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# Saint Vincent and Foreign Missions

Gerard van Winsen, C.M.

Translated by Sister Jacqueline Kilar, D.C.\*

Much has already been written on the subject indicated by our title. The biographers of the Saint — Abelly, Collet, Maynard and Coste — have spoken to us about it.<sup>1</sup> DeVaumas gave it excellent treatment in a chapter of his book,<sup>2</sup> and we ourselves have already published an article on the topic.<sup>3</sup> Articles have recently appeared wherein the authors speak, expressly or with numerous references, of the missions accepted by Saint Vincent.<sup>4</sup> For that reason, we think it well for us to take up the subject again and add

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\*This article was first published in *Vincentiana* 3 (1978), 150-182. It has been translated with the permission of the author for publication in *Vincentian Heritage*. Sister Jacqueline Kilar, D.C., a member of the Southeast Province, is a graduate of the Sorbonne, Paris. She is the Editor-in-Chief for the translation of Pierre Coste's *Saint Vincent de Paul. Correspondance, Entretiens, Documents*.

<sup>1</sup>L. Abelly, *La vie du vénérable serviteur de Dieu Vincent de Paul*, Paris, 1664. We quote the 1891 edition; P. Collet, C.M., *La vie de Saint Vincent de Paul*, Nancy, 1748; U. Maynard, *Saint Vincent de Paul*, 3rd edition, Paris, 1886; P. Coste, C.M., *Monsieur Vincent*, Paris, 1932.

<sup>2</sup>G. de Vaumas, *L'éveil missionnaire de la France*, Lyons, 1942.

<sup>3</sup>G. van Winsen, C.M., *De plaats van de H. Vincentius in de apostolische beweging van zijn tijd*, *Het Missiewerk*, 1957, 30-37.

<sup>4</sup>Bernard Jacqueline, *Missions en France*, in *Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide Memoria Rerum*, Rom-Freiburg-Wein, 1971, vol. I/1, pp. 131-132; Teobaldi Filesi, *L'attenzione della S. Congregazione per l'Africa Settentrionale*, *ibid.*, pp. 377-411, *passim*; Louis Jadin, *L'oeuvre missionnaire en Afrique noire*; B. Madagascar, *ibid.*, pp. 515-545.

a few details. We shall draw attention particularly to the person of Saint Vincent.

We shall divide the topic into five points:

- I. The contemporary portrait of Saint Vincent the missionary
- II. His missionary motivation
- III. Unproductive negotiations
- IV. A survey of the missions accepted
- V. What the Saint did for other missions

## I. – THE CONTEMPORARY PORTRAIT

Four years after the death of the Saint (1581-1660), Louis Abelly, his first biographer, published his life. He had worked with accounts furnished by the confreres of the deceased. Abelly, therefore, sketched his portrait of Saint Vincent according to the still vivid recollections of his contemporaries.

It is remarkable that the author speaks in the same chapter of the missions in Europe and of those in Barbary and Madagascar. He recognizes the unity of the Mission.<sup>5</sup> The words of Saint Vincent quoted in this chapter also underline the universality of the missionary vocation:

Who depicts better than missionaries the way of life led by Jesus Christ on earth? I do not say this only of ourselves, but I include as well those great apostolic workers of various orders who give missions both within and outside the kingdom. They are the great missionaries of whom we are but the shadows. See how they go off to the Indies, to Japan, to Canada to complete the work that Jesus Christ began and has not ceased since the first instant He dedicated Himself to it by the will of His Father.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Bk. II, chap. I, "Des missions der Monsieur Vincent," *op. cit.*, vol. II, pp. 5-273.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 8. Abelly slightly altered these words which were spoken during the repetition of prayer on October 25, 1643.

The portrait of Saint Vincent the missionary is delineated immediately before the account of the Barbary missions.<sup>7</sup> Once again we find a remark concerning the universality of the missionary vocation:<sup>8</sup>

How happy, oh! how happy is the state of a missionary whose missions and labors for Jesus Christ know no other bounds than the entire world in which men live. Why then should we restrict ourselves to one place and set limits, when God has given us such an expanse in which to exercise our zeal?

Abelly recalls Saint Vincent's desire to go himself to the ends of the earth:<sup>9</sup> "Ah! wretch that I am! by my sins I have rendered myself unworthy of going to serve God among the peoples who do not know him."

Saint Vincent had great devotion to Saint Francis Xavier and held in high esteem the missionaries of the Company of Jesus and other Orders. To arouse the missionary zeal of his confreres, he used to gather them together to listen to the stories of Missionaries who were visiting him and in the refectory their printed accounts would be read. The Saint did everything he could to contribute to the progress of their missions.

He offered his own Company to the Lord to go work in foreign missions and was delighted when someone wished to leave for this work. But according to his great

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Cl.P. Coste, C.M., *Vincent de Paul, Correspondance, Entretiens, Documents, Table generale, XIV volumes*, Paris, 1920-1925, XI, p. 134. Hereafter, we shall give only the volume and the page of the French edition.

<sup>7</sup> Abelly, *op. cit.* vol. II, pp. 118-120.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119. In a XVIIth century manuscript published by A. Dodin in his *Saint Vincent de Paul: entretiens spirituels aux missionnaires*, Paris, 1960, p. 1030, no. 47, the last sentence of the quote is as follows: "Why then should we restrict ourselves to one place and limit ourselves to one parish when we have the entire circumference of the globe?" Abelly's alteration is evident.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119

maxim, he wished, in this case also, to follow Providence alone.

Having in hand the other sources of the Saint's life, we can say that his is a genuine portrait of Saint Vincent the missionary. Abelly condensed its essential traits, but this portrait is the result of an evolution in Saint Vincent which we shall try to follow in the next section.

## II. – THE MISSIONARY MOTIVATION OF SAINT VINCENT

We now wish to respond to the question: What was the decisive motivation of Saint Vincent with regard to sending his confreres to the foreign missions?

The contacts between Bishop Ingoli, the Secretary of the Propaganda, and the Lazarist Louis Lebreton<sup>10</sup> in 1639-40 were an occasion for Saint Vincent to reflect on his Community's call to the foreign missions.<sup>11</sup> We see his first reaction in a letter of May 10, 1639:<sup>12</sup>

I admire the foresight of that Congregation (of the Propaganda) for the missions and pray the Sovereign Shepherd and Master of the missions to draw glory from it. *Is there any harm in your telling them quite simply about [the mission work] here? Could you not by that means procure some establishment for it?*

Bishop Ingoli wanted to associate the Lazarists with the Propaganda. The reaction of Saint Vincent is negative.

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<sup>10</sup>Lebreton was sent to Rome with regard to the matter of the Lazarists' vows.

<sup>11</sup>De Vaumas wrote, *op. cit.*, p. 235: "It was around the 1640's after having been the field of a few religious families and of very rare individuals, that the missionary idea little by little attracted the secular clergy and the Christians who were gathering more and more frequently into charitable companies."

<sup>12</sup>I, p. 548.

He does not wish to break with the bishops of France. He is entirely preoccupied with the missions in his own country. He still does not recognize another call for his Community. He even asks Lebreton to start missions in Rome while he himself will pray for the foreign missions.<sup>13</sup>

In 1640, Bishop Ingoli explicitly requests two Lazarists for the foreign missions. This time M. Vincent was to recognize a call from God (letter of June 1, 1640):<sup>14</sup>

What shall I say to you concerning Bishop Ingoli's proposal? Nothing indeed, Monsieur, except that I accept it with all the reverence and humility I can, as coming from God; and that we shall do what we can to undertake it . . . .

The Saint shaped his stance towards the foreign missions as follows:

Since writing the above, I have been to celebrate Holy Mass. This is the thought that came to me: Because the power to send *ad gentes* resides in the person of His Holiness alone, he has the power to send every priest throughout the earth for the glory of God and the salvation of souls; and all priests have the obligation to obey him in that regard. According to that maxim, which seems reasonable to me, I offered God this Little Company for His Divine Majesty to go wherever His Holiness commands.

And even though Saint Vincent maintained that the direction and discipline of the Missionaries was in the hands of their Superior General, his confreres were to be "with regard to His Holiness like the servants of the Gospel, and if he says to them: go there, they shall be obliged to go; come here, they shall come; do that, they shall be obliged to do it."

In the lives of Saint Vincent, his experiences at

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<sup>13</sup> XIII, p. 338.

<sup>14</sup> II, p. 50.

Folleville and Chatillon-les-Dombes are spoken of a great deal, and rightly so.<sup>15</sup> But these initial experiences of Saint Vincent must be completed by the subsequent moment in which the Saint, while celebrating Holy Mass, receives an inspiration concerning the mission *ad gentes*. M. Vincent immediately states a principle.<sup>16</sup> This constant principle regulates his stand and his conduct; it forms an integral part of his missionary spirituality. Its application, however, has limitations. In 1642, Saint Vincent cannot respond to the sponsorship offered by Bishop Ingoli because of a lack of personnel and his obligations to the bishops of France. He wrote on May 25, 1642:<sup>17</sup>

. . . I think that, since His Holiness is the only one who can send [missionaries] *ad gentes*, all priests are obliged to obey him when he commands them to go to them. This Little Company is brought up so disposed that, when His Holiness chooses to send it *a capite ad calcem* to those countries, dropping everything, it will go most willingly. Would to God, Monsieur, that He had made us worthy of using our lives as Our Lord did for the salvation of those poor creatures so far removed from every assistance. . . .<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Saint Vincent preached his first mission sermon in Folleville on January 25, 1617. This event will bring about the birth of his Congregation in 1625. In Chatillon-les Dombes, M. Vincent founded the first confraternity of the Ladies of Charity, likewise in 1617. To help these Ladies, the Saint will found the Daughters of Charity in 1633.

<sup>16</sup> The celebration of Mass was for Saint Vincent a privileged time in which he received special insights from God. One is led to recall here an experience that the Saint will have a year later. As he was celebrating Holy Mass after the death of Saint Jane de Chantal, he saw her soul reunited to that of Francis de Sales and both of them joined to God in the form of globes.

<sup>17</sup> II, p. 256.

<sup>18</sup> It must be noted that the maxim which brought Saint Vincent so much enlightenment was already being discussed. In a *Traité des Saints Anges*, M. Olier wrote in 1645: "This dignity of

We find this principle three more times in the Saint's correspondence of 1647. On one occasion, in a letter of March 15 to Bishop Ingoli, the principle is applied to a concrete case: the Saint is proposing his assistant, Lambert aux Couteaux, for the position of coadjutor of Babylon.<sup>19</sup>

It is found twice in the letters to M. Jean Dehorgny<sup>20</sup> who appears to be against the plan of sending a Missionary to Persia. Saint Vincent on the contrary sees in this a call from God. In March 1647 he extends his reasoning to support his maxim:

Must we not contribute to the extension of the Church? Yes, without doubt? and such being the case, in whom does the power of sending *ad gentes* reside? It has to be in the Pope or the councils or the bishops. Now the latter have jurisdiction only in their dioceses; as for councils, there are none at this time; therefore, it must be in the person of the first named. If then he has the right to send us, we also have the obligation to go; otherwise, his power would be useless.

In the letter of May 2, 1647 he expresses the principle in a rather personal tone:

He (=God) is calling us there (=Persia) through the Pope, who alone has the power to send *ad gentes*, and it is a matter of conscience to disobey him. I feel urged interiorly to comply, thinking that this power God has

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apostleship has been left to them (the Popes) so that they might save everyone and send others to preach the name of God everywhere in the world, activities which cannot be exercised by individual prelates. A shepherd must have sheep, and a husband an already formed spouse — these are the two dignities of prelates; whereas the Apostle of the Church, the Holy Father, although he has no children among the unbelievers, has in himself the fecundity and power to beget them. To him alone belongs the right of giving missions in barbarian lands and of going to preach to unbelievers as one having authority over them." Quoted by de Vaumas, *op. cit.*, p. 248, note 50.

<sup>19</sup> III, p. 158.

<sup>20</sup> March 1647, III, p. 154; May 2, 1647, III, p. 182.



given His Church of sending [men] to announce the Gospel throughout the earth would reside in vain in the person of its head, if his subjects were not likewise obliged to go to the places he sends them to labor at extending the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Saint Vincent once again stated his missionary principle during the repetition of prayer on August 30, 1657.<sup>21</sup> He had received news that three Missionaries from Madagascar had died. He asked himself in the presence of his Community:

How do we know now whether the Company has a vocation for that place, whether it has been called there? Indeed, Gentlemen, we must not doubt it, for we were not thinking of Madagascar when they came to suggest it to us. This is how it all happened . . . .

And M. Vincent explains once again that the Pope has the power to send [missionaries] all over the world; that he has given this power to the Propaganda which, in its turn, sends the Lazarists to Madagascar: “Now, I ask you, is that not a true call?”

We can conclude that from 1640 to the end of his life Saint Vincent allowed himself to be guided by a maxim which was received as an inspiration during Holy Mass, which was almost always stated in the same words, and which was consistently applied in various circumstances.

Saint Vincent was likewise driven to labor for the foreign missions for a more personal motive. We find his thinking for the first time in the letters of August 31, 1646; March 1647; and May 2, 1647.<sup>22</sup> The Saint declares: “As for me, I know that I have felt this way for a long time.”

It is a matter of M. Vincent’s personal opinion, for he

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<sup>21</sup> XI, pp. 420-422.

<sup>22</sup> III, pp. 35, 153, 182.

says: "... perhaps I am mistaken." And a little further on: "And even though I were mistaken."<sup>23</sup>

On August 31, 1646 he formulates his thinking in the following manner:<sup>24</sup>

I confess to you that I am greatly attached and devoted, so it seems, to the propagation of the Church in infidel countries, because I fear that God may destroy it little by little here and that little or nothing will be left of it a hundred years from now on account of our depraved customs, these new opinions which are progressively multiplying, and because of this state of affairs.

This idea, that God wishes to transport His Church to other countries, we find again in a conference of September 1655;<sup>25</sup> in a letter of September 3, 1655;<sup>26</sup> and in a conference of September 1656. Thus we can conclude that this thought is also a constant motivation for Saint Vincent.

The conference of September 1656<sup>27</sup> clarifies the thinking of the Saint concerning this matter. We can first of all surmise from the following passage that Saint Vincent owed his motivation to Pope Clement VIII whom he had visited in Rome and for whom he had a great veneration:

This holy Pope then, having received two ambassadors from some princes of the Orient where the faith was beginning to spread, and wishing to thank God for this in their presence, offered the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass for their intention. While he was at the altar, during the Memento, they saw him weep, groan and sob. This greatly astonished them. Therefore, after the Mass was over, they took the liberty of asking him what had aroused him to

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<sup>23</sup> III, p. 183.

<sup>24</sup> III, p. 35.

<sup>25</sup> XI, p. 309.

<sup>26</sup> V, p. 517.

<sup>27</sup> XI, pp. 351-356.

tears and groans during an act that should have brought him only consolation and joy. He told them quite simply that it was true he had begun the Mass with great satisfaction and contentment seeing the progress of the Catholic religion, but this contentment had suddenly changed to sadness and bitterness. The sight of the damage and losses occurring every day in the Church because of heretics gave reason to fear that God might wish to transport it elsewhere.

We should quote the entire conference, but we shall be satisfied with transcribing the following passages:

Ah! gentlemen and my brothers, what a joy it will be for God, if amid the debris of His Church, amid these upsets caused by heresies, amid the conflagration set on all sides by concupiscence, if amid this ruin, a few people are found who offer themselves to Him to carry elsewhere, if one must speak this way, the remains of His Church, and others to defend and guard what little is left here.

Saint Vincent did not agree with the Abbé de Saint-Cyran who thought it was foolhardy to oppose God's designs and try to defend the Church He had decided to destroy. And Saint Vincent adds:

Alas! Gentlemen, perhaps he spoke truly in saying that God wanted to take the Church away from us on account of our sins. But this author of heresy was not speaking truly when he said that it was foolhardy to oppose God in this matter and to devote oneself to saving the Church and defending it, for God asks this and we must do it.

We see that this thinking of Saint Vincent appears several times in a missionary context. It is for him a personal motive to labor for the foreign missions. One cannot say that this idea is part of his missionary doctrine, his general spirituality; it arises from the concrete situations of his time. Nevertheless, it is a thought that can have its use for our time as well.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Jacques Delarue, *Ce que croyait M. Vincent*, Mame, 1974, pp. 113-118.

### III. UNPRODUCTIVE NEGOTIATIONS

It is astonishing to note how many negotiations with regard to sending Lazarists to the foreign missions took place during Saint Vincent's life and yet proved fruitless. In 1634, the Saint must already have been thinking of Turkey. He wrote on July 25:<sup>29</sup>

The Ambassador of Turkey (=the Count de Marcheville) did me the honor of writing to me and of requesting priests from Saint-Nicolas (=the community of Adrien Bourdoise) and from the Mission and he thinks they will be able to do more than I would dare tell you.

M. Vincent wrote this letter to M. du Coudray in Rome. The latter was in contact with a young Maronite boy. The Saint suggested to him:

... and please bring with you... that good Maronite boy if you think he wishes to give himself to God in this Little Company; and please practice his everyday Greek on the way so as to teach it here if necessary; who can tell?

This is the first mention of a candidate for the Congregation coming from outside of Europe.

In 1640, Bishop Ingoli asks M. Vincent for two confreres from Avignon to accompany a bishop from another company.<sup>30</sup> The country in question is Brazil, for

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<sup>29</sup>I, p. 253.

<sup>30</sup>II, p. 50, letter of June 1, 1640. From the beginning of his Institute, M. Vincent had contacts with the Propaganda. On June 65, 1627, Blaise Feron (Are we to identify this man with the Feron of whom Abelly speaks, vol. I, p. 89?) applied for the confirmation of Saint Vincent's "Mission," and the Propaganda confirmed it on November 5 of the same year (B. Jacqueline, *op. cit.*, p. 131, which gives the references). M. Vincent wanted to obtain the approbation of his Institute as a Congregation, but two petitions written for that purpose were rejected by the Propaganda. (B. Jacqueline, *ibid.*; XIII, pp. 218-225; I, p. 52). In 1632-33, Bishop Ingoli did Saint Vincent's Congregation a service with regard to the Bull of institution (XIII, p.

on August 9 we find the note:<sup>31</sup> "I am waiting for an answer concerning Fernambouc [*sic*] in the Indies."

M. Vincent did not have any confreres from the Comtat of Avignon. He remarks, however: "It seems to me absolutely necessary for the Bishop and the other two who are to go with him to be from the same company."

Moreover, he emphasizes: "The direction and discipline of those sent must belong to the Superior who has the right to recall them and send others in their place." We do not find any further references to this affair.

For years Saint Vincent was occupied with the bishopric of Babylon in Persia. The first reference is found in a letter of August 24, 1643<sup>32</sup> and the last in that of

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257), and in 1641 with regard to permission for the establishment of a house in Rome (XIII, p. 282). During the years 1639-42, the Prelate wanted to associate the Lazarists with the Propaganda (XIII, p. 338). He asked Saint Vincent for information concerning his Institute (letters of M. Vincent: February 28, 1640, II, p. 26 and February 3, 1641, II, p. 155). B. Jacqueline speaks "of an appeal reintroduced in 1640." Perhaps the matter in question was approval for the rules (Coste, *M. Vincent*, II, pp.7 ff.). In 1640, the Propaganda asked the Nuncio in Paris for some information. In 1642, M. Vincent was of the opinion that he could not respond to Bishop Ingoli's proposals because of a lack of personnel and because of his obligations to the bishops of France. His instructions to the Superior in Rome can be read in a letter of May 25, 1642, II, p. 255.

<sup>31</sup>II, p. 90. With M. de Vaumas (*op. cit.*, p. 276) we suppose that the letter of June 1 (compared with that of August 9, 1640) is speaking about Pernambuco. Maynard (*op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 195) and Coste (II, p. 50, note) think that it is about Persia. It must be noted that Collet (*op. cit.*, I, p. 407) places the proposal to send apostolic workers to Babylon in the year 1644 as we do. In 1640, His Excellency Jean Duval, Bishop of Babylon, had just arrived in Ispahan. He had embarked at Marseilles the previous April 1639 (J. Metzler, *op. cit.*, p. 691). When Bishop Ingoli asked in 1640 for some confreres who were natives of Avignon which depended on the Holy See, we were led to think of a region where the Propaganda was afraid of difficulties on account of padroado. For all these reasons, Brazil comes to mind rather than Persia.

<sup>32</sup>II, p. 413.

November 14, 1659.<sup>33</sup> Only the period 1643-1647 is of importance for us, because it was at that time that the Propaganda requested Lazarists for Persia.

In 1643, after the return to France of Bishop Jean Duval, the Bishop of Babylon,<sup>34</sup> M. de Monthéron, an old friend of M. Vincent, began the negotiations. The former had had a meeting with Bishop Ingoli. The plan was that the Lazarists would depart for Persia and Bishop Duval would resign in favor of one of M. Vincent's confreres. M. de Monthéron also discussed the matter with the Superior in Rome, Bernard Codoing, and likewise wrote a letter to Bishop Duval.

Meanwhile, it would be necessary to get another benefice for the Bishop and present the matter officially to M. Vincent. That is why M. de Monthéron suggested to the Nuncio in Paris that he contact the Queen with regard to finding another benefice for Bishop Duval and also officially discuss the matter with M. Vincent. Meanwhile, Saint Vincent already knew all about it because a "good nun" had spoken to him on behalf of M. de Monthéron.<sup>35</sup> M. Vincent's first reaction to the proposal was negative. He wants to wait

. . . until it pleases the Divine Goodness to manifest Its will more clearly concerning the affair in the way the

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<sup>33</sup> VIII, p. 167.

<sup>34</sup>In 1637, the bishopric of Babylon (Baghdad) was endowed with a sum of about 125,000 gold francs by Madame E. Le Peultre, Ricouart's widow. She proposed the Carmelite Jean Duval (Bernard de la Sainte Trinite) as bishop. This latter arrived in Ispahan on July 7, 1640 and left the city in the early months of 1642. In spite of the Propaganda's requests, he did not return to Persia again. Rome was looking for new candidates. It is in this context that we must place Saint Vincent's actions. Cf. J. Metzler, *Night erfüllte Hoffnungen in Persien*, in *Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide Memoria Rerum*, vol. I/1, pp. 690-693.

<sup>35</sup> II, pp. 413-415.

matter will be proposed to you (=Codoing) by the said Congregation (=the Propaganda) and in the way the proposal will be received here (=in France), *positis aliis circumstantiis ponendis*.

Moreover, M. Vincent lacked personnel and the situation in Persia was such that working in Baghdad was impossible — it was necessary to go to Ispahan. The Saint also thought that the Lord did not want his confreres to be named bishops.

In August 1644, the Superior in Rome, Bernard Codoing, believed that there was a clear call from God to send Lazarists to Persia. M. Vincent still hesitated, above all because of financial difficulties:<sup>36</sup> “There remains another difficulty, that of giving the Bishop of Babylon from here the revenue he draws which is destined for his bishopric. Could you not have the matter settled without our having to do that?”

The affair dragged on until 1647. M. Vincent had recognized a clear call from God to his Congregation, but the new Superior in Rome, Jean Dehorgny, questioned it. Saint Vincent answered him in March 1647:<sup>37</sup>

You know, Monsieur, how long it has been since the Sacred Congregation cast its eyes upon us, how many times it has had us sought out, how little we have hurried

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<sup>36</sup> II, p. 474. It was difficult to send money to Ispahan (II, p. 474). It was also difficult to compensate Bishop Duval. On May 2, Saint Vincent wrote (III, p. 184): “As for temporal goods, the bishopric has a revenue of nine hundred *écus*. In order that the former bishop, who receives it but is not in residence, may transfer half of it to his successor, we shall give him besides thirteen or fourteen hundred *livres* as a benefice or life annuity to compensate for that half.” M. Vincent thought that M. Authier wanted to have the bishopric of Babylon (II, p. 422; Cf. de Vaumas, *op cit.*, p. 271, who writes that Authier was asked but obstinately refused). M. Vincent wanted to facilitate the union of his institute with the Lazarists. M. Authier was objecting to this union against the desire of his confreres (II, p. 422; cf. IV, p. 142).

<sup>37</sup> III, p. 153.

so as to mix nothing human in the decision concerning this holy enterprise but, since we are again being urged, both through letters and by the Nuncio, I no longer have any doubts about accepting this work.

The lack of personnel no longer counts for M. Vincent. Saint Ignatius even named novices as superiors. "Would it be right for us to have an abundance of men, which fact renders them useless part of the time, while God stands in need of them in other places to which He is calling us?"

M. Vincent had asked for externs for the bishopric, but without success.<sup>38</sup> He no longer makes any objection to one of his own being named bishop:

I have again passed over the danger there is that this example might give some individuals in the Company reason to seek after church dignities. I decided that the remoteness of the place in question, the risks run in going there and residing there, and the apostolic humility with which the man destined for the post will be able to conduct himself . . . will remove both the reason to seek after such positions and several other disadvantages.

Saint Vincent came to the point of having to act. In March 1647, he proposed to Bishop Ingoli his assistant, Lambert aux Couteaux, as a candidate for the position of coadjutor of Babylon.<sup>39</sup> "I confess to you, Your Excellency, that losing this man is like tearing out one of my eyes or cutting off my own arm."

He promised to discuss the affair with the Queen and afterwards he would again notify Bishop Ingoli.

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<sup>38</sup> M. Vincent had won over M. Feret, but the Bishop of Paris had complained; M. Féret was to become the pastor of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet. The Saint had thought of his confrere, M. Gilles, but he was not suitable. He again asked for an extern, M. Brandon, who did not accept either.

<sup>39</sup> III, p. 158. Why this solution of a coadjutor? Perhaps to resolve the difficulty concerning the revenue received by Bishop Duval? Cf. note 36.



However, the presentation of M. Lambert aux Couteaux had not yet been firmly decided by the Saint. He had spoken with the candidate only in general terms. The Superior in Rome was still against the decision. In May 1647, M. Vincent wrote him in that regard:<sup>40</sup> "I will nonetheless suspend the decision until I have seen what you wish to write me about the matter, with the intention of yielding to your reasons if they are better than mine."

In a letter of October 23, 1648, M. Vincent again refers to Persia<sup>41</sup> "where the Propaganda is sending us;" but as far as his Congregation was concerned, the affair came to naught.<sup>42</sup>

In 1644, the Lazarists were requested for the East Indies.<sup>43</sup> Bernard Codoing in Rome saw in this a clear call from God. It made a deep impression on M. Vincent. He almost sent a priest and a cleric to Portugal with the Ambassador of France who was to leave for that country. From there his confreres could go on to the Indies.

Again in 1645,<sup>44</sup> M. Vincent has to reassure the Superior of Rome that he has no objection to the proposal concerning the Indies. But this time again we find no further trace of the affair in Saint Vincent's correspondence.

Broached in 1643, the request for a Missionary for Salé became serious in 1646. M. Vincent wrote on July 25 of that year:<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> III, p. 182-185.

<sup>41</sup> III, p. 380.

<sup>42</sup> Perhaps something more concerning this affair can be found by studying the references in the Propaganda archives given by J. Metzler, *op. cit.*, p. 692, note 40.

<sup>43</sup> Collet, *op. cit.*, I, p. 407; Letter of August 12, 1644, II, pp. 474-475.

<sup>44</sup> January 4, 1645, II, p. 500.

<sup>45</sup> As early as 1643, the Marseilles Company of the Blessed

They are again asking for us in Salé which is another city of Africa (in Morocco) in which it is permitted to preach Jesus Christ. We still do not know whom to choose to go there. I beg you to give some thought in the presence of God as to who might be capable and zealous for that mission and tell me how you feel about it.

A week later, Saint Vincent had made the decision to send a priest and a brother there.<sup>46</sup> The priest, M. Jacques Le Soudier, left Paris by August 25, 1646.<sup>47</sup> He was to assist the slaves of Salé and would be at the Consul's service. But in October 1646, Le Soudier had to stop in Marseilles by M. Vincent's order.

A Recollet Father had left for Morocco saying that he wanted to ransom some slaves, but he supplanted Le Soudier in Salé in the post which was intended for him.<sup>48</sup>

Saint Vincent wrote to the Consul on October 5, 1646:<sup>49</sup>

I do not know what to say about the behavior of that good Father who has gotten ahead of us, Monsieur, except that it is a maxim of ours to yield to others the good works they offer themselves to do, judging with reason that they will do them better than we. And then we fear that some argument might occur on the spot and that this might be a scandal rather than an edification to both the Christians and the infidels.

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Sacrament had requested Missionaries of Saint Vincent for Salé in Morocco. (Cf. *Mission et Charité*, Paris, 1970, no. 39, p. 46, vol. XV of Coste, *Correspondance, etc.*). The City was a well-known retreat for pirates. France maintained a Consul there who at that time was M. Andre Prat (II, p. 623, note 14). He was succeeded as Consul by his son Henri on October 20, 1648 (III, p. 69, note 2).

<sup>46</sup>Letter of August 2, III; p. 4.

<sup>47</sup>Letter of August 25, III, p. 27. Cf. Letter of August 31, 1646, III, p. 35. Concerning Jacques Le Soudier see II, p. 83.

<sup>48</sup>III, pp. 69; 72; 81-82.

<sup>49</sup>III, p. 69.

For Saint Vincent the matter was finished.

Later, the Consul's son Henri again entreated Saint Vincent to send the Lazarists. That is why, six years later, in January 1652, the Saint addressed a petition to the Propaganda requesting the necessary faculties for the Missionaries he wished to send to Salé. The Propaganda acquiesced to M. Vincent's request.<sup>50</sup> But as soon as M. Vincent found out that the Recollets were making an appeal in Rome to be settled in their former mission, he refused the post. He wrote to the Nuncio on March 7, 1652:<sup>51</sup>

. . .the Gentlemen of the Propaganda may know that, when other workers are found who wish to go to the places we are called, we withdraw from them so as not to break with charity nor depart from the opinion we ought to have that others will do better than we.

Here is the real Saint Vincent; his group humility is in action.

In the course of the years 1647-1648, M. Vincent planned to send Missionaries to Arabia. In a petition of January 1648, M. Vincent asked the Propaganda for the authorization to direct this mission in his own name and for the appointment of a vice-prefect.

The latter would take up residence in a port of Fertile Arabia to which Dutch and English vessels could take him. But it seems that those plans were never carried out.<sup>52</sup>

In 1652 M. Vincent was asked to send two priests to Guyana.<sup>53</sup> An expedition to these regions was being prepared.

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<sup>50</sup> III, pp. 301-303.

<sup>51</sup> III, p. 31.

<sup>52</sup> III, pp. 335; 380.

<sup>53</sup> In Volume XIV, at the bottom of page 403, Coste wrote as a

In March the Saint asked the Propaganda for the necessary faculties and requested for himself the power of naming the prefect of that mission.<sup>54</sup>

The religious director of the expedition, the abbé de l'Isle-Marivault, was offered hospitality by Saint Vincent. There was a general gathering of people in the house of the Bons-Enfants of the Fathers of the Mission to which he had retired, recounts Biet, the historiographer of the expedition.<sup>55</sup>

M. Vincent himself wrote:<sup>56</sup>

They are getting together a sizeable group of men here for that country. A Doctor of the Sorbonne is going over with a number of good priests whom he is taking there, determined not to depend on any one but the Holy See. This plan was made a long time ago and will be carried out sooner than the other one (the foundation of a seminary by M. de Ventadour in Gentilly) because the money and the boats are almost ready.

But Saint Vincent withdrew his Missionaries. We find the cause in a letter of May 3, 1652:<sup>57</sup>

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reference to the letter of December 21, 1651, IV, pp. 292-296: "departure for Canada." This is evidently an error, for in IV, p. 296, note 10, he cites the *Gazette de France* of May 25, 1692 in which one reads as the destination point of the expedition "the North Cape, around the fourth degree of the equinoctial line," which is Guyana. It cannot be said that Saint Vincent planned to send Lazarists to Canada. Cf. de Vaumas, *op.cit.*, pp. 271-274. When reading the pages quoted by de Vaumas, one has the impression that Coste in his notes IV, p. 296, 10 and IV, p. 336, 2 sees too great a link between M. de Ventadour and the Guyana expedition.

<sup>54</sup> III, p. 335.

<sup>55</sup> Antoine Biet, *Voyage de la France équinoxiale en l'île de Cayenne entrepris par les Français en l'année 1652*, Paris, 1664, p. 13, quoted by de Vaumas, *op. cit.*, p. 272.

<sup>56</sup> IV, p. 296.

<sup>57</sup> IV, p. 377; cf. De Vaumas, *op. cit.*, p. 275, note 1. In 1652 Saint Vincent wrote a report on the candidates destined for an eventual bishopric in Guyana. De Vaumas, *op. cit.*, p. 271, note 54.

The plan for America did not succeed for us. It is not that the embarkation is not being carried out, but the one who had requested priests from us never mentioned it to us again at all, perhaps because of the difficulty with the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda which he had not expected. I think the priests who are being taken there are going without any [approval and faculties from the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda]. I think, as you, Monsieur, that it is good to make such sacrifices for God, sending our priests to convert unbelievers; but that is understood only when they have a legitimate mission.

In 1654-1655, there were negotiations to send Missionaries or other priests to Sweden and Denmark.<sup>58</sup> The Propaganda wanted to ask the Saint for seven or eight priests.<sup>59</sup> The Congregation repeated its orders two or three times.<sup>60</sup> M. Guillot who was working in Poland wished to go.<sup>61</sup> He entered into correspondence with Sweden<sup>62</sup> and had a meeting with the Ambassador of France.<sup>63</sup>

M. Vincent asked the Superior of Warsaw to give him everything he needed, for example, a book of controversy.<sup>64</sup>

In February 1655 it had become clear that Queen

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<sup>58</sup> Collet, *op. cit.*, II, p. 15 wrote: "I do not know whether the conversion of Christine, the Queen of Sweden, had made people believe that the return of her states to the Roman Church was not an impossibility." Cf. H. Tüchle: *Im Spannungsfeld des Lutherischen Christentums (Bohmen, Deutschland und Skandinavien)*, in *Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide Memoria Rerum*, vol. I/2, pp. 60-62.

<sup>59</sup> V, p. 64.

<sup>60</sup> V, p. 178.

<sup>61</sup> V, p. 212.

<sup>62</sup> V, p. 163.

<sup>63</sup> V, p. 178.

<sup>64</sup> V, p. 213.

Louise-Marie de Gonzague would not allow M. Guillot's departure. In view of the difficulties encountered with regard to the confreres in Poland, the Ambassador had found three priests in France.

Saint Vincent wrote at that time:<sup>65</sup> "Here then is the known Will of God and thus the resolution of the difficulty concerning the matter."

In 1656 the Propaganda asked M. Vincent, through the Nuncio, for a priest for Lebanon.<sup>66</sup> The Saint had thought of sending M. Edme Jolly there,<sup>67</sup> but did not do so. The intense heat of Lebanon might make that confrere ill and besides he was doing much good in Rome. M. Vincent decided upon M. Thomas Berthe.

On July 14 M. Vincent visited the Nuncio to explain to him in detail the qualities of his confrere. He wrote: "We shall ask God to dispose of this affair as His wisdom thinks suitable."

The affair went nowhere.<sup>68</sup>

Vincent de Paul had still other plans. We must quote a letter from Nicolas Etienne, written from Madagascar on January 1, 1664:<sup>69</sup>

I shall go as far as China, Japan, and the other infidel lands to pave the way for our Congregation so as to render to God and to souls there the service it affords in Europe. It was also the intention of late M. Vincent, our blessed Father, that I go on even to China.

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<sup>65</sup> V, p. 325.

<sup>66</sup> VI, p. 19.

<sup>67</sup> VI, p. 23.

<sup>68</sup>We wish to point out a coincidence. In 1656 Father Lambert, a Jesuit, received a plot of land in Antoura on which a residence and later a *collège* were constructed. The Lazarists took it over from the Jesuits and are still directing the *collège* of Antoura.

<sup>69</sup>Abelly, *op. cit.*, III, p. 148, note 2.

We see the evolution in the missionary spirituality of Saint Vincent on comparing this text with the letter of 10, 1639.<sup>70</sup> Are we to doubt that all his confreres were able to follow this evolution of the Congregation? We do not know. Nevertheless, we again wish to quote two texts. The first is an extract from a repetition of prayer, July 14, 1655:<sup>71</sup>

What! a cowardly Missionary will say, what good are so many missions? Go to the Indies, to the Hebrides! Go, go, that is too much . . . indeed, when M. Vincent has died, there will be a lot of changes. We shall have to curtail all these employments, for otherwise, how shall we support them! What! to the Indies, the Hebrides, prisons! So that, Gentlemen, you will have to say: Farewell, missions; farewell, Indies; farewell, Hebrides; etc. ... And who is the cause of all this harm? A coward, cowardly Missionaries full of love for their own comforts and rest.

On December 6, 1658, the Saint said again:<sup>72</sup>

There may come, therefore, after my death, spirits of contradiction and cowardly people will say . . . and others will say that it is too much to undertake sending men to distant countries, to the Indies, to Barbary. But my God, but my Lord, did you not send Saint Thomas to the Indies, and the other Apostles throughout the earth? Did you not charge them with the care and direction of all peoples in general and of many individuals and families in particular? No matter; our vocation is: *Evangelizare pauperibus!*

We can now draw up the following list:

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<sup>70</sup>Cf. note 12.

<sup>71</sup>XI, pp. 193-194.

<sup>72</sup>XII, p. 90.

- 1634 Constantinople
- 1640 Pernambuco (Brazil)
- 1643 Babylon (Persia)
- 1644 East Indies
- 1645 *Tunis*
- 1646 *Algiers Salé* (Morocco)
- 1647 Arabia
- 1648 *Madagascar*
- 1652 Guyana
- 1654 Sweden
- 1656 Lebanon

The plans which were carried out are italicized. We wish to say something about them in the following section.

#### IV. – A SURVEY OF THE MISSIONS ACCEPTED

It is not our intention here to rewrite the history of the missions taken on by Saint Vincent — so much has already been written about them. What interests us in this article is the person of Saint Vincent and the directives he gives to his Missionaries.

##### A. Tunis (begun 1645) and Algiers (begun 1646)

As early as the year 1642, Saint Vincent received Louis XIII's command to send some of his priests to Barbary.<sup>73</sup> The King gave him nine or ten thousand *livres* for this work. The purpose of the missions in Barbary is well

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<sup>73</sup> Abelly, *op.cit.*, II, p. 21. Cf. *Mémoires de la Congrégation de la Mission*, Vol. II, in Tunis and Algeria, Paris, 1864; T. Filesi, *L'attenzione della S. Congregazione per l'Africa settentrionale*, in: *Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide Memoria Rerum*, vol. I/2, pp. 389. ff.



defined in the act of foundation of the house in Marseilles:<sup>74</sup>

*Item*, with the express condition of sending by the above-mentioned Priests of the Mission forever and in perpetuity, at the time when they judge suitable, priests of the aforesaid Congregation of the Mission to Barbary for the purpose of consoling and instructing the poor captive Christians detained in the above-mentioned places in the faith, love and fear of God, and to provide through them the missions, catechism lessons, instructions and exhortations, Masses and prayers to which they are accustomed.

The first priest of the Congregation, accompanied by a brother, arrived in Tunis on November 22, 1645. He was to be the chaplain of the French Consul. To facilitate the missions in Barbary, Saint Vincent purchased the consulates of Algiers (1646) and of Tunis (1648).<sup>75</sup>

During his lifetime, M. Vincent sent three confreres to Tunis to minister to the slaves, and a priest confrere and a layman for the consulate. One confrere died in Tunis during this period.

Up to Saint Vincent's death (1660), four confreres had been sent to Algiers (beginning in 1646) to work with the slaves (three died there during this time) and a priest confrere for the consulate. The most famous of these missionaries was Jean Le Vacher who worked in both Tunis and Algiers.<sup>76</sup>

In a rule of life for the latter, Saint Vincent advises him<sup>77</sup> "to live with every imaginable precaution with the

<sup>74</sup> XIII, p. 300. The contract was concluded with the Duchess d'Aiguillon.

<sup>75</sup> XIII, p. 307. The Duchess d'Aiguillon gave the money.

<sup>76</sup> L. Misermont, *Jean Le Vacher*, Paris, 1935.

<sup>77</sup> XIII, p. 363; cf. p. 313.

dey, the pasha, the customs officials and other important people.” Le Vacher was, moreover,

. . . to win over by patience the priests and religious slaves who are there, and maintain the merchants in the greatest union possible. Above all, they shall be subject to the laws of the country, religion excepted, about which they shall never argue nor say anything so as to contemn it.

Le Vacher was to write down exactly the names of the slaves he would assist and make note of the sum he distributed to them.

And in 1652, Saint Vincent wrote to Jean Le Vacher’s brother Philippe who was then in Algiers:<sup>78</sup>

You were sent to Algiers only to console afflicted souls, to encourage them to suffer and to help them persevere in our holy religion.

That is your principal duty, and not the office of vicar-general which you accepted only in so far as it serves as a means to arrive at the above-mentioned ends.

Philippe Le Vacher was not to communicate with the Turks and renegades:

Do not expose yourself to the dangers which may arise from doing that, because by endangering yourself . . . you would endanger everything and would do great wrong to the poor Christian slaves, in so far as they would be assisted further, and you would close the door for the future on the present liberty that we have to render service to God in Algiers and elsewhere.

The humble M. Vincent was not afraid to make a comparison between the Orders who are going to ransom slaves and the work of his Missionaries:<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> IV, pp. 120-121.

<sup>79</sup> XI, p. 437. M. Philippe Le Vacher (brother of Jean) was

That, Gentlemen, is beautiful and indeed excellent, but it seems to me that there is something more so in those who not only go off to Algiers and to Tunis to contribute to the ransom of poor Christians, but who, besides that, stay there to ransom these poor people, to assist them spiritually and corporally, to run to their need, to be always there to assist them.

During Saint Vincent's life twelve hundred slaves were ransomed and 1,200,000 *livres* were spent for that purpose and for other works of charity on behalf of the slaves.<sup>80</sup>

It was not easy to always find laymen for the office of Consul. Therefore, the priests themselves had to take on that post. M. Vincent applied for this permission in Rome, but it was not granted.

In the correspondence with M. Jolly, the Superior in Rome, concerning this matter, we find some highly pertinent statements written in Saint Vincent's hand in letters drawn up by his secretary.

For example, on September 7, 1657:<sup>81</sup>

We make use of priests to practice in the Ecclesiastical State civil law which could be exercised by seculars; why not in Barbary, taking into account the state of affairs? I declare before God that it is not for the purpose of carrying on business, nor to make use of any temporal advantage, and that there is no motive which brings us to this holy employment other than charity alone — for the neighbor, for the love of God.

Saint Vincent could give proof of this statement (letter

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present at this repetition of prayer. In the margin of the manuscript we read: "*Nota* that M. Vincent wanted to encourage, as may easily be believed, M. Philippe Le Vacher who was on the point of returning to Algiers."

<sup>80</sup> Abelly, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 183-184.

<sup>81</sup> VI, p. 442.

of November 23, 1657):<sup>82</sup> “These consulates are a great burden on the Company because of the expenditures we must make over and above their revenue in order to support them.”

But the Saint maintained his Missionaries even in very difficult circumstances because of his point of view:<sup>83</sup>

Even though no other good were to come about from these mission stations than that of having the beauty of our holy religion seen by that wretched land . . . I think the men and the money would be well employed.

## B. Madagascar

While discussing Saint Vincent and the foreign missions, we wish to reconstruct here the history of the mission of Madagascar as the Saint lived the events. Therefore, we shall not speak of the works of the Missionaries themselves. We think that Collet<sup>84</sup> has summed up well the relationship between M. Vincent and the mission of that island:

Since this mission cost him dearly, and since, more than any other, it made manifest his patience, his great heart, his constant submission to every wish of God, we cannot look upon it as foreign in relation to him. It is true that his priests put a great deal of themselves into this mission, but we can say that he put in even more.

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<sup>82</sup> Filesi, *op. cit.*, wrote: “ma Propaganda si limitò, in realtà, a tollerare l’iniziativa senza darle peraltro mai un avallo ufficiale.” Saint Vincent was prepared to resell the consulate (V, p. 364; VI, pp. 300, 305, 350), but the Duchess d’Aiguillon was opposed to this (VI, p. 315; VII, p. 248) fearing “consuls with outside interests who are governed by other principles than those of charity and the public good.”

<sup>83</sup> VII, p. 117. The Superior of Marseilles had written his reasons for giving up the works in Barbary.

<sup>84</sup> Collet, *op. cit.*, I, p. 435.

On March 22, 1648, the Saint wrote: <sup>85</sup>

And now the Nuncio (Nicolas Bagni), by the authority of the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith of which our Holy Father the Pope is the head, has chosen the Company to go serve God on Saint Lawrence Island, otherwise called Madagascar.<sup>86</sup>

The first Missionaries to set out were Charles Nacquart (born in 1617) and Nicolas Gondrée (born in 1620). They embarked on May 21, 1648 and arrived in Madagascar the following December 4. In the month of October 1650,<sup>87</sup> M. Vincent received the news of M. Gondrée's death (May 26, 1649).

A new departure took place only in 1654.<sup>88</sup> The voyage of François Mousnier (born in 1625) and of Toussaint Bourdaise (born in 1618) lasted from March 8 until August 16, 1654.

They no longer found any confrere in Madagascar. In June 1655,<sup>89</sup> M. Vincent learned of M. Nacquart's death (May 29, 1650).

Three new Missionaries departed: Mathurin de Belleville (born in 1627), Nicolas Prévost (born in 1612)

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<sup>85</sup> III, pp. 278-279.

<sup>86</sup> In actual fact, the Madagascar mission was given by the Propaganda to the Disalced Carmelites (XIII, p. 317) who afterwards gave up this mission (III, p. 279, note 4). Cf. Louis Jadin, *L'oeuvre missionnaire en Afrique noire*; B. Madagascar, in *Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide Memoria Rerum*, vol. I/2, pp. 515-545.

<sup>87</sup> Coste, *M. Vincent*, II, p. 257.

<sup>88</sup> The plan to have a boat leave in 1651 was not realized. Saint Vincent was not able to carry out the Propaganda's suggestion to have the Missionaries depart on Dutch or Portuguese boats. Cf. His answer to the Cardinal-prefect of the Propaganda, August 16, 1652, IV, pp. 453-455.

<sup>89</sup> *Mémoires de la Congrégation de la Mission*, vol. IX, Madagascar, p. 242.

and Claude Dufour (born in 1618). Their trip lasted from November 29, 1655 until June 13, 1656. In July 1656, Saint Vincent learned of M. Mousnier's death (May 24, 1655).<sup>90</sup>

In 1656 Saint Vincent sent Charles Boussourdec (born in 1609), Francois Herbron (born in 1617) and Brother Christophe Delaunay (born in 1634) to Madagascar, but the vessel was shipwrecked in the harbor of Saint-Nazaire during the night of November 2 to 3.<sup>91</sup>

Once again sad news reached France in the month of August 1657.<sup>92</sup> M. de Belleville had died during the voyage (January 18, 1656), M. Dufour died in Madagascar (August 18, 1656), and M. Prevost in September of the same year. The conferences on the virtues of these confreres were held at Saint-Lazare in the months of September and October, 1657.<sup>93</sup>

M. Vincent never knew with certainty whether M. Bourdaise was alive. In actual fact, he had died on June 25, 1657. On November 11, 1658 Saint Vincent uttered these dramatic words:<sup>94</sup>

M. Bourdaise, my brother, M. Bourdaise who is so far away and very much alone, and who, as you are aware, has engendered for Jesus Christ, with so much difficulty and care, a great number of the poor people of the country where he is, let us pray also for him. M. Bourdaise, are you still alive or not? If you are, may God be pleased to preserve your life!

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<sup>90</sup>Coste, *M. Vincent*, II, p. 281.

<sup>91</sup>XI, p. 372 ff.

<sup>92</sup>XI, pp. 414-416; 417-425.

<sup>93</sup>XII, p. 476.

<sup>94</sup>XII, p. 69.

On March 14, 1658, a new group of Missionaries set sail for Madagascar: Charles Le Blanc (born in 1625), Marand Ignace Arnoul (born in 1628), Pasquier de Fontaines (born in 1630), and Brother Christophe Delaunay (2nd time).<sup>95</sup>

A storm obliged the captain to dock in Lisbon. After the departure, the vessel was attacked by a Spanish warship and the crew along with the Missionaries were taken to Spain.<sup>96</sup> Saint Vincent was filled with compassion for his confreres. He wrote on August 25, 1658:<sup>97</sup>

I beg you above all, Gentlemen, to get a good rest and recover your health after having suffered so many hardships, and do not spare anything in that regard. Then come home at an easy pace. It will give me inexpressible joy to see you again and to embrace you.

But the Superior of Saintes, Louis Rivet, did not have the same compassion for Brother Delaunay. Saint Vincent gives him a strong reprimand on the same August 25.<sup>98</sup>

I beg you to clothe our Brother Christophe. *Mon Dieu!* Monsieur, why did you not do so at the moment he arrived! You saw his need, you were aware that he was our brother and that you would please us, and yet you left him with his rags. . . . It is to be desired, Monsieur, that you have a little charity for those of the Company who are passing through. . . . when they are destitute of all things as those men are.

In 1659, a new embarkation was considered, but the departure was postponed. Finally, the Missionaries were

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<sup>95</sup> In his letters of March 16, 1658 (VII, p. 108) and of March 22 (VII, p. 110) Saint Vincent speaks of two coadjutor brothers, but nowhere in his correspondence do we find a name.

<sup>96</sup> VII, pp. 196, 198.

<sup>97</sup> VII, p. 243.

<sup>98</sup>  
VII, p. 244.

able to leave on January 18, 1660. There were Pierre Daverout (2nd time), François Feydin (born in 1620), Pasquier de Fontaines (2nd time), Nicolas Etienne (born in 1634), and Brother Philippe Patte (born in 1620), an excellent surgeon. The Missionaries did not reach Madagascar; after a sojourn of some months at the Cape of Good Hope, they returned to Europe by way of Holland and arrived in Paris on July 20, 1661.<sup>99</sup> But by then Saint Vincent had died. However, this time again, affliction had no mercy on Saint Vincent. He had been informed that M. Etienne had drowned while going by launch to the place of embarkation. The Saint had spoken of it only to three confreres in secret so as to better prepare the others for the sad news. Another Missionary was on the point of leaving Saint-Lazare to go embark when some letters arrived from M. Etienne proving that he was still alive.<sup>100</sup> This time the Saint was spared the heartache.

Saint Vincent's attitude in the midst of all these trials is found especially in the conferences of November 15, 1656,<sup>101</sup> and of August 25 and 30, 1657.<sup>102</sup> Abelly speaks of this situation:<sup>102a</sup>

Certainly, after all these difficult trials, there was some reason to doubt whether God wanted to make use of him and his men on this terribly distant mission; and it seemed a foolhardy enterprise to wish to pursue it further since the conduct of Divine Providence appeared so

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<sup>99</sup>Cf. "Nicolas Estienne, Préfet apostolique de Madagascar (1663-1664)," *Revue d'Histoire des Missions*, 1936 (13), 82-138. This article of F. Combaluzier and C. Verwoerd gives some very interesting documents.

<sup>100</sup>Abelly, III, pp. 426-428.

<sup>101</sup>Coste, XI, p. 376.

<sup>102</sup>*Ibid.*, XI, pp. 414, 417.

<sup>102a</sup>Abelly, II, pp. 236-237.



opposed to it. This was also the opinion of some of his friends who followed the light of human prudence more than was expedient in order to succeed in apostolic works.

We do not agree with Abelly's accusing these friends of "human prudence." Objectively speaking, there was reason to give up the mission because of the lack, for example, of boats going regularly to Madagascar. Were there confreres among the friends mentioned by Abelly? The attitude of the Superior in Saintes toward Brother Christophe is not very reassuring.

In 1656 Saint Vincent is unwilling to believe that the candidates for this mission "are acting like milksops now because a ship has been lost."

But in 1657 he says (and we see his true attitude in these circumstances):

Someone from this Company will perhaps say that we must give up Madagascar. Flesh and blood will say that, that we must not send anyone there anymore, but I am certain that the Spirit speaks otherwise.

What was the Saint's motivation? Let us see: What! Gentlemen, shall we leave our good M. Bourdaise there all alone?" He could be recalled from Madagascar, but M. Vincent does not think of that because in the case of Madagascar there is a call from God.

First of all, Saint Vincent recognized a true missionary call to this island for his confreres: "It is not flesh and blood, as you may well believe, which have brought them to risk their lives as they have done." And later:

Now as for knowing whether the Company has a vocation from God for that place, whether it has been called there, well, Gentlemen, we must not doubt it, for we were not thinking of Madagascar when they came to suggest it to us.

This is a constant line of thinking in the spirituality of the Saint: I did not think of it, it is God who did so. And as on other occasions,<sup>103</sup> M. Vincent recounted the sequence of events.

In the existing circumstances he adores the Will of God, recognizing “that the ways of God are incomprehensible and hidden to the eyes of men.” But the Saint does not hesitate to give expression to human doubts:

Well, Lord, it seemed that you wanted to establish your kingdom in those far-off countries, in the souls of those poor infidels, and yet you allow what seemed destined to contribute to this to be destroyed and lost in port.

And again: “And how is it, therefore, that He thus ruins, so it seems, what could contribute to it? No, no, do not think that!”

For the rest, Saint Vincent cites in these conferences examples drawn from Holy Scripture and from the history of the Church to corroborate his point of view. He also speaks about what we have called in this article his missionary motivation.

However, it must be said that at least the Missionaries Mousnier and Prévost were very imprudent in the matter of health. M. Bourdaise wrote to Saint Vincent:<sup>104</sup>

I shall tell you frankly that, although I respect the virtue, the motives and the love of God which made them act this way, there were excesses. They would cross over streams while fully dressed, and after enduring the rain, they would not change their clothing. They used to perform great austerities and would sometimes eat only once a day. If they had moderated their zeal a little, they

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<sup>103</sup>Coste, IX, pp. 113-114, 208-209.

<sup>104</sup>VI, p. 192; cf. VIII, p. 160.

would still be full of life and helping to convert our poor Indians (VI, p. 192).

Saint Vincent used to give his Missionaries directives and they would ask his advice.<sup>105</sup> On their part, they furnished information which was important for making the work begun succeed as well as possible and for preserving the health of those sent.<sup>106</sup> It is a pity that we do not know all the directives of Saint Vincent. What did he think of the colonial struggles carried on by the French in Madagascar?<sup>107</sup> What we have left of his advices gives, nonetheless, a substantial idea of his missionary thinking. Above all, he inculcates a high idea of the missionary vocation,<sup>108</sup> "a vocation as great and adorable as that of the greatest apostles and saints of God's Church."

For his Missionaries he desires: humility, abandonment, generosity, great courage, faith, charity, zeal, patience, respect, poverty, concern for others, discretion, upright morals, and a great desire to be consumed entirely for God.

Again he wrote:<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> III, p. 580; V, p. 298.

<sup>106</sup> V, p. 291.

<sup>107</sup> III, p. 581, Nacquart to Saint Vincent: "How shall I act with regard to these wretched wars which I discuss with these gentlemen? People here say that they will find many pretexts for them both with regard to the past and to the future, and I know well that these can only be false and capable of destroying the work of God and losing salvation for those who continue them. If it is done, it is for the sake of a little merchandise.

<sup>108</sup> III, p. 279.

<sup>109</sup> V, p. 456. We think this letter is indeed written to a missionary in Madagascar. The words "That is why you gave yourself to Him and exposed yourself to the danger of a long voyage" apply well to this mission. The exhortations to patience are also very much in keeping with the concrete situation in Madagascar.

Now in order to begin well and to succeed, remember to act in the spirit of our Lord, to unite your actions to His, and to give them an end quite noble and quite divine by dedicating them to His greatest glory.

And the Saint adds a piece of advice well adapted to the situation of the mission in Madagascar:

God sometimes hides from His servants the fruits of their labors for very just reasons, but He brings great fruit from them, nonetheless. ...This consideration ought to keep your heart very much at ease and raised up to God in the confidence that everything will be well even though it seems just the opposite.

Saint Vincent also gives directives with regard to method. The truths of faith must be explained by reasoning taken from nature, they must be explained by means of large pictures. He foresees that his Missionaries will have to split up into several posts, so therefore, they need to see each other as often as possible. He also regulates correspondence with France — each year they are to write and they shall receive news of the Company.

Hard experience makes him tell his Missionaries who are setting out in 1655:<sup>110</sup>

You know that your health will be in danger in that new climate until you get a little used to it; that is why I am warning you not to expose yourself to the sun and not to apply yourself for some time to any task except the study of the language. Act as if you have become children and are learning to speak, and in that spirit, allow yourselves to be governed by Monsieur (Mousnier).

He wants his Missionaries to follow in all things the usage of the Council of Trent and to use the Roman Ritual for everything.

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<sup>110</sup>V, p. 434.

M. Vincent responded to the needs the Missionaries had pointed out to him. We see this in 1659 when he sent Brother Patte who was a surgeon. He gives him instructions which are very "ecumenical," as we say today, for the exercise of his service:<sup>111</sup>

It is to be hoped, that in the service you render to God on the boat, you will make no exception of persons nor allow any discrimination to show between Catholics and Huguenots, so that the latter may know that you love them in God.

The missionaries had asked for the Daughters of Charity, but Saint Vincent did not send them.<sup>112</sup>

In France itself Saint Vincent labored for his Missionaries. He received into his Company a former colonist from Madagascar. He had his Community pray for the Missionaries,<sup>113</sup> gave it news about the missions, had copies made of the accounts received from Madagascar (but he refused to have them printed),<sup>114</sup> and passed them on to his confreres.<sup>115</sup> Like a true diplomat, he tried to stay on good terms with the Gentlemen of the Company and the Duke de la Meilleraye,<sup>116</sup> so that he could

<sup>111</sup>VIII, p. 182.

<sup>112</sup>III, pp. 583-584; V, pp. 278, 300; XI, p. 564; X, p. 102.

<sup>113</sup>For example, January 30, 1654, XII, p. 465.

<sup>114</sup>VI, pp. 31, 177, 592.

<sup>115</sup>VI, pp. 440-444, 460. To Louis de Chandénier the Saint wrote (VI, p. 34): "Here is a brief account from M. Bourdais which does not deserve your taking the trouble to read it; it savors too greatly of a poor Missionary's simplicity."

<sup>116</sup>With regard to the rivalries between the Society of the Orient, which was established in 1642 and became the Sébastien Cazel Company in 1653, and the Marshall de la Meilleraye, see the *Mémoires*, vol. IX, Madagascar, passim. In order to safeguard the possibility of sending Missionaries, Saint Vincent was obliged to side

continue to send his Missionaries to Madagascar.

Using pictures, Saint Vincent himself had taught the faith to a young Malagasy about twenty years old.<sup>117</sup> He was baptized by the Nuncio on March 22, 1648.

In August 1655, Saint Vincent welcomed at Saint-Lazare four Malagasies who had been brought to France by de Flacourt. Three had already been baptized by Monsieur Nacquart. The eldest, Louis, who was about sixteen years old, was treated like one of the brothers.<sup>118</sup> Saint Vincent wanted to make good Christians of them saying<sup>119</sup> “that it would take only those four to convert their whole country.”

That is why Saint Vincent enjoined his Communities to give them good example. He shielded the Malagasies from curiosity and asked “that they not be made a pastime.”

Louis became “wonderfully” converted.<sup>120</sup> He was to serve as a brother, as an interpreter, and even as a catechist for the Missionaries.<sup>121</sup> He embarked in 1658, but we already know about the misfortune of that voyage. After his return to France, Louis was not welcomed by the Superior of Saintes and Saint Vincent was afraid that,<sup>122</sup> “at the time of that rebuff, he (Louis) has decided to leave us.”

At the end of this section we must mention that de

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with the Marshall. See Coste XIV under the words: “Indes Orientales, Compagnie des Indes Orientales,” and “La Meilleraye.” As for the sending of Capuchins on La Meilleraye’s ships, see: Louis, Jadin, *op. cit.*, pp. 535-536.

<sup>117</sup>III, p. 283.

<sup>118</sup>VII, p. 244.

<sup>119</sup>Repetition of prayer of August 24, 1656, XI, pp. 297-299.

<sup>120</sup>VII, p. 75.

<sup>121</sup>VII, p. 86.

<sup>122</sup>VII, p. 245.

Flacourt wrote a dedication addressed to Saint Vincent in his work *Dictionnaire de la langue de Madagascar* which was published in 1658.<sup>123</sup>

From a letter of January 12, 1658 we also know that the mission of Madagascar had required up to this time an expenditure of seven or eight thousand *livres*.<sup>124</sup>

## V. – WHAT THE SAINT DID FOR OTHER MISSIONS

As Abelly relates, Missionaries from various missions used to visit Saint-Lazare to see Saint Vincent. We may suppose that they also spoke to him about their financial necessities. With all his simplicity, M. Vincent was a man of influence, a man acquainted with potential benefactors.

In his correspondence we find a letter to Mother Catherine Vironceau, Superioress of the Hotel-Dieu of Quebec.<sup>125</sup> She had asked him for assistance because of losses brought on by the Iroquois. Moreover, the revenue from the coaches in France had diminished considerably. Saint Vincent replies that there is much misery in France: the provinces are in a state of complete desolation

. . .to which a number of charitable people in Paris are trying to bring some assistance, contributing their care and their alms to keep the people from dying of poverty. But, since these alms are not adequate, it would be useless to speak to them about the needs of Canada.

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<sup>123</sup>XIII, p. 168; de Flacourt had already published: *Petit catéchisme avec les prières du matin et du soir, que les Missionnaires font et enseignent aux néophytes et catéchumenes de l'isle de Madagascar, le tout en français et en cette langue*, Paris, 1657, 112 pp. F. Froidevaux assumes that M. Nacquart is its author in *Les Lazaristes à Madagascar au XVII esiecle*, Paris, 1903, p. 65.

<sup>124</sup>VII, p. 46.

<sup>125</sup>IV, p. 370; cf. XIII, p. 849.

We also find a letter of October 31, 1658, written to Father Sylvestre de Saint-Aignan, a Capuchin in Lebanon.<sup>126</sup> He was trying to find 12,000 *écus* to have the Maronite Abou Naufel named Governor of Lebanon by the Sultan. Saint Vincent points out to him that his account is too long for the mighty<sup>127</sup> “who, because they have a great number of business matters, balk at accounts that detain them a long time.”

And then the Saint does not favor the idea because of the instability of Turkish functionaries: “A considerable sum would be spent without much fruit.”

Nevertheless, Saint Vincent does not wish to excuse himself from being of service in this plan. Collet relates<sup>128</sup> that the matter was discussed at a meeting of the Ladies of Charity and the “Capuchin, delighted with success of his negotiations, left with letters of exchange by which he obtained the amount he needed to allow his brothers in Jesus Christ to breathe more freely.”

Saint Vincent took care of Lebanon another time. Perhaps as a member of the Council of Conscience, he, along with Jacques Charton, Penitentiary of Paris and likewise a member of the Council, had to make peace between the Capuchins and the Franciscans. They were having a dispute over the consular chapel of Sidon. An agreement was signed at Saint-Lazare on January 18, 1648.<sup>129</sup>

Saint Vincent took an interest in Tonkin and Cochin China. In July 1653, along with some other people, he signed a petition to Innocent X asking for the creation of bishops *in partibus* in those regions.<sup>130</sup> A petition of the

<sup>126</sup>VII, p. 325; De Vaumas, *op. cit.*, p. 341-342.

<sup>127</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup>Collet, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-63.

<sup>129</sup>De Vaumas, *op. cit.*, pp. 324-325.

<sup>130</sup>Coste, II, p. 523.



same tenor was sent to the Propaganda in September 1652.<sup>131</sup> During the negotiations, Pallu was lodged at the house of the Lazarists in Rome<sup>132</sup> and Lambert de la Motte made his retreat at Saint-Lazare.<sup>133</sup>

Saint Vincent worked in a special way for Canada by judging the vocation of a number of people for that country. In 1638, Marie Madeleine de Chauvigny, Madame de la Peltrie, consulted him.<sup>134</sup> Saint Vincent himself told the Daughters of Charity on June 9, 1658:<sup>135</sup>

About five years ago, a lady came to see me about her desire to go to Canada. At first I found the idea difficult, considering the person's rank; but seeing from her perseverance that her call was from God, I advised her to follow it. She went and is still there doing much good.

Thus, both for his confreres and for others, Saint Vincent was a support in their missionary vocation.

Panningen, September 27, 1977.




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<sup>131</sup>V, p. 11.

<sup>132</sup>VI, p. 593.

<sup>133</sup>Coste, *M. Vincent*, III, p. 330; VI, p. 538.

<sup>134</sup>De Vaumas, P. 167. L. Chapot, *Histoire de la vénérable Mère de l'Incarnation*, Paris, 1892, I, p. 312; *Abrégé de la vie du bienheureux Vincent de Paul*, 3rd ed., Paris, 1733, p. 29, quoted in Pémartin, *Lettres et Conférences de Saint Vincent de Paul*, vol. XI, Paris, 1888, p. 90, no. 2. We also find there the name of Marie de l'Incarnation herself who doubtless had been in contact with Saint Vincent concerning her vocation.

<sup>135</sup>X, p. 508.