poland, and on their return to France appointed them to such responsible positions that it was very difficult in the present circumstances to find replacements for them. Therefore, although planning to send five or six young men who were finishing their courses in theology and could learn the language, and giving them the chance to get acquainted with the customs of the new country, he had to refuse the petition.<sup>181</sup>

He further reassured Ozenne: "We shall ask God for the grace to obey God's will for the missionaries in that kingdom. We continue to pray that He would instill in them the same spirit. I thank God that matters are going well."<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 6: 553-54.

<sup>179</sup> Letter 2479, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 7 December 1657, *CED*, 7: 5.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>181</sup> Letter 2493, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 21 December 1657, *CED*, 7: 23.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*

If one reads the letters of those days, it is difficult to believe that just years earlier Vincent severely reminded the missionaries in Warsaw to be faithful to a strict observance of the customs of the congregation. After the terrible experience of war the missionaries deserved some recognition for their good behavior, especially Desdames who spent the most difficult days of the war in Warsaw. Vincent was careful to make his point:

Because it pleased God to manifest his power in you and through you, so that you remained steadfast in so much confusion, surmounted by so many adversities, my soul is filled with a feeling of tenderness and esteem for you, and gratitude to God so that I cannot think of Him without remembering and offering you to God. I thank him often for giving you those graces and giving the community such an example of constancy in times of turbulence.

I also ask God to strengthen you with his power that the stability you have shown may serve as the corner stone of the congregation in Poland. May it prove permanently and powerfully erected there, as unmoved as a mountain, in the service of God whom you serve with such courage and willingness. Warsaw has not yet received the peace that was assured, nor have the missionaries come to the end of their suffering. We must trust that Our Lord would care for them in his providence, just as he instituted and expanded the Church amid persecutions and so also will build their small home in the midst of storms.<sup>183</sup>

Even in the most difficult times Vincent found the time to reassure Desdames of his heartfelt esteem and fond memories:

Although your letter is of a later date, marked May 1658, and although I am very busy today, I cannot

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<sup>183</sup> Letter 2524, Saint Vincent to Desdames, 1 February 1658, *CED*, 7: 67.

keep myself from telling you that I received it and that you are very dear to me. You are in good health, and once again reunited with our family. It seems to me that everyone there is moved by your example. They are ready to suffer anything for God and to serve him with the same endurance you have shown him for such a long time.<sup>184</sup>

He likewise wrote Ozenne:

I often present the congregation the example of your total dependence on God, your patience in adversity, and your steadiness amidst a multitude of distressing events. I never think of you or them [*Desdames and Duperroy*] with other than a deep feeling of joy, which exceeds everything else in my soul.<sup>185</sup>

This joy did not last long. On 14 August 1658, Reverend Ozenne died at the age of 45 of a five day fever. Vincent was deeply moved by this loss but quietly accepted the will of God. He firmly believed that “this dear priest who passed away is very happy, being freed from the mortal body which gives us so many afflictions. Now he dwells in the house of his Lord, as our faith believes.”<sup>186</sup>

Vincent consoled those who remained by saying that with God’s help, Ozenne’s help from heaven would be even more fruitful than when he lived with us. In letters to the superiors of the houses of the congregation he wrote:

He always avoided evil and did what was right with great diligence and benefit. He was sincere, meek and exemplary. God himself is now his reward. He left all of us who knew him with a deep sorrow. We lost a great deal with his death, that is, if we can call a loss that which God gains.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Letter 2592, Saint Vincent to Desdames, 24 May 1658, *CED*, 7: 158-159.

<sup>185</sup> Letter 2554, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 16 March 1658, *CED*, 7: 108.

<sup>186</sup> Letter 2660, Saint Vincent to Desdames, 13 September 1658, *CED*, 7: 260.

<sup>187</sup> Letter 2664, Saint Vincent to Firmin Get, 20 September 1658, *CED*, 7: 266; Letter 2665, Saint Vincent to Jean Martin, 20 September 1658, *CED*, 7: 268; Letter 2666, Saint Vincent to Edme Jolly, 20 September 1658, *CED*, 7: 270; Letter 2675, Saint Vincent to Pierre Cabel, 2 October 1658, *CED*, 7: 282-283.



Several months later Reverend Fleury, the zealous protector of the house in Warsaw, died. Vincent, with great sorrow, wrote of him, "not only the queen but also the entire congregation lost its guardian and benefactor."<sup>188</sup>

Strengthening the house in Warsaw with new people became an urgent matter. At the same time plans for founding the community in Cracow seemed to be approaching realization, thanks to the efforts of Mr. Chwalibowski.<sup>189</sup>

To the day he died, Vincent was involved in seeking help from this benefactor and Reverend Desdames, whom he appointed as superior after the death of Ozenne.<sup>190</sup>

Vincent thought it better if this help could be organized so that there would be an opportunity to seek and train several young Poles in the seminary.<sup>191</sup> For this plan to work he had to consider how to increase the number of vocations in France. He was waiting for news from Poland as the war had not ended yet. Desdames was eager to return to giving parish missions, which he loved to preach, but he did not have the personnel to do so. Vincent had to restrain Desdames' zeal and counseled patience:

The inclination which God grants you to direct missions tells me that it will serve you well to lay the two cornerstones of a foundation of good work in Poland. Divine providence will aid you in teaching and correcting the people, and inspiring other workers of the land to join with you. You will eventually achieve all the goals of the congregation. But we must wait peacefully and seek the will of God. You press me now to send you people, especially brothers. My heart urges me all the more to help you. Be assured that with God's help we will do this, but I am afraid to send anyone from here before peace and a healthy situation have been established. Oh that God will give us the one and the other. We will see what happens with the coming of Spring.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Letter 2748, Saint Vincent to Desdames, 13 December 1658, *CED*, 7: 400.

<sup>189</sup> Wdowicki, *Historia*, believes this to be the correct spelling of *Chwalibowski*. However, in the original letter of Saint Vincent it was spelled *Falibowski*.

<sup>190</sup> Letter 2660, Saint Vincent to Desdames, 13 September 1658, *CED*, 7: 261.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>192</sup> Letter 2789, Saint Vincent to Desdames, 21 February 1659, *CED*, 7: 458-459.

Vincent remembered the disasters involving the missionaries in Warsaw. He wanted to reassure the priests he would send that they would have means of support and their freedoms to accomplish what they were sent to do.

He tried to pacify them:

I admit that idleness is often the cornerstone of dishonor, and that missionaries have to avoid this more as they were created to work. On the other hand, their happiness does not rest on confronting difficulty but on always seeking God's will. Our Lord works variously, sometimes working, at other times not working, or acting and then not acting.<sup>193</sup>

The spirit of the world is restless and wants everything at once. Leave it aside. We do not wish to choose our path. We would rather go where it pleases God to send us. We are as fruit trees. The oppressive and long winter limits them and restrains them from producing anything, but as a consequence their roots are deeper. However, later they bring forth much fruit.<sup>194</sup>

At the time the community was thinking of enlarging the house in Warsaw, a direction beloved by Vincent. Even before the war, the queen offered the missionaries a wealthy benefice, Wiskitki. She wanted it to become a seminary and a retreat-center for religious to attend the conferences without fees.

Vincent called out: "Oh, Father! How close is this wish with the will of God! I expect that if this is what God wants and blesses, a lot of good will come to Poland."<sup>195</sup> On this occasion Vincent renewed his promise to send missionaries and Daughters of Charity to Poland. He graciously thanked the queen for this work.

Soon Vincent appointed two young missionaries to work in Poland, one of them a priest. On 22 August he wrote: "The young man of whom I spoke is pious, wise, honest and loved by everyone.

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<sup>193</sup> Letter 2810, Saint Vincent to Desdames, 11 April 1659, *CED*, 7: 488-489.

<sup>194</sup> Letter 2879, Saint Vincent to Desdames, 20 June 1659, *CED*, 7: 612.

<sup>195</sup> Letter 2940, Saint Vincent to Desdames, 15 August 1659, *CED*, 8: 78.

We have never seen an imperfection in him. Many of our houses are asking for him. His name is Marthe."<sup>196</sup> He similarly praised Reverend Francis Monvoisin.<sup>197</sup>

Several problems arose and they could not leave that year. In January Vincent spoke of these young priests, educated in philosophy and theology, sent to the College of Good Children, the better to prepare for their mission in Poland.<sup>198</sup>

In May Vincent was waiting for the queen's decision on their arrival date. She was to send them the help she promised. The queen, however, was absorbed with preparations for a peace treaty with Sweden. After signing the document in Oliwa on 3 May she focused on the missionaries.

Upon receiving a letter from Desdames, Vincent wrote on 23 July 1660: "I see the time has come to send you the help I promised. It is my burning desire that it will be a relief for you. God himself knows how keeping you happy and healthy is important to me."<sup>199</sup> Vincent was planning to send two or three priests and a cleric who had studied philosophy. However, upon the death of Madam Le Gras he had a problem choosing Daughters of Charity for the mission in Poland.<sup>200</sup>

On 3 December Vincent wrote that the priests and sisters were waiting for a good boat to sail to Danzig.<sup>201</sup> On 17 September they left Paris for Rouen, and from there Poland. Reverend Labriere, two clerics, Get and de Marthe, and one brother, together with three Daughters of Charity sailed for Poland.

On that same day Sister Moreau died in Warsaw of an infection. She was about to be sent back to France to replace Sister Barbara Bailly, who took care of Saint Louise de Marillac during her last illness. No one was better prepared than Sister Moreau to maintain the spirit of the congregation in the young family in Warsaw. Before her death just ten days later, Vincent managed to send the help he had promised.

Vincent waited a long time for the war to end in Poland. He wanted to help the missionaries wrestling with the difficulties in Warsaw. He sympathized with them and proved that he was

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>198</sup> Letter 3072, Saint Vincent to Desdames, 30 January 1660, *CED*, 8: 231.

<sup>199</sup> Letter 3161, Saint Vincent to Desdames, 23 July 1660, *CED*, 8: 326-327.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>201</sup> Letter 3254, Saint Vincent to Desdames, 3 September 1660, *CED*, 8: 423.

interested in what was happening in Poland, especially during the war with Sweden. He wrote Ozenne after Rakoczy's rout:

Thanks be to God that he rendered to the king the justice that was due him in the war with Sweden. We can hope that the same will come to all the rest whom the king will frustrate. I ask God to give his army victory near Riga, and wherever the king decides to act, so that God would protect the king and queen and finally crown him with success in all his decisions.<sup>202</sup>

One of the purposes of Vincent's letters was to reassure people of his prayers for them. Here are a few excerpts:

We ask God that among all the people, he bless the army of the king, bless those who were anointed and through them bless their kingdom.<sup>203</sup>

I praise God for the good news you sent me. I pray, and urge my congregation to pray, that God in his goodness changes the situation from good to better.<sup>204</sup> I thank him that they are now speaking of peace. May God in his goodness grant much needed relief for the king and queen and for his kingdom.<sup>205</sup>

When the king prepares for war with his enemies, we can raise our hands to heaven with the wish that he be victorious because of the power and strength of the Lord of Hosts. We also ask God for joyous peace as they plan to end the war. May God's goodness restore all things to their former state. These are the graces for which we most often and most powerfully beg God, and to the end we will continue to pray for the protection and blessing of the royal highnesses.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Letter 2525, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 1 February 1658, *CED*, 7: 68.

<sup>203</sup> Letter 2530, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 8 February 1658, *CED*, 7: 74.

<sup>204</sup> Letter 2541, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 1 March 1658, *CED*, 7: 91.

<sup>205</sup> Letter 2554, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 16 March 1658, *CED*, 7: 108.

<sup>206</sup> Letter 2579, Saint Vincent to Ozenne, 3 May 1658, *CED*, 7: 140.

Vincent lived to see long awaited peace, only to learn of new war in Poland. The troops of Moscow were growing stronger. In 1656 Poland signed a treaty with Moscow, whose help was needed to restrain the threat from Sweden. As soon as this danger had passed, the old antagonisms arose with the invasion of the Cossacks. In 1657, following the death of their leader, Chmielnicki, Jan Wyhowski, who favored the Polish cause, was appointed the new commander in chief. A year later Poland formulated an agreement with Sweden, a political triumph brought about by Queen Louise-Marie. The triumph did not last long. Russia broke with the Cossacks and invaded Poland in 1659.

In February of 1660, Vincent wrote:

We are saddened at the news of a new invasion by Moscow and the capture of Grodno. The hope of making peace with Sweden delights us. Oh that God would deign to bless this treaty in favor of Poland, and that they build a stronger army to resist the second enemy that threatens us.<sup>207</sup>

On 3 September 1660, the last of a long list of Vincent's correspondence dealing with Poland contained the following: "May God bless the royal army so that the Cossacks willingly, or by force, would yield to the power of the king."<sup>208</sup> This came from the conviction that righteousness is on the side of the king.

Many of Saint Vincent's statements found in his correspondence and conferences clearly demonstrate the importance of affairs in Poland. Can we infer from this that our nation truly appreciates his good qualities? It would be difficult to substantiate a thesis contrary to evidence found in his writings.

Vincent's love for the Church shines brilliantly in the face of people who were threatening Catholicism in Poland. His gratitude and trust, bestowed upon Queen Louise-Marie, led him to care about and pray for the prosperity of her land.

The disasters which Poland experienced stirred people to look for a cause of the years of war and oppression. Having been

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<sup>207</sup> Letter 3078, Saint Vincent to Desdames, 13 February 1660, *CED*, 8: 240.

<sup>208</sup> Letter 3254, Saint Vincent to Desdames, 3 September 1660, *CED*, 8: 424.

raised at the French court, the queen believed that it was the weakness of Poland's constitutional state. However, her attempts at reform met with stiff opposition and ended in failure.

The king himself recognized the social disparity. On 1 April 1656, at Lvov, he pledged to do something about it (repeating the sentiment on 15 June at Warsaw). He saw that "from the tears and oppression of the people, the just judge sent disease, war and other disasters throughout those seven years. Yet I promise and pledge that once peace reigns I will employ all available means to liberate my Polish people from all unjust burdens and oppression."<sup>209</sup> However, this was but the empty jingle of a bell.

Among the powerful, those more enlightened clearly saw that it was excessive oppression of the people that thrust Poland into a whirlpool of civil wars.

A.S. Radziwill claimed the cause was connected with Chmielnicki and the Cossacks:

There were rebellions from time to time in other monarchies but nowhere were the people so oppressed as in Poland. There was oppression of the poor before. The lords, in various ways, squeezed the blood from the workers, and it was done mutually. The crimes of the Cossacks and the mobs were not heard because our sins also were not heard.<sup>210</sup>

Religious fanatics tried to offer their own analysis of what brought about the Swedish invasion of Poland. They found the sacrificial goat in Arianism, and in acts of the parliament of 1658, which expelled the Arians from Poland.

Did not Vincent ask himself the same: "Who was at fault?" He too looked for the guilty and then told his missionaries: "We priests are the cause of devastation. Bad priests are the cause of all disasters."<sup>211</sup> That was precisely his style, to find fault, above all, in one's self.

<sup>209</sup> *Historia Polski* (History of Poland), 1648-1764. Choice of texts by B. Baranowski, J. Bartys, J. Michalksi (Warsaw, 1956), 95.

<sup>210</sup> Radziwill, *Pamiętniki*, vol. 2: 391.

<sup>211</sup> Conference 141, September 1655, *CED*, 11: 309-310.

In the end the question remains: Was Poland, for Vincent, just a poor and unhappy country needing help? A fragment of his letter from 1 March 1652, shortly after the arrival of the missionaries in Poland, depicts their "honor."

We read of their delighted visits to our rich churches. They were bewitched by the excellent care of the churches in Poland, in sharp contrast to the neglected churches in France.

This struck the missionaries, who made it a point when they wrote Vincent.

We hear his reply:

I blushed with shame, as you did, seeing what you had heard of the dirt and disorder in French churches and the lack of respect which rules there. I do not doubt that you are seeing something completely different in Polish churches, and it does not seem to be dissimilar today. Truly this is a great evil which we do not properly take into account because we are so accustomed to it. When your letter forced me to deliberate on this, I immediately saw that the means of improvement will not be difficult, but no less necessary. Then I resolved to work on this, beginning here and counseling all our houses to use every possible means to improve.<sup>212</sup>

Unfortunately the care of those people who filled the churches was not on a par with the care of the churches themselves in Poland. Magnificent foundations, chiefly based on the exploitation of "the workers," often with the intention of the founders, were to be sufficient expiation for robbery and vice.

Vincent and his missionaries worked to straighten out this glaring neglect. A statement from Marescotti, the apostolic emissary to Poland in the years 1670-1671, can be added to the above:

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<sup>212</sup> Letter 1463, Saint Vincent to Lambert, 1 March 1652, *CED*, 4: 326-327.

We ought to thank God that he poured forth the spirit of faith and devotion on these people, but at the same time they lack the light necessary to practice Christian virtues. Some places are lacking, either because of the great distance from the parish or from the ineptitude and negligence of pastors. These pious people come to church in great numbers where they attend Mass with humility and devotion, in some places singing with great dedication beside the clergy praising God. For the good of the people, and the training of the clergy, Queen Louise-Marie arranged to have French priests, who were not yet established, come to Poland to carry out their apostolate. Thus far they have not yet brought about the training of candidates for the priesthood in their own homes, as is the custom in Rome and elsewhere. Therefore, religious training of the clerics is necessary for this important change in their life. They should be acquainted with the rites and observances of their new vocation. These steps are necessary and useful in any country, although more so in Poland where the lower clergy needs education and the motivation to work.<sup>213</sup>

In the darkness, these times of self-love, hatred, cruelty, avarice, blindness, and fanaticism the figure of Vincent shines as a clear bright light. Stimulated by his zeal, priests, brothers and sisters followed. They taught the unenlightened, healed the sick, raised the fallen and abandoned. The mind and heart of Vincent accompanied them always.

Saint Vincent is known by name in Poland and associated with good deeds. Yet, his keen piercing eyes, blazing with an internal glow, have lost some brilliance for us. Very few people really know how the affairs of our country concerned him.

If Vincent was sure that after death he could aid people with greater effectiveness than during his time in the mortal world, then perhaps he ought to be satisfied that his words remind us of him. We believe that Poland has not become indifferent to him. Seeing more clearly our needs, the more Vincent will have recourse to God, for

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<sup>213</sup> *Report of Apostolic Nuncios*, vol. 2: 406-407.



which he never wearied. We can be sure that Vincent has not forgotten us, and if by chance this happened then let us try to remind him of our love.