



SAINT VINCENT de PAUL
Hunter of Souls

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By

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Cover art: Oil on Canvas “Saint Vincent de Paul” in choir dress (Cassock and Surplice) by Simon Francois de Tours (1606 - 1671). It was completed in Saint Vincent’s lifetime and is in the Public Domain. *



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SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL

Hunter of Souls

Vincent was the third child in the family of six children. He had three brothers and two sisters. Vincent was born in the village (called Pouy at the time) and baptized in the village church on the same day of his birth (April 24, 1581). His father owned a small property. He kept cattle and pigs and toiled to persuade the poor land to grow vegetables, millet, and grapes to supply his growing family. Vincent shared his portion of the labors according to his powers. Like most small boys in the country, he was put to minding the cattle as they grazed over the district and to tending and feeding the pigs.

His father and mother realized his quick and keen intelligence and hoped to give him a better opportunity in life than they themselves had had. Therefore, when he was about 14, he was sent to board in a college kept by the Franciscan Fathers at Dax. During his two years there, he could walk home to see his family often and they were proud of his progress. He loved his family but, at this age, he had developed a little snobbery, for he tells us how ashamed he was to be seen on the street with his father "because he was badly dressed and a little lame." On one occasion when his father called to see him at the college, Vincent refused to meet him "because he was a poor peasant." Vincent was regarded by the Friars as an unusually bright student so they recommended him to a local lawyer, de Commet, as a tutor for de Commet's sons, which helped Vincent pay his own way at college.

VOCATION TO THE PRIESTHOOD

Soon, Vincent strongly felt his vocation to be a priest. Seeing Vincent's piety, charity, and holy life, his lawyer patron saw and encouraged the idea. This was in the days before seminaries, so in the late summer of 1597 he went to Toulouse to take up his theological studies among the several thousands of other students of various faculties at the university. It was a seven-year course and costly. The sale of a pair of bullocks by his father gave him a start but he decided to fend for himself. He opened a small academy for boys some miles from the city and, having built it up, transferred it to Toulouse, where he was able to continue his studies whilst not neglecting his pupils. Steadily he approached his priesthood, associating intense work with keen piety, and was ordained on September 23, 1600. He was young, but the practice of early ordination was in vogue in France at that time. He still intended to continue as a student and his capacity, his, practical judgment, and his university education offered him an opportunity to earn a livelihood. Income from investments or rent from land or property was the usual source of benefices and bestowing of these benefices was, in some measure, in the hands of the bishops. Upon the recommendation of Monsieur de Commet, Vincent was promised one parish and its revenues in his native diocese. The gift was challenged and he withdrew his claim, returning to his studies and his boarding school. In 1604, he obtained his bachelorship in theology, making the future look bright. His father had died a few years earlier, so Vincent's heart was now fixed on being able to do something for his mother and assisting the younger ones of the

family, as well as on making sure of his own financial state. He seemed caught up in the stream of the ambition of the day. He was making his way by reason of his school and had friends so powerful that, in spite of his youth, he had some hope of being made a bishop, which would have guaranteed his revenues and his mother's welfare. He was in great need of money at this time (the reason for which we do not know) when he learned that a good woman in Toulouse had died making her will in his favor. It was a windfall and he decided to grasp it at once and go and sell the property. A debtor to the estate fled to Marseilles where Vincent pursued him and recovered the debt. When a friend offered him a passage of part of the return journey by sea, he accepted to save expenses and, in July 1605, set sail across the Gulf of Lyons for Narbonne.

CAPTIVITY IN AFRICA

This was the beginning of a changing, restless, patchwork period of twenty years of his life. The ship was captured after a fight by Turkish pirates and Vincent received a wound in the leg. The crew and Vincent were taken to Tunis to be sold in the slave market. He describes the sale, "After stripping us quite naked, they handed out to each a pair of breeches, a linen vest, and a small cap and then marched us up and down the streets. When they had taken us around the town five or six times, with a chain about our necks, they brought us back to the ship so the merchants might come and see who were able to eat well and who were not. They were also able to show that our wounds were not grievous. When this was over, they brought us back to the market place where the buyers came to see us. The buyers acted just like people who come to the sale of a horse or an ox, making us open our mouths to see our teeth, feeling our sides, examining our wounds, making us walk, trot, and run, making us carry weights and wrestle to show our strength, with a thousand other brutalities as well." His first owner was a fisherman, but Vincent was a bad sailor so he was soon sold to an old alchemist, for whom he fed a dozen furnaces, and who taught him some medical secrets and some tricks and amusements of his art. Vincent toiled hard, but this was little compared to the outlook for the young priest, cast among Mohammedans trying constantly to pervert him, with no sign of redemption from a future of lifelong servitude. But, he kept his faith and confidence in God and trusted to the Blessed Mother. He wrote later, "God always gave me a firm conviction that I should escape, by reason of the unceasing prayers I offered to Him and to the Virgin Mary, through whose sole intercession I believe I was set free." After a year of slavery he was re-sold to a Frenchman who, after being previously captured had renounced his faith and gained his liberty. Vincent worked in the Frenchman's fields on the mountainside and, whilst singing psalms and hymns in his rich clear voice, he attracted the notice of one of his French master's wives. She questioned him more about his faith, and was so pleased with what he told that she reproached her renegade husband for having deserted his religion. He was touched by grace through her words and, since to return openly to his faith would mean certain death, the next day told Vincent that they must make a plan to escape to France.

RETURN TO FRANCE

It was ten months before they boarded a little skiff and landed in the south of France in 1607. At Avignon the apostate was publicly absolved and entered the community. Vincent now wrote home to his mother to explain his two years silence and to comfort her after his absence. He also wrote to one of his former pupils, a de Commet, to tell of God's Providence over him in his exile. The Pope's Vice- Legate at Avignon kept Vincent with him as a guest and promised to help him restore his position by procuring a benefice for him. On account of the tricks and magical effects learnt from the old Turk and reproduced by Vincent, the Vice-Legate took him to Rome with him, much as a showman might, or lest anyone else should get these amusing secrets from him. Vincent spent several months in the Eternal City, reviewed his Theology, made friends of some important people, made his pilgrimages to the hallowed spots of the City of Peter, and seeing the solidity and the supernatural character of the Church, burnished up his faith into the brightness and clearness that remained with him for life. Writing later to one of his priests at Rome he says, "What a consolation it was to me to find myself in that city, the mistress of Christendom, the dwelling of the Head of the Church militant, the spot where lie the bodies of Saint Paul and of so many other martyrs and holy persons, who in past times have shed their blood and spent their lives for Jesus Christ. How happy I considered myself to be in treading the very streets so many saints had trodden. It was a consolation which affected me even to tears."

RESIDENCE IN PARIS

At the end of 1608, Vincent went for the first time to Paris. He must have had some special reason to make this change of abode instead of returning to his diocese or home to his people. Perhaps he was in Paris on a Papal mission to King Henry IV, which would have appealed to his desire to get ahead in high places, or maybe he wished to begin life anew in new surroundings. At any rate, in 1610, a letter to his mother shows him in great hopes of advancement and prosperity and of being able to retire and spend the rest of his days (he was only thirty) near her. He was soon appointed as one of the chaplains of the Queen, Marguerite of Valois, and charged with distribution of her magnificent alms. He was also receiving a benefice of £300 a year. Many financial obligations were attached to it, so it was not all it seemed; but the position gave him contact with notable people at the Court and in Paris and it was a beginning of security for himself and his mother.

In his duty as "almoner," Vincent was also contacting his future inheritance in the person of the sick, suffering, and destitute, towards whom his heart was always drawn. Besides his charitable deeds, he spent a lot of time in prayer in the Royal Chapel, in the splendid church of Saint Louis, the Sainte Chapelle, and in Notre Dame Cathedral, where without notice he could freely indulge his love for the presence of God and his devotion to Mary. He had occasion too, for some great acts of virtue. Accused of theft by his roommate, Vincent bore the injustice silently, though his character was being attacked and damaged among his friends, until suspicion was cleared by the confession of the guilty party six years later. Also, out of compassion for a friend who had helped him and was

now in grievous torment and sickness with doubts about his faith, Vincent, after long prayer, offered himself to God as a victim to undergo this trial in his stead. The sick man felt his doubts vanish, but darkness came over Vincent. He fought calmly and stood firm against the assaults of doubt, but was released only on deciding that he would devote his life to the poor. A big hospital of the Brothers of Saint John of God was near his dwelling and, as chaplain to the Queen, he had entry there and means to disburse. He handed over a gift of about £3000, which he had received in 1611, to the hospital authorities—a sign that his anxiety about finances had now been supplanted by charity for the suffering people of Christ. He had found friend, confessor, and guide in Father Peter de Berulle, who, in 1611, founded the French Oratorian Congregation. Under Father de Berulle's direction, Vincent's life was planned for the next period of years.

PARISH PRIEST OF CLICHY

One of the first members of the new Oratory was the Parish Priest of Clichy, who resigned his parish in favor of Vincent on advice of Father de Berulle. The extensive district was on the border of the city, yet it really was a country parish. The dilapidated church that Vincent now took as his chief care served six hundred parishioners. Vincent began to restore the church, preached, and heard confessions diligently, caring for the sick and afflicted, which gained the goodwill of all. He never forgot the goodness of his people. "When I was a country parish priest," he said years later, "my people were good folk. I used to say to myself, 'How fortunate you are to have such good people.'" "They came to church and went to confession. The Pope himself is not as happy as a parish priest in the midst of such kind-hearted people. I listened with admiration to those peasants singing the psalms and never missing a note." The Baptismal Font, the Pulpit, and Cross of Vincent are still in use in the old church, which is now attached to the beautiful big church of Saint Vincent in the present crowded workingman's suburb of Clichy.

CHAPLAIN AND TUTOR FOR THE NOBILITY

Vincent worked here only for a year when, in 1613, his adviser, Father de Berulle, directed him to change his occupation. He was to be a tutor to the children of Philip de Gondi. An administrator was chosen and installed to care for the parish and, amid the sorrow and tears of his flock, in obedience, Vincent set out for his new home with his few belongings on a handcart.

The de Gondi family had been high officers of the kingdom for a century and the Bishopric of Paris had been in their family for over fifty years. Peter, Henry, and John Francis held the Bishopric in turn and Henry was Bishop at the time Vincent was called to Paris to the home of the Bishop's brother Philip, a Count, Marquis, Baron, Admiral of the Fleet, and the King's Lieutenant-General. Vincent was thus brought back among the nobility. It was a

mark of the high esteem felt for him that he was chosen for the education of the children of such a notable family, though it must have amused him, a son of the poor from the remote and barren country districts, to be moving and living in such circles. Here he came to know many of the important people of the day. Though he was not interested in their patronage now, later on he would know where to turn for help. Following a strict order of the day, his room was a monk's cell for reading and meditation in his free time. There he drew the fervor and strength that urged him in his activities. God's destiny for him was being slowly worked out in these vagaries of his earlier life. The lady of the house was a pious and virtuous, generous and determined noblewoman. She had one son of eleven, another of two, and the baby, John Francis Paul, all naturally destined for high stations in life. The eldest was to be Vincent's charge for the next four years. Besides the family, the household staff was also under his spiritual care for instruction, Mass, and confession. He was also still able to take some part in the welfare of his poor of Clichy. His taste for pastoral work had inclined him definitely to this side of the apostolate and whenever the de Gondi family went to their country houses Vincent would go with them and spend the time in the spiritual concerns of the villages. Countess de Gondi aided him and the two of them visited the sick and gave alms to the needy. Near Folleville, they called to see a dying man. After Vincent had heard the sick man's confession, the sick man sent for Madame de Gondi and said, "I should have been damned," he told her, "but for the general confession I made at the request of your chaplain, because of the many grave sins I never before dared to confess." Madame was shocked and amazed. She thought, "If this could be true of a man so well esteemed in the neighborhood, how many others may be in a similar state?" She thought long and hard about a remedy and asked Vincent to preach about general confessions. The sermon was planned for January 25, 1617, in the Church at Folleville. The result of the sermon was that all the people came to confession. Vincent continued his instructions to prepare the people for the sacraments, but the crowds were beyond his capacity. Help was obtained from some Jesuit Fathers and together they continued the same good work for other nearby villages. Madame de Gondi established a fund of £4000 to guarantee a repetition of these missions in the country villages and towns, but no one could be found to undertake the missions, so it was left for Vincent to arrange them when and where possible.

PARISH PRIEST AGAIN

This short term of his ministry among the people brought him again to consider his position. As a priest, his time was claimed by one family yet how many other families were in dire need of his assistance. What about his promise to God to devote himself to the poor and needy? He placed his difficulty before his director, Father de Berulle, and in a few months left the de Gondi Mansion under the Oratorian's instructions to care for a small parish at Chatillon in the Archdiocese of Lyons. This little town was very low spiritually and uncared for by the local clergy. Calvinism was making rapid progress there. Vincent reformed the place by his zeal and fervor, by his example and preaching. Vincent's reform began with the clergy and converted many heretics because of his kind ways. But, Madame de Gondi had missed him. She lamented her loss and left no stone unturned to have him back believing the salvation of her household, of the thousands of people

dwelling on her rented properties, her husband, her children, and, above all, her own, depended on Vincent's presence in her house. She could neither eat nor sleep and wept day and night. She wrote to Father de Berulle and was so insistent that, acting as the Finger of Providence, Father de Berulle sent Vincent back--to the joy of the heretics and the grief of the good parishioners of Chatillon. Knowing his desire for active work, Madame de Gondi decided to placate him and altered his status from tutor to supervisor of the children's education, allowed him freedom to go about her estates among her 8,000 tenants for missions and other good works—good works in which she co-operated with her activity and her money. Vincent promised to stay with her until her death, resigned his parish, and was domiciled again in Paris at Christmas of 1617. It seemed he was being used as a plaything by the Hand of God, being thrown about, back and forth, without any permanent position, devoting his time and talents as occasion offered.

THE CONFRATERNITY OF CHARITY

Whilst in his parish of Chatillon, Vincent had started a Confraternity of Charity for Women. Asked one Sunday to say a word in his sermon on behalf of a sick and helpless family, Vincent spoke feelingly of their plight and of the divine charity it would be to aid them. Going to call on them himself in the afternoon, he found a procession of people coming and going. At the house itself, he found a crowd of willing helpers with loads of food. In the situation, Vincent saw need for order and discretion, which resulted in the Confraternity of Charity. Founded on the feast of the Immaculate Conception and after three months of practical experimentation, it was decided that Our Lord Himself was to be its Patron and the Blessed Virgin was to be its patroness. Vincent framed all the rules, the religious duties of the members, the means to virtue for the members, the details of how to approach the sick, how to serve them, how to fix up their trays, what to prepare for them, the recipes to use, what to say to them, how to console them, and how to prepare them for the sacraments. It was Vincent's first attempt at enlisting the help of lay people in an ordered form, and its results were beyond all expectations.

Now back at the de Gondi affairs. Vincent set up a plan for missions in each town and village of the estates, preaching, catechizing, and hearing confessions. A permanent result of each mission was establishment of the Association of Charity on behalf of the sick and poor. The men folk wished to take a hand also so, in 1620, Vincent made associations for the men. Besides their spiritual duties as set down, the men took care of the poor children, the aged, and the feeble. They found places for those who could work, supplemented the earnings of others, and took full care of the helpless. Boys were lodged, provided with employment, and taught the trades of the factories run by the Association of Charity. Their resources were obtained by gifts and collections, as well as from the sale of the cattle and of the fleeces of sheep owned by the association and farmed out to graze on different holdings. For a time some of these groups were mixed but experience showed that men and women could not work together. It was these associations that inspired Frederic Ozanam's society of charity in the nineteenth century—the Saint Vincent de Paul Society. Both men's and women's Associations fostered the spiritual life of the members and their contacts and procured some remedy to the needs of the poor and sick. Vincent's constant

urging, his supervision, and his visitation of the branches occupied his time and gave him the pleasure of spending himself for the needy. He was no longer thinking of making his way or of retiring on a good income. Instead, he was being led along the path Providence had laid out for him to give him the knowledge and experience required for the larger undertakings ahead of him.

CHAPLAIN-GENERAL OF THE FLEET

In his search for those in distress, Vincent looked at the prisoners of Paris. Their horrible condition moved Vincent to tears and he begged the authorities for improvement. To see the spiritual and temporal betterment of the convicts became his urgent charge, for which he enlisted the aid of clerics and laity with undreamt-of results.

Vincent was especially interested in those men condemned to punishment by serving at the oars of the King's Navy Galleys. His present patron, Philip de Gondi, was the General of the Galleys, so Vincent was appointed Chaplain-General, which carried with it the rank of an officer in the Mediterranean Fleet. This gave him free access to the men and supervision of the other chaplains. Thus, he was able to conduct missions on the boats at Marseilles and Bordeaux, to regulate the order, to offer Mass and the sacraments, as well as to use great influence for the better treatment of the convicts. A well-known picture represents Vincent being leg-ironed with the ball and chain to take the place of one of these prisoners in the ship and to allow the prisoner to escape to his needy wife and family. Certainly, Vincent's charity could have caused him to go to such an extreme, for his compassion for these unfortunates was unlimited.

VINCENT VISITS HOME

After one of his missions to the Navy at Bordeaux in 1621, being quite near his home district, Vincent decided, on the advice of friends, to pay a call to his relatives. It was nearly twenty years since he had seen any of them and his return was a grand joy to them and to him. He spent ten days with them. They noted his piety and devotion, his enquiries about their religious life and practice; he told them not to expect any financial help or other help from him, urging them to trust in Providence and to give all their efforts to the saving of their souls. He made a special visit to the church of his Baptism and renewed his Baptismal promises. In a final act of devotion, he went barefoot with a large crowd in pilgrimage to the neighboring village of Buglose, which was then a famous shrine of Our Lady. There he sang Solemn Mass. After the Mass and breakfast together, Vincent bade his people farewell. But he was heartbroken. His tender feelings led him, though now forty years of age, to cry the whole way along to Dax. In his tears, he thought of all the ways he could benefit his people by money, by his influence and by advancing them in the world. These thoughts played upon him for three months afterwards. In prayer, he obtained of God deliverance from this scheming and his over-tender feelings to such a degree that he completely handed over his relations to Divine Providence. Afterwards, he was never of any material help to them beyond once transmitting some money given to him for them; nor did he ever return to see them. God's call to the work appointed would not be refused at the call of the flesh and blood he loved so well.

SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES AND SAINT JANE FRANCES DE CHANTAL

It would seem that Vincent's hands were now full. He had whole districts to provide for spiritually with regular missions, he had the Galley convicts under his care, as well as the supervision of the increasing number of Associations of Charity. He also still had the de Gondi family, Madame and the boys. The second son had been killed by the kick of a horse and the youngest, John Francis Paul, was in line for the Archbishopric of Paris, to succeed his uncle as the second Cardinal de Retz. Then, another office was soon passed on to Vincent.

A few years earlier in Paris, Vincent had met the holy Bishop of Geneva, Francis de Sales. They became firm and close friends, exchanging their plans and consulting on all their great secrets, with an unlimited esteem for one another.

In 1622, Francis de Sales brought a Community of his Visitation Nuns with their saintly foundress, Mother Jane Frances de Chantal, to Paris. Francis asked Vincent to be their Superior and Director, and had him appointed so by the Archbishop of Paris, which settled the matter for Vincent. Francis de Sales died on December 28, 1622 and Mother de Chantal then relied on Vincent in the government of her Community. They saw one another rarely, but their correspondence was frequent until her death in 1641. The holy and intimate union of the three grand saints was shown in the fact that Vincent was given a vision by Almighty God of the souls of his two friends rising to heaven. It is the only miraculous occurrence we find in the life of Saint Vincent. According to his report, there appeared to him a small globe of fire that rose from the earth and proceeded to join in the upper region of the air another larger and brighter globe, both of them then rose higher, entered into and shone resplendently in another globe infinitely greater and brighter. He was told interiorly that the first globe was the soul of Mother de Chantal, the second, that of Francis de Sales and the third, the Divine Essence. Because of the entreaty of the two saints, Vincent retained the guidance of the Paris House of the Visitation until his death, although he was averse to his priests taking up any similar duties, since it impeded their freedom for the work of the missions.

BEGINNINGS OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION

After all these years of changing occupation, of constantly traveling from place to place, of taking a hand as required in so many varied works for neighbors, Providence had given Vincent sufficient experience and advanced him sufficiently in holiness to lead him to his chief undertakings. He was following the ways of His Divine Master, doing the Will of God, as indicated to him and subject to those in authority, seeing Christ Himself in Philip and the Blessed Virgin in Madame de Gondi. Without pomp or show amid the

persons of wealth that he dealt with, Vincent shared the privations of the poor—seeking to preach the Gospel to every creature, to preach the remission of sins, to instruct the ignorant in all that Christ had said. Vincent went about as an apostle—he literally read the Words of Christ, “As often as you did it to one of these My least brethren, you did it to Me,” and in favor of the sick, the needy, and the imprisoned, Vincent gave his time, patience, and charity. He studied the condition of the people, and, as he traveled up and down the Provinces, he learned first-hand the wants of the faithful and the neglect of the shepherds. To relieve this he was content to pray to God and to do his best in his own lowly way to improve matters. He was no firebrand or professional reformer and he did not rush into any evil to show what was at fault and what he could do to remedy it. As a rule, he was forced or led into his various works, waiting or even resisting until he could no longer hold back against the Hand of God that pushed him onwards as he groped step-by-step, creating new works.

He was forty-five years of age when, in 1624, he was induced to begin his Congregation of Priests for Missions. Madame de Gondi still kept her £4000 ready to endow anyone who would take up regular mission work among her tenants and employees. Vincent, as her chaplain, made the offer to one Order after another, but it was constantly refused for a variety of reasons. However, the necessity of the work weighed so heavily upon him that, for want of others, he gave way to the pressure of the de Gondi family and of Philip's brother, the Archbishop of Paris. In 1625 Vincent promised that within a year he would organize a band of six ecclesiastics—zealous, learned, and free to devote themselves to the salvation of the poor country people by preaching, instructing, and providing general confessions, with special care for the de Gondi estates and the convicts, and under the direction of the Hierarchy. Vincent was given possession of an old dilapidated student hostel, the College des Bons Enfants, near the Porte Saint Victorie, for the residence of the new community. The revenue from £11,000, donated by the de Gondi family was to supply their upkeep. According to the contract of April 1625, Madame de Gondi required Vincent to continue to reside in her house. The designs of God, however, soon removed this obstacle (which would have separated the Superior from his companions) by the holy death of Madame de Gondi in June 1625. As Vincent was faithfully beside her, preparing her entrance to heaven, Madame de Gondi consented to his living at the College. The following April, Vincent joined the Oratory to become a priest.

EARLY YEARS OF THE COMMUNITY

When Vincent was in the parish of Clichy in 1612, he had given lessons to a dozen clerics, one of them, Anthony Portail, being lodged in the presbytery. After Anthony Portail's ordination, he had worked with Vincent for the convicts and now, at 33, he was the first and only companion in the College. Helpers were engaged temporarily, and the following year two more priests joined the group. By virtue of a duly registered legal document, these four formed a “Congregation, Company, or Confraternity,” and acquired their legal status in 1627. Opposition from some clerical bodies in Paris was easily overcome by his friend the Archbishop but to make their rights secure, Vincent wanted the

assurance of Papal approval. This was not such an easy matter in distant Rome, and strange to say, the chief opponent was his former guide, Father Peter de Berulle. However, in 1633, his Company was blessed with the authorization of Pope Urban VIII.

Meanwhile, the seat of the Community had been transferred to the northern side of Paris, to Saint Lazare. This property was a hundred and twenty acres with large scattered buildings housing a priory of Augustinian monks. The Prior's offer of such property caused Vincent in his humility to tremble as it was such a big estate for his small needs. After the persuasion of more than thirty visits, Vincent took the advice of a canonist friend, Duval, and accepted. Once accepted, Vincent regarded his possession of the property as the Will of God and nothing would stop him until he was in peaceful possession. Vincent was like that—"slow to move" but unwavering when he had made a decision. It is from this house of "Saint Lazare" that the missionaries got the name "Lazarists" in France. When the Community was removed from there during the French Revolution, their new (and present) headquarters opened in 1817 and was given the old name. Thus, the title "Lazarist" still prevails in many countries.

The missionaries (the Lazarists) went about the country parishes in twos or threes—preaching, teaching the catechism, giving the sacraments, restoring peace and harmony among the people, and staying at a place until all had made a general confession. They tried to have, as much as their work allowed, some religious exercises together and lived in rented houses or boarded out for the time of the missions. At home, they followed an order of the day to make use of their time in prayer and study and to improve their preaching. Vincent himself gave the directions and instructed them in the mode of procedure. Their routine copied that of religious communities to some extent, but they improvised as occasion demanded, fitting their life to their activities on behalf of the neighbor. Far from setting out with a fixed plan to determine the details of their life, they had no set rule for thirty-three years, that is, until they had established the line of life that suited them and that worked in practice.

Their increase was slow, thirty-five in the first ten years, but most were already priests, who were inspired to share in the missions due to the burning zeal and energy of the small band and the need and eagerness of the people. There was no novitiate or probation until twelve years after the commencement of the Congregation, as Vincent was waiting to see what the Will of God might be for the future of the society. But the hundredfold of the Gospel was given the four foundation members, for before the death of Saint Vincent, thirty-five years later, there were over four hundred priests in the Community, as well as two hundred lay brothers. Vincent was sure that God had planted, watered, and given the increase. Looking back years after, he said, "We went forth to preach the Gospel to the poor as Our Lord had done. This is what we did; and God on His part did what He had foreseen from all eternity. He blessed our work; and when other ecclesiastics saw this, they begged permission to join us; not that they came all at once, but from time to time. O my Savior! Who could ever have thought that such results could have sprung from the condition in which we once were. If anyone had told me what would come to pass, I should have thought he was making fun of me; and yet it was in that way that God willed our company to begin." Most of his subjects came from the country dioceses, about three per cent came from Paris, and a few were exiles from Ireland. Altogether, the progress showed the goodwill of so many of the clergy to meet an evil when it was pointed out to them, with its remedy, and the power of Vincent in co-opting assistance for his labor.

His first idea was to have this band of workers at the disposal of their Lordships, the Bishops, for use in their dioceses and under their command. However, this plan was altered by Pope Urban VIII, who named Vincent Superior-General and exempted the Congregation from the control of the Bishops. To ensure the members of the Congregation would not be taken away from the works of their vocation and engaged in duties that would hinder the missions, they were considered as belonging to the secular and not the regular clergy, though they lived together in common. It was thirty years before any private vows were added to their rule.

Vincent had been trained principally in the spirituality of Father Peter de Berulle and the Oratory, emphasizing the cult of the Divine Lord, Incarnate, Risen and Glorified, the Eternal High Priest. As Vincent grew older, under the influence of Saint Francis de Sales and by reason of his own dealings with the people, he took as his line of life the imitation of Christ in His public Actions. Coupled with an intense devotion to Mary Immaculate, he chose his path to be the ordinary, well-worn ways of the spiritual life, with the ideal of following Christ in all his doings. Therefore, Vincent's motive for undertaking or declining any work was what Christ had done. Once Vincent had the lead from Our Lord's words or deeds in His public life, Vincent would adopt the way indicated and, according to this guidance, Vincent developed the virtues that made him a saint. It was his following of the actions and words of Christ that led Vincent so earnestly in his zeal for the missions. Quite simply, Vincent was continuing the mission of Christ, Who preached to the poor, especially to those outside the cities.

MISSIONS ABROAD

From 1625, to the end of his life, Vincent had his chief life's work in his hands; but he took part also in many other affairs at the same time, so it is not possible to follow his interests year by year. At the end of ten years existence, there were thirty-five members in the Company and the work was limited only by their capacity. The Founder was no propagandist. He waited for God to bless their endeavors by an increase of workers, accepting those who came, doing his utmost to keep them, and unwilling, once they had established their vocation to that life, to let them depart under any pretext.

The Society's sphere of action gradually covered France. They were invited to Rome in 1642, then to Genoa and Turin, and to Warsaw in 1651, founding houses in each and opening the way for more members.

In 1645, though their total was only 180 priests and 80 lay brothers, foreign missions came under their zeal. Vincent was glad of the opportunity given by King Louis XIII, to send a priest and a lay-brother to Tunis, where he himself had lived in captivity, to help the poor Christians languishing in slavery and in daily danger of apostasy. This was followed by a similar mission to Algiers, another pirate station, where 20,000 Christian slaves were held under Mohammedan control. In 1645, Vincent was also preparing to send missionaries to Persia, at the request of the Holy See. The plan was interrupted, however, and the eight priests were sent to Ireland, which was then in the turmoil of religious war, famine, and

pestilence. Vincent's eight priests labored in Ireland for eight years, resulting in wonderful fruit. Another outpost was in the faraway island of Madagascar, near the French settlement of Fort Dauphin, where in a pestilential climate, the missionaries died one after another from fever and plague or at the hands of the savage natives. At this time, the Orkney Islands and the Highlands of Scotland also had their missionaries from Paris. Vincent's large heart willingly sent the message of the Gospel and the comforts of religion wherever he was called, not counting the reduction of his home forces, but trusting in the favor of God to send laborers to the vineyard.

HELP FOR THE CLERGY

As the home missions continued, Vincent could not close his eyes to the fact that to give a mission in a place and then leave it without zealous clergy to stabilize the good results would be to act like a general who captured a town from the enemy, and then went off to attack another without leaving a garrison behind in the first one. He had seen the lack of holy and earnest priests throughout France and the neglected state of the people. Yet, much as he lamented it, it did not seem to him that it was his personal affair. Before he was born, the Council of Trent had ordered that seminaries be opened in the dioceses wherever possible and more than twenty had been begun in France, mostly to fall within twenty years. The religious wars, pillage, and arson stopped the spread of this reforming move but the beginning of the seventeenth century seemed more hopeful. Plans were ready for many colleges and the bishops were full of zeal to bring them into being. The Oratorians managed a number of colleges and Adrian Bourdoise established several houses where the parish clergy could live together and be instructed in the duties of their ministry. Still, the remedy was inadequate. Vincent had been asked at times by various bishops to give a fortnight's retreat and instruction to candidates before their ordination, with notable success. Also, in the gift of Saint Lazare House in 1632, the Archbishop of Paris required that his ordinands be received at Saint Lazare House for a fortnight's retreat under the missionaries or other directors. Such preparation was very little, so it was suggested to Vincent that a weekly meeting of the clergy could be held at which they would consider the virtues proper to priests and the ways of practicing them as well as review the duties of their office. He willingly agreed, and Saint Lazare House was laid open to them gratis every Tuesday. Annual retreats were free also to any who wished for the opportunity.

These arrangements were but a small contribution to the improvement of the clergy and, though Vincent could see that more fundamental and lasting preparation was a necessity, he and his confreres had their missions to attend to as their vocation. They did start a junior school in the College des Bons Enfants where the humanities were taught to children who were possible candidates for the priesthood, but it was not a success. "We have twenty-two in the seminary," the Founder wrote, "but of that number only two or three are passable." Still, he was slow to abandon what he had once begun and the institution was according to the mind of the Church.

Though he had not had the benefit himself, Vincent had nurtured the idea that seminaries should take in clerics already in orders or approaching orders who would be trained for a year or two in virtue, prayer, chant, ceremonies, preaching, and theology. Distrusting his

own initiative, he waited for some Providential direction through authority. That direction came in 1642 from Cardinal Richelieu, who, as Bishop of Lucon, had failed with his seminary and now, as chief minister of the King, was heartily interested in the affairs of the clergy. He urged Vincent to carry out his plan by admitting clerics to the College des Bons Enfants and gave Vincent a sum of money to maintain twelve clerics for two years. Thus, Vincent had two institutions under one roof: separate and under different rules of life and education.

After three years, the juniors were transferred to a house in the boundaries of Saint Lazare, which was called after Saint Charles Borromeo. This opening of the doors to the ecclesiastics and students, as distinct from the boys, was the beginning of the senior seminaries. It was the crown to what was to be the second proper work of his Congregation—training of the clergy.

Vincent now had the complete chain of works for the benefit of the priesthood: the minor seminary of Saint Charles for beginners, the major seminary of the Bons Enfants for their theological studies, retreats at Saint Lazare before their ordinations, and, finally, the Tuesday conferences and the annual retreats to renew constantly and stimulate their piety and devotion. From then on he was committed both to the service of the souls by the missions and the parallel work of providing holy and learned priests for the parishes; giving his attention to the ignorant and uninstructed as well as to the masters and teachers of Christian knowledge.

SAINT LOUISE DE MARILLAC

Vincent's zealous activity was not all consumed in these two great works. The Confraternities of Charity for the poor and sick had developed all over the country. To remain efficient and keep to their purpose, they required a lot of time and supervision—much more than Vincent was able to give. Moreover, Vincent realized that a woman's hand was needed to manage and train these groups of charity. God supplied this hand in Louise de Marillac, whose maiden name was Mademoiselle le Gras. She probably had known Vincent since about 1620 for they dwelt in the same parish. She had one son, aged ten, and her husband, the chief secretary of the Queen Regent, Marie de Medicis, was practically invalid. Upon her husband's death in 1625, Louise dedicated her life to works of charity and religion. Once her son left for college, Louise led a life like a fervent religious, with daily meditation morning and evening, daily Mass, Communion three times a week, the Rosary, little office of the Blessed Virgin, spiritual reading every day, and taking the discipline three times a day. During her free hours, she visited the poor or made clothes for them and ornaments for poor churches.

In 1624 Louise de Marillac was sent by her director, Bishop le Camus, to give the guidance of her soul to Vincent. Vincent found he had to moderate her intensity whilst waiting to know what he would advise for her future, telling her to honor meantime, the inaction and delay of the hidden state of the Son of God. After three years, the hour of Providence came and Vincent engaged her in the active life of visiting the Confraternities about the country. A well-educated organizer with real love for the poor and ignorant, for four years Louise

cheered on and fired the zeal of the branches, gently reviving and directing their good deeds as she travelled back and forth in stagecoaches at her own expense. She delighted in teaching the catechism to the growing girls and the young children but grieved to think of the lack of schoolmistresses who might perfect the instruction. After she had seen this field of charity and had experience of its working, guided in the minutest points by constant letters from Vincent, she was ready for her further vocation. The Confraternity had begun in several parishes of Paris, but the members were mostly women of rank and of the aristocracy. Good intentioned and with money to give, they were not used to the constant and unpleasant hard work entailed in membership—preparing food, distributing it to the poor and sick, visiting the poor and sick in their dingy and dirty hovels. They would often pass on these duties to their employees, who were wanting in the essential thing—charity. Louise and Vincent saw the failure, but the remedy was not in sight.

THE DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY

Louise and Vincent recognized that if they could get some young women, not inclined to marry and willing to serve the poor, to devote themselves to the poor for the love of God, under the guidance of the Confraternity, it would be a solution. God provided these young women. The first was Margaret Naseau, from the country outside Paris. Margaret had taught herself to read, whilst her cows were grazing on the roadside. She met Vincent on one of his missions and asked his advice about teaching other girls. Vincent encouraged her and she induced a couple of the others to do the same.

As soon as Margaret heard of the society in Paris for helping the poor, she gave up teaching and came to offer herself for this more needed duty. Thus, Margaret became the right hand of Mademoiselle le Gras, in the parish confraternity. Lovable, kind, prudent and holy, Margaret died a few years later of the plague caught from a poor girl whom she had made sleep in her own bed. Margaret had brought other girls to join her and still others joined as knowledge of the cause became more known. In this way, the associations continued their works of mercy. Great virtue was required in these girls to persevere in their difficult tasks. Spiritual training and formation was necessary, so Vincent decided to group three or four of them under Louise's direction in her house and, thus after seven years of waiting, Louise's vocation was settled, she being now at the age of forty-two. Paris had gotten used to these women going about in their lay dress, serving the poor, visiting their homes, and caring for the sick and the dying. Now it was time to unite them and give them solidity. November 29, 1633, was the foundation day of the Company of the Daughters of Charity. They would show a new type of community life, guided by a precise rule, imitating the virtues of Jesus Christ, serving the sick and poor—a distinct body from any of the nuns or sisterhoods of the time. They would be secular persons living together without any public vows, though making vows for one year at a time. Vincent loved to remind them that, as Daughters of Charity, they were Daughters of God and, as Servants of the poor, they were the Servants of Christ. He kept a constant interest and direction over them. When the Company was officially approved in 1648 by the Coadjutor Archbishop of Paris, John Francis Paul de Gondi (the baby of the de Gondi house when

Vincent first went there), Vincent was named its Director for Life. Such was the beginning of this community and it has suffered little change since then. They are seen all over the world. It was another creation and an innovation brought into being by the man who was so tenacious of tradition and firmly opposed to novelty and change; but who at the same time knew how to adapt himself to the needs of the times and to serve the Church with his genius.

THE LADIES OF CHARITY

With the Daughters of Charity just under way, another duty was thrust into Vincent's hands in 1634. The big general hospital of Paris, on the other side of the square from Notre Dame Cathedral, was well-known to his charity. An average of three, four, or five thousand patients were housed there with a crushing three to six in a bed—over twenty-five thousand persons a year were admitted there. A Community of Augustinian Nuns, aided by a number of chaplains, was in charge of the hospital at this time. Many religious priests also aided in helping the sick and the dying. Some ladies of the nobility would visit the hospital to exercise their kindness and give some relief to the wants of the inmates. One of these, Madame Goussault, the wife of the President of the Court of the Exchequer, was astounded at the ignorance of the patients regarding their religion and of the duties of their Faith. She was also astounded at what she perceived to be the neglect of preparing the very sick and the dying to receive the sacraments. Here, she thought, was a good opening for some activity for womenfolk. She made the suggestion to Vincent that he address the problem. But, Vincent believed to intrude in other people's concerns was too delicate a matter, even at her request. Not satisfied, she went off to the Archbishop to convince Vincent to take a hand. The Archbishop's request was a command to the holy man, so Vincent called a meeting of Madame de Goussault's friends. Attending were, besides Mademoiselle le Gras, several wealthy ladies, wives of some of the chief officials of the King, and a duchess or two. A confraternity was formed for the spiritual instruction of the patients including their preparation for the sacraments and for death. A book of lessons was drawn up for the ladies to read to the sick and four ladies from the confraternity would visit the hospital every day. The ladies were instructed to be careful not to cross the Sisters at the hospital in any way and to put off their style and vanity by dressing simply and plainly whilst on this holy occupation.

The ladies of the confraternity brought little gifts of sweets and fruit, later extending this to an extra meal for the sick. As they increased their activity, the ladies got some help from the Daughters of Charity, which caused the Confraternity ranks to increase to hundreds. Vincent remained their Director, presiding at their weekly meetings and urging them in the spirit of charity, reminding them of the blessing allowed to them to take such a place in the activity of the Church and deciding for them the questions that they discussed freely for the perfection of their enterprise. Among the members are the names of countesses, marchionesses, duchesses, and many ladies of the Court, including some of the princesses, and other ladies (married, widowed, and single) of all ranks. This is a good indication of the fervor and the active Christianity of these people. It is also a good indication of the infectious zeal and charity of the friend of the poor and destitute, who would have everyone contribute to the relief of their needs.

The Confraternity flourished vigorously in the French Revolution, when the nobility in great part lost their status. It was revived in 1840, and is now an active organization in many countries, a women's society parallel to the Saint Vincent de Paul Society for men. This company brought Vincent into other fields of action. One of its members, Mademoiselle de Pollallion, got him interested in a work of her own. On her husband's death, she quitted the Court and gave her time to establishing a community—the Daughters of Providence—to care for refuges, for fallen women, and for girls whose virtue was in danger. Vincent encouraged her, got the Ladies of Charity to supply funds; and drew up the rules for them—and it too spread rapidly. During the wars, it encountered many crises, bringing them to rely on Providence in earnest, with Vincent always by their side to advise and exhort. After the foundress's death, Vincent appealed to the Ladies not to let the good work fail and sought gifts from them, from the Queen down, to maintain it. Under his protection, it survived and its existence was secured.

Another lady of the Confraternity, Madame Villeneuve, set up a society of the Daughters of the Cross, to teach schools and instruct girls and women in their religion. It passed through many trials—financial and otherwise. Yet, Vincent was always able to avert disaster, getting the required help from the Ladies of Charity, preventing their dissolution, and confirming them in their spirit of charity, so to preserve the good work of this Institution, which goes on vigorously to the present day.

THE FOUNDLINGS

Another type of charity came into Vincent's sphere in 1638—to father the fatherless by the care of the foundlings. In the big city of Paris, hundreds of children were deserted by their parents each year through want, shame, or sheer barbarity. A government institution received them, but there was little chance of survival for the weak, small, sickly, and underfed. Even their baptism was neglected. Vincent could not close his eyes to such an evil or merely shed a tear of grief and give all his attention to the host of other charities he controlled. He told the Ladies of Charity of the state of affairs and sent them to see for themselves. The ladies' visit resulted in opening a house to take a dozen infants, who would be mothered by the Daughters of Charity and the expenses found by the Ladies of the Confraternity. It was a small start by way of experiment. Its good results were an incentive and the ladies' devotion grew to the stage of taking over the full number, incurring a very large annual cost.

In the mean time, the Thirty Years war was raging and bringing untold misery throughout France, Paris was being asked for the maximum of help, and relief was urgently required on all sides. Everyone was feeling the pinch, so the idea of returning the children to their former guardians was mooted; it had only been an experiment; it had achieved some success while times were not so bad, and could be resumed after more drastic needs were met.

In 1648, Vincent called a general meeting of the Ladies where he put to them their present difficulties in carrying on the orphans' homes. He opposed to that the good that was done in snatching the orphans from death and making them children of God—to know Him and to love Him.

“But nevertheless,” he went on, “it is for you to decide. You became their mothers by grace when their mothers by nature abandoned them; see now if you too, will forsake them. Cease to be their mothers and become their judges; their lives and deaths are in your hands. The time has come for you to pronounce sentence. If you continue your charity, they will live, if you abandon them, they will undoubtedly perish, as your own experience surely shows you.” The home for the foundlings continued, however much it cost and, as time went on, the number of its buildings increased to thirteen, to give a real home and a Christian upbringing to the helpless little ones of Christ. It is no wonder that the commonest representation of Saint Vincent de Paul is the one that shows him with a small child in his arms and another by his side in the folds of his soutane.

WAR RELIEF

The Thirty Years' war, from 1618 to 1648, enveloped all of Western Europe—from Sweden to Spain. Chiefly religious in its origin as an effort to restrict Protestantism, it developed into a struggle for wealth and commerce irrespective of religion. France, under the policy of Cardinal Richelieu, lined up with Holland, England and Sweden. Austria, Spain, and some of the German states opposed them.

The Rhine Valley, Belgium, Alsace, and Lorraine provided the battlefields in great part. In 1636, the French overran the little kingdom of Lorraine, to the northeast of France, and in 1639, both the Swedes and the French, ravaged it again, reducing it to be a French Province. The widespread misery there is beyond description. Towns and villages lost their whole populations; some were reduced to ashes. No one's life or virtue was safe; famine and pestilence took hundreds who had no one to bury them; men killed one another for food; mothers ate their own children and children their mothers.

Crowding to Saint Lazare for food and help, refugees brought the accounts to Paris. Vincent set about large-scale relief. An entire province needed to be succored, but the whole world was not too big for his charity. It began as a reduction of food at home so there would be more to give. Vincent called upon his unfailing helpers—the Ladies of Charity and the Queen—and their lavish gifts were sent on the way to Lorraine. It is estimated that Vincent collected from these sources over half a million pounds for the stricken ones. Vincent had to supply food and clothing for over twenty-five towns. In some places, food was given to over a thousand every day. Distribution was under the care of some of the missionaries and the lay brothers. Their charity and zeal was inflamed by the Superior, directing the whole scheme from Paris. Missioners who had any skill in medicine were the first sent to help and soon the benefit of missions was also offered to the desolate people. Calamity was often the time of grace. Sinners became penitent under the heavy hand of God. The sick, aged, young mothers, religious women—all were the object of the gentle charity and thoughtfulness of this noble priest. Accounts of the distress relieved were sent back and Vincent had the accounts printed on leaflets to show the donors the use of their gifts and to spur on their generosity. Until peace came, this host of helpless sufferers depended in large measure on the charity of the great city of Paris and God blessed the undertaking

with a mighty work of relief. Many women and girls came to the capital for safety and groups of them were cared for by the Daughters of Charity, who found positions for them when they were able to take them.

Vincent showed a rare delicacy for those who had been rich or were of rank and now felt the shame of asking strangers for help. Some noblemen were gathered and the young Baron de Renty was assigned to distribute their alms, which he did over a number of years with such tact and graciousness that their less fortunate friends seemed almost to be doing a favor rather than receiving one. When it was at last possible for many of these displaced persons to return to their districts, the open hand of Vincent put the finishing touch to this mighty achievement by giving them the means to go home and providing for them until they were re-established.

DISTRESS IN MANY PROVINCES OF FRANCE

Until 1659, the same relief on a bigger scale went on for another ten years in other parts of France. The war in Flanders against Spain brought the opposing armies back and forth through the well-known battlefields of Picardy and Champagne in north and northeast France. There, the usual evils (crime and brutality, devastation and pillage, famine and disease) made paupers of hundreds of thousands. All eyes and hands were lifted towards Vincent—to move him to become the Father of his Country. Towns and cities were fed by the alms given out by his missionaries and lay-brothers; the soup-kitchen was begun in this dire need; houses were set up for expelled religious, for young women, and for orphans; hospitals were opened directed by the Daughters of Charity, who in half-a-dozen towns were engaged in attending the wounded and sick soldiers. Spiritual care including the sacraments, instruction, and comfort for the dying, was the special duty of the missionaries. They pressed into service all the local clergy whom they were able to rescue from their sad plight. It seemed as if an army of Christ was brought into existence by the evils of the armies of hate.

At the same time, there was universal distress in Paris and in the Province surrounding it. The Peace of Westphalia was hardly signed in 1648, when the Parliament and Nobles, dissatisfied with the Regency and its financial policy for them, revolted to begin what is called the war of the Fronde. The Queen fled to Saint Germain and Paris was blockaded. After three months, it was reduced, but the city, the suburbs especially, suffered horribly by murder, pillage, and starvation. There was no peace, for the civil war carried on in the outer parts of the province. The state of the country is described in a letter of Vincent de Paul to the Pope, Innocent X, whom he sought to induce to intervene in August, 1652. Vincent wrote, "The Royal House, divided by dissension, the people divided into sections; cities, and provinces afflicted by civil war; villages, towns and cities and provinces overthrown, ruined and, in ashes; laborers unable to harvest what they had sown, and sowing nothing for the year to come. The soldiers go to every excess, without punishment. The people are exposed not only to theft and pillage, but also to murder and all sorts of

torture. The country people who are not stricken down by the sword die of hunger; priests, no better spared by the soldiers than others, are treated inhumanly and brutally, tortured, and put to death. Young girls are dishonored, religious women even are exposed to the wantonness and madness of the soldiery; churches are profaned, pillaged, or destroyed; churches that remain are mostly abandoned by their pastors, the people being deprived of the sacraments, of the Mass, and of all other spiritual help. And, horrible to think of and worse to say it, the Most August Sacrament of the Body of Christ is treated with the utmost indignity, even among Catholics; for to get the sacred vessels they throw the Holy Eucharist on the ground and tread on it with their feet.”

All aid possible was organized, the same agents brought in for Lorraine were brought into play, and were then inflamed with generosity and charity from the furnace of Vincent's love for the distressed and his desire to do for them whatever work of mercy was in his power. He went about Paris collecting from one friend's house to the next; the Queen put in her diamonds and the courtiers gave their jewelry. The power of God worked with him and his superhuman activity was the means of solace for thousands of the afflicted. At the beginning of the Fronde, Vincent hoped to make use of his good standing with Queen Anne to induce her to put a stop to the war. Though he was nearly seventy-years old, he set out on horseback, accompanied by his lay-brother secretary, to interview the Queen. His mediation, however, was fruitless. His journey to the country brought him an occasion to go further afield. For many years now, the multitude of his engagements had kept him near Paris and robbed him of his active part in the missions. Therefore, he undertook a tour of some of the houses of his confreres in the north to supervise their work, and also to see first-hand the devastation of the war. This winter was severe, but he rode on from town to town until, exhausted and sick, he had to be brought back to Paris in the early summer. There Vincent was soon engulfed in all the works of relief.

A new side of Vincent's character showed itself in these times. In the spirit of a crusader, he did his utmost to get the King and Mazarin and the commercial interests of Marseilles to undertake a campaign against the Turks in North Africa. Vincent hoped to rescue the Christian slaves and to overcome, finally, the Mohammedan power in those parts. Nothing was done regarding the matter in Vincent's lifetime, but his plan was fulfilled later on.

THE COUNCIL OF CONSCIENCE

It was impossible that so important a figure in the life and training of the clergy should not be taken into consultation in the appointments the Crown then had of Bishops for the many Sees of France. Political advantage and personal favor had regulated many of these nominations, although Louis XIII and Richelieu had been often influenced by Vincent's opinions. Anne of Austria, as Regent, set up a body to attend to these matters in 1643, called the Council of Conscience, for which she chose Vincent as a member. Mazarin, the agile politician, was another. It was a real hornet's nest for Vincent, leaving him open to all sorts of charges of abuse and hatred; but it was an office for the welfare of the Church and he did not shrink from it. Without personal interest, he argued and, fought for the selection of the best bishops, and the Church of France was immeasurably indebted to his good judgment and fearless program in choosing its bishops during the ten years he carried this undesirable burden.

INTEREST IN RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

Together with the care for the episcopate, Vincent was called on to use his prudence and power in the betterment of the regular life of many of the abbeys and convents of the religious orders of men and women. His common procedure was a canonical visitation, by which he tried to honor and help them, to serve and protect them. For some, he obtained revision of their administration and constitutions; for others, spiritual care and guidance; for more, security of tenure and recovery of the properties from which they had been driven. For all, an increase in devotion to their life of service for God, by prayer and good works.

JANSENISM

Yet another act for the Church was Vincent's energetic opposition to Jansenism. Already condemned and then revived by a friend of Vincent, the Abbot of Saint Cyran at Poitiers, this heresy now denied the present existence of the Church and the authority of Pope and Councils.

It would revert to the primitive Church and its practices of piety. Absolution could be given only after months of penance and Holy Communion was to be rarely received, Grace and salvation were not open to all, and freewill was not a fact.

Vincent took the advice of some theologians and, at the Council of Conscience, sought for the condemnation of these errors. In the delay, the Abbot of Saint Cyran died, but the heresy was adopted and spread. Therefore, in 1650, a petition was sent to Rome, at Vincent's instigation and signed by 85 of the Bishops. The condemnation came in 1653; and was made more explicit against any evasion in 1656. It was accepted with ready submission and great joy by the majority, but no one was more satisfied than Vincent. As he had had special prayers for the petition by his community, he now continued them in thanksgiving.

He tried in charity and meekness to reconcile those who were too hardheaded to accept the Church's judgment and urged the victors not to do anything that would make it harder for their adversaries to submit. The condemnation was a sign and a confirmation of the pure and ardent faith that Vincent had and a showing of his deep love for the Church and loyal veneration for its Head, as well as proof of his theological learning and skill.

THE END OF LIFE

Continual occupation in the affairs of his own communities, in the interests of the Church of France, in the foreign missions, and in spiritual and corporal miseries of all kinds was

the burden he carried for so many years and its weight was visibly telling upon Vincent's strength. Completion of his plans of rules and government of his Congregation and of the Daughters of Charity was on his hands, and he had the present management of both Companies to discharge, together with the molding of their special character. All the details of distant houses came for his advice, encouragement, and restraint, which required of him in return thousands of letters to his confreres. His years were full and crowded; it is a matter of sheer wonder how he was able to control and to effect and perfect so many things in his thirty-five years of leadership.

A personal picture of him is given by his intimate friend, Bishop Abelly, which sums up his person. "He was of middle height and well proportioned. His head was a little bald and somewhat large, but in the right proportion to the rest of his body. His forehead broad and commanding; his face neither too full nor too thin. His look was gentle, his glance penetrating, his hearing quick, his bearing grave but kindly, simple, and unaffected; his approach very affable, and his character extremely kind and amiable. His temperament was ardent and his constitution strong and robust. His mind was broad and big, well-balanced, capable of great things, and not taken unawares. He was very adverse to changes, novelties, and singularities; gifted with a natural eloquence, he combined simplicity and prudence in everything he said. His heart was most tender, noble, and generous, easily won by all that was good and holy." With the grace and light he reaped in his long prayers to God and in his meditations, with his humility and selflessness, seeking to do what was the will of God and to follow the footsteps of His Divine Master, dealing with all in the utmost simplicity and Christ-like meekness, Vincent was proved by the years to be a leader raised up by God for the sanctification of his times and for the glory of the Church. As his infirmity grew, his limbs failed and, unable to stand at the altar for Mass, he had to forego this greatest privilege of his priesthood. He continued to assist daily at the Mass, being carried to the chapel each morning. He suffered day and night but the Will of God was his comfort. His breviary was his prayer book, to which he added the Ritual prayers for the sick and the dying. Full of consideration and kindness for all who visited him, he begged pardon for the trouble he gave to those who looked after him. In his full senses, he was anointed in readiness for death and, sitting in his chair, he gave his blessing to his spiritual children about him. As they prayed, he quietly, calmly, and peacefully finished his course as the faithful servant of God and the Father of the Poor, his saintly soul going up to the Joys of his Lord, in the early morning of September 27, 1660.



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**THE SERAPHIM COMPANY, INC.
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