VINCENT DE PAUL

(Depaul, Saint, prêtre, fondateur, 1581 - 1660)

- 1 Earthly career
- 2 Evolution of religious experience
- 3 Dogmatic foundations
- 4 Human cooperation
- 5 In the footsteps of Vincent de Paul
- 6 Landmarks

André DODIN, C.M.

Dictionnaire de spiritualité
16 Ulbald d'Alençon
Zypaeus
Beauchesne - Paris - 1994

1. THE EARTHLY LIFE OF MONSIEUR DEPAUL

Vincent was born on April 24, 1581, in the hamlet of Ranquines, in the village of Pouy (near Dax), which on December 3, 1828, by royal decree, would be renamed “Saint Vincent de Paul.” Young Vincent was the son of Bertrande de Moras and Jean Depaul. The family of farmers had six children: four boys and two girls. His rural origins shaped his way of thinking and later enabled him to understand country people well. At the dawn of the seventeenth century, the peasantry made up 17 million of the total population of 20 million. Jean Depaul and Monsieur de Comet, judge of Pouy and lawyer at the presidial court of Dax, directed Vincent toward an ecclesiastical career. His uncle Étienne Depaul, prior of Poymartet, enjoyed comfortable means and helped support the family. At fifteen, Vincent attended the modest College of the Cordeliers in Dax, and Monsieur de Comet even engaged him as tutor for his children. Like a true younger son of Gascony, Vincent moved eagerly toward the priesthood. He was tonsured at Bidache on December 20, 1596, and ordained priest on September 23, 1600, by Bishop François de Bourdeille, former Bishop of Périgueux. The vicars general quickly appointed him pastor of Tihl, but he could not take possession of the parish because it had already been assigned to S. Soubé. Vincent then went to Rome, where Pope Clement VIII had proclaimed a Jubilee. This holy pope deeply impressed the young priest; even heretics regarded Clement VIII as a saint. On October 17, 1659, Vincent would still speak of him to his missionaries.

For his intellectual formation, Vincent enrolled in the Faculty of Theology at Toulouse, which on October 12, 1604, granted him the degree of Bachelor of Theology in recognition of seven years of study.

He moved frequently between Toulouse and Bordeaux. He went to Marseille to recover the inheritance of an elderly woman from Toulouse that a merchant had taken from him. He had the man imprisoned, but then Vincent himself disappeared mysteriously. Back in Dax, his family grew anxious as the young cleric's debts accumulated.

To reassure his benefactor, Monsieur de Comet, Vincent recounted—in a colorful style reminiscent of Cervantes—that he had been captured by corsairs, taken to Tunis, passed through the hands of four different masters, and finally escaped with his last master, a renegade from Annecy who had returned to the faith. According to the story, this master abjured his errors before the vice-legate, Bishop François Montorio. As Montorio completed his mandate, he supposedly took the young Vincent with him to Rome, intrigued by the "fabulous secrets" Vincent claimed to know for making gold. Yet this unfortunate patron soon abandoned him, and Vincent made his way to Paris.

Psychologists have questioned this captivity narrative, noting its inconsistencies and improbabilities. The Gascon historian Pierre Coste, editor of Vincent's works and his modern biographer, never believed this "Arabian Nights" episode. Vincent himself would later write humorously, "If you were a Gascon, I would understand that you were hiding certain matters from me." He never again mentioned this Tunisian diversion. Six months before his death, on March 18, 1660, he begged Canon Saint-Martin to surrender those wretched letters, whose copies he had already burned. Fortunately, another Gascon, Brother Bertrand Ducournau, had first brought them to the College des Bons-Enfants, where Monsieur Wateblet deposited them with the "Gentlemen of Saint-Lazare."

Upon arriving in Paris, Vincent naturally went to the Gascon quarter in the Faubourg Saint-Germain. A compatriot, Bertrand Dulou, a judge from Sore in the Landes, shared his room with him. But misfortune struck again: while Vincent lay sick in bed, an apothecary's assistant stole the judge's purse. Vincent had seen nothing and taken nothing, yet despite his protests, Dulou expelled him, issued a formal denunciation, and accused him of theft. Vincent fled the storm and sought refuge among the future Oratorians at the Petit-Bourbon. The judge continued to pursue him, even accusing him before Father de Bérulle, who seemed untroubled by the charge.

At the Oratory, through Antoine Leclerc de la Forêt, Vincent was appointed on May 17, 1610, as chaplain and adviser to Queen Marguerite de Valois. He lodged for a time on the Rue de Seine, in a house marked by the sign of Saint Nicholas. Bérulle deeply impressed him. It was Bérulle who first taught that it was good to remain lowly, that the humblest conditions were the safest, and that higher ranks carried hidden dangers—hence the saints fled honors, and Christ himself came "not to be served but to serve" (Mt 20:28).

It was on Bérulle's advice that Vincent replaced François Bourgoing as parish priest of Clichy on May 2, 1612. Obedient to Bérulle, he also accepted the position of tutor to the children of the Gondi family on February 20, 1613. Yet he felt uneasy, too far removed from the poor, whose presence brought him peace. He confided this to Bérulle, who then proposed that he take the parish of Châtillon-les-Dombes, where he was installed on August 1, 1617. A month after leaving Paris, he informed Monsieur de Gondi that he could no longer serve as tutor. Philippe de Gondi, then in Provence, passed the letter to his wife, Françoise Marguerite de Silly, who immediately went to

Bérulle and begged him to recall Vincent to Paris. The Superior General of the Oratory sent Vincent a persuasive letter. When he returned to Paris on December 23, 1617, he visited Bérulle and the next day resumed service with the Gondi family.

The rhythm and style of his life now changed. On February 8, 1619, he was appointed General Chaplain of the Galleys and took the oath on February 12. In Paris and Marseille, he witnessed firsthand the harsh condition of the galley convicts. An inner call grew stronger: the evangelization of the poor. The rural poor were abandoned; he heard it said and knew it to be true. Many died without daring to confess their sins to their parish priests, and some pastors did not even know the formula of absolution. Madame de Gondi had observed this deficiency and carried the formula with her to provide to confessors—a practice dating from her youth before 1604. She had pointed out this serious lack to Vincent, who himself became a witness to it.

Preaching throughout the Gondi estates, he evangelized, heard confessions, and sought to repair the damage by encouraging general confessions. He founded charitable confraternities like the one established at Châtillon on August 23, 1617. Yet he needed help. He enlisted Monsieur Belin, chaplain of the Gondi household at Villepreux. After a mission to the galleys in Bordeaux and a brief return to his homeland in 1623, he obtained a licentiate in law and was appointed principal of the Collège des Bons-Enfants. His income as General Chaplain was supplemented by revenues from the parish of Clichy (which he would not relinquish until 1626), the parish of Gamaches (February 28, 1615), the canonry of Écouis (May 27, 1615), and the priory of Grossesauve (February 7, 1624).

Yet a stable organization was needed. On the afternoon of April 17, 1625, the Gondi family placed 45,000 livres in Vincent's hands to organize missions on their lands. Two months later, on June 23, Madame de Gondi died, assisted by Vincent, who then informed Philippe Emmanuel de Gondi in Provence. After this, Vincent settled permanently at the Collège des Bons-Enfants and continued preaching missions.

Meanwhile, François de Sales, during his stay in Paris (December 7, 1618 – September 13, 1619), met Vincent. Their vision for the religious future of France converged, and a deep friendship quickly formed. Before his death in Lyon on December 28, 1622, the Bishop of Geneva appointed Vincent superior of the Paris Visitation convent. Vincent, who would gladly have relinquished this demanding responsibility, always recalled that it was the saintly bishop himself who had asked this service of him.

Providentially, the prior of Saint-Lazare granted his vast buildings to Vincent de Paul. On January 7, 1632, the priory was united to the Congregation of the Mission, and the following day, January 8, the Archbishop of Paris approved the union. From that time on, the priory became both a center of charity and a headquarters for Catholic reform. By 1633, Monsieur Vincent's work had, in a sense, reached maturity. Although refinement and development would continue for another twenty years, the essential characteristics of his institutions were firmly established.

His efforts were directed, sustained, and intensified along two principal lines.

From the experience of Gannes–Folleville, which revealed to him the spiritual misery of the rural poor, emerged a first dynamic impulse. This led to the foundation of the Congregation of the Mission, dedicated to alleviating the spiritual poverty of country people through preaching, catechesis, and the sacraments.

- A second impulse flowed from the sermon on charity preached at Châtillon-les-Dombes on August 20, 1617. This inspiration took organized form in the Confraternities of Charity, later in the Society of the Ladies of Charity, and finally in the Company of the Daughters of Charity (November 29, 1633). These groups were devoted primarily—though not exclusively—to the material and spiritual assistance of the poor in all their conditions.

In extension of, or alongside, these two principal expressions of charitable dynamism, many other works would arise. They developed with remarkable speed and astonishing diversity. All of them sprang from a loving contemplation of the divine charity of Jesus Christ.

1° THE MISSION AND MISSIONS

Experience soon showed that it was necessary, like Christ, not only to evangelize the poor but also to instruct and form successors. Otherwise, the future would be abandoned to the evil one.

The priests of the Mission are continuators of the Mission of Jesus. His mission did not consist solely in bringing the Good News to those in need of salvation; it also required forming and instructing disciples who are not merely collaborators but mystically incorporated into the one Mission of Jesus—a mission of love, yesterday, today, and forever (cf. Heb 13:8).

The Missioners were careful not to seek the status of a religious order. As early as August 22, 1628, the Holy See had refused to approve statutes that would have established a new religious institute. The parish priests of Paris, fearing that these Mission priests might diminish their ordinary and extraordinary revenues, even petitioned the Parlement of Paris (December 4, 1630) not to approve the new community.

To reassure the Paris clergy and obtain papal approval, as Monsieur Duval advised, Vincent—an excellent canonist—found a new formula. The Missioners would not become religious; they would remain secular clergy. They would pronounce the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, adding a fourth vow to serve the poor in the Congregation of the Mission for life. Yet these vows would be private, in the internal forum, so canonically they remained members of the secular clergy.

By 1633, Vincent was fifty-two years old. The major institutions were in place: the Charities (since 1617), the Congregation of the Mission (founded April 17, 1625; approved by Rome January 12, 1632, by the bull *Salvatoris nostri*). Politically, Richelieu firmly guided Louis XIII. Despite sporadic regional revolts, a relative stability allowed charity to flourish.

Parish missions multiplied—840 would be preached by 1660—establishing Confraternities of Charity. Retreats for ordinands began in 1628; seminaries in 1641 (fourteen by 1660). The Tuesday Conferences and clergy retreats began in 1633. Vincent simplified preaching, influencing the French clergy, and even sought reform of religious orders (1643–1652).

Numerous charitable works emerged: aid to beggars, retreats for laity, ministry to galley convicts (from 1624), prisoners, and Christian slaves in North Africa (Tunis 1645, Algiers 1646). He assisted devastated provinces—Lorraine, Picardy, Champagne, Île-de-France—and sent missionaries abroad: Italy, Ireland, Madagascar, Scotland, the Hebrides, Poland.

By 1660 the Congregation had 25 houses, 131 priests, 44 clerics, and 52 brothers. The immense work accomplished by so few recalled Vincent's conviction: "Three can do more than ten when Our Lord puts His hand to it." (Abelly, cité infra, III, p. 11).[1]

2° CHARITY AND CHARITIES

The Confrérie de la Charité (Brotherhood of Charity), established on August 23, 1617, and canonically approved on December 8, 1617, by Denis de Marquemont, Archbishop of Lyon, was an association of Christian women concerned with helping the poor, who suffered, groaned, and died in misery at their doorsteps. It was a work of material and spiritual assistance, whose purpose Vincent de Paul had highlighted and sanctified by linking it directly to the eternal charity of Jesus that needed to be expressed. This happy formula gave social classes that were unaware of each other the opportunity to get to know each other, to meet, and to fraternize.

Using the most diverse people, circumstances, and even difficulties, Vincent de Paul built a vast charitable network capable of alleviating all misfortunes and extending to the ends of the earth.

From 1613 to 1625, it was Madame de Gondi who not only financed Vincent de Paul's zeal but also enlightened him, asking him to pay particular attention to certain failings of the clergy. It was she who asked him to note that some parish priests did not even know the formula for absolution. Upon the death of Madame de Gondi, Vincent de Paul agreed to guide and direct the religious life of Louise de Marillac, widow of Antoine Legras (DS, vol. 9, col. 1081-84). This was a particularly difficult undertaking, as this frail woman had already sought advice from Michel de

---

[1] The number of CM's priests and brothers before 1660. Based on the *Recuil des Principales Circulaires des Supérieurs Généraux de la Congregation de la Mission, Tome Premier, 1877.* Circular letter of the Superior Generals of the Congregation of the Mission, Volume 1 (1877), page 2, there is this information: *À la mort de notre bienheureux Père, 426 prêtres et 196 frères étaient entrés dans la Compagnie. Vingt-six maisons avaient été créées.* The information drawn from the Circular Letters of the Superior Generals of the Congregation of the Mission, Volume 1, offers a striking picture of the Congregation at the time of the death of Saint Vincent de Paul in 1660. In little more than three decades since its foundation in 1625, the Congregation had welcomed 426 priests and 196 brothers and had established 26 houses. Far from being modest, these figures reveal a remarkably rapid and robust development for a missionary institute still in its formative years. Numerically, the total of 622 members reflects an extraordinary vocational attraction. In the religious landscape of seventeenth-century France, such growth within a short period testifies to the clarity of Vincent's charism and the urgent pastoral needs it addressed. The strong proportion of priests underscores the Congregation's primary orientation toward evangelization, popular missions, and the formation of clergy. At the same time, the substantial number of coadjutor brothers reveals Vincent's inclusive vision of mission, where practical service, humility, and shared life were integral to apostolic effectiveness. The establishment of 26 houses in just over thirty years points to a dynamic missionary strategy rather than institutional accumulation. These houses functioned as bases for itinerant missions, seminaries, retreats, and charitable works, enabling the Congregation to serve both rural and urban populations and to expand beyond France. Such dispersion required flexibility, trust in Providence, and a readiness to face insecurity and risk. Spiritually, this rapid growth was accompanied by significant sacrifice. Many missionaries died young due to illness, plague, and the hardships of mission territories. The Congregation's expansion, therefore, was not the fruit of comfort or stability, but of evangelical zeal and fidelity. At Vincent's death, the Congregation of the Mission already appeared as a mature apostolic body: young in years, strong in numbers, wide in geographical reach, and deeply rooted in a spirituality of service to Christ in the poor *(The footnote added by FX Armada Riyanto, February 2026, CIF only for the readers of the translation from French)*.

Marillac, the Capuchin Honoré de Champigny, Jean-Pierre Camus, and François de Sales. She felt a certain repugnance when she saw Mr. Depaul, sensing that this priest possessed a supernatural power. She was inwardly shaken by doubts about the immortality of the soul and her vocation. She found in Monsieur Vincent a sure and energetic guide who would enable her to save herself from herself and give herself totally and definitively to God. For five years, Vincent applied himself to guiding, building, and balancing the inner life of Mademoiselle Legras.

Since the death of her husband, the future had become unclear to her. She had to take care of her only son, who remained the torment of her life. Monsieur Vincent took charge of little Michel de Marillac, who was torn by his conflicting desires. His mother wanted him to become a priest. He was thinking of any other profession. To calm and stabilize little Michel, Monsieur Vincent began by subjecting his mother to a dose of realism. He asked her to abandon her desire for institutional religious life. He prescribed that she live in the present, take inspiration from Benedict of Canfield, and *"not step over Providence"* (I, 68). Borrowing certain phrases from Monsignor de Genève, he asked him to simplify his life and return to the essentials. "God is love and wants us to come to Him through love." He calmed his excessive emotionality by reminding him of the essentials. There is only one ideal for all existence: to unite oneself with the adorable will of God. The soul then enjoys a supernatural peace; union with God's will is a foretaste of paradise. We must abandon everything that is beyond our strength and take care of our health—any deterioration clouds our judgment and makes us slaves to the madwoman in the house. A simplifying and soothing hygiene that will gently bring forth in this soul and on this face a supernatural, ineffable smile: "Be cheerful, Mademoiselle." Several meticulously directed retreats stabilize this restless heart and dispel disappointing and depressing illusions.

After five years of novitiate, Vincent succeeded where all others had failed. He launched Mademoiselle Legras into action (1629). He managed to place this trembling little widow at the mercy of God. Mademoiselle was a brilliant organizer, a saint with all the virtues of a "strong woman." After her death, praising her to the Daughters of Charity, he pointed out that she had succeeded in using all the possibilities of feminine holiness and that from now on his daughters could find in her a model uniting the two vocations, that of Martha and Mary, illuminated by the image of the Immaculate Mother of Jesus. The memory of Mademoiselle would enable the Daughters of Charity to be authentically mothers to the poor and daughters of God who is love.

As early as August 23, 1617, the Ladies of Châtillon had committed themselves with generous fervor to caring for the poor in their parish and even to nursing them with their own hands. They quickly realized that they could not neglect their obligations as mothers and wives. It was then that Monsieur Vincent and Mademoiselle Legras had the idea of supporting the Ladies' enterprise with the dedication of servants animated by unfailing supernatural zeal. Such was the origin of the Daughters of Charity.

For these servants of the poor, who met for the first time on November 29, 1633, Monsieur Vincent found a new formula, as he had for the Priests of the Mission. Without being nuns, the Daughters of Charity would live in community and take vows internally. Exempt, like the Priests of the Mission, from episcopal jurisdiction, they would be placed under the jurisdiction of the superior of the Mission. These daughters of God would not be religious in the world, but lay people fulfilling their baptismal vows in the world, the term "vow" being used as Pierre Lombard did: the requirement to imitate Christ because of their integration into the Mystical Body of the Son of God. As such, these servants of the poor had to be even more perfect than nuns (X, 143, 145, 661). Their canonical status is inferior to that of nuns, but they too are in a "state of perfection" (IX. 14).

As each Company is characterized by a “spirit” (IX, 459; 581-82; X, 123-24 XII 262), the spirit of the servants of the poor will be characterized by the practice of the virtues of the “true daughters of the fields” (IX, 79-94, 602). Charity, humility, and simplicity will be the jewels in their crown (IX, 591-609; X, 354-55). These three virtues will be like the three faculties of their soul. *"They will have as their monastery only the houses of the sick and that where the superior resides; as their cell, a rented room; as their chapel, the parish church; as their cloister, the streets of the cities; as their enclosure, obedience, since they must go only to the sick or to the places necessary for their service; as their gate, the fear of God; for veil, holy modesty, and making no other profession to ensure their vocation than by this continual trust they have in divine Providence and by the offering they make to Him of all that they are and of their service in the person of the poor"* (X, 661; August 24, 1659).

Vincent constantly adapted their rules, harmonizing their piety with the demands of their duties. He never ceased to show them the greatness of concrete and supernatural charity, the equivalence in times of need of prayer and service to the poor. To these girls devoted to God in a world of brutal customs, to these servants of galley slaves, beggars, and the poor of all kinds, he taught modesty, reserve, interior life, uprightness of intention, and the art of passing over all filth, like light, without getting dirty. To support their spiritual life, he recommended François de Sales' Introduction to the Devout Life and Treatise on the Love of God, J. Busée's Meditations, revised by Fr. Alméras, J-B. Saint-Jure's Meditations, and The Imitation of Christ. A Daughter of Charity had to be strong, direct, a little austere, and still retain the peasant air of those girls of the fields who join their calloused hands in hard work and breathe a simple and luminous joy, simply because God watches over them, loves them, and counts their every step.

In accordance with Providence, the rules were modified between November 29, 1633, and September 29, 1655.

Five rules were promulgated and meticulously explained (XI, I, 1, 326 - IX, 213; VI, 66).

The opportunity to take vows became increasingly evident. Before her husband's death, Louise de Marillac had taken a vow of widowhood in case she lost her husband. In 1640, the Daughters of Charity did not yet take vows, but on March 25, 1642, Louise de Marillac and four other sisters took the four perpetual vows (V, 353; X, 638).

On November 29, 1633, at their first meeting, there were only four servants of the poor; in 1634, there were twelve; in 1660, the Company of the Daughters of Charity was established in nearly thirty districts of Paris and as many towns in the provinces.

2. THE EVOLUTION OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

As soon as he was able to express himself, the young Vincent showed a disconcerting desire for power. He wanted to free himself from his father's peasant poverty and slight disability.

We cannot forget the confessions of Mr. Vincent de Paul. He humbled himself before Madame de Lamoignon by confiding that he had refused to see his father when he came to visit him at the college in Dax. On October 19, 1659, he declared to the missionaries: *“When I was a little boy, as my father took me with him into town, I was ashamed to go with him and acknowledge him as my father, because he was poorly dressed and a little lame”* (Xll, 432).

The awareness of his difference and superiority remained with Mr. Depaul for a long time. When, in 1630, one of his nephews came to Paris in the hope of receiving some help to get comfortable, he received him cordially, but gave him only enough to return on foot as he had come, sending him away with only ten écus to travel 180 leagues; he had even asked the Marquise de Maignelay for these écus as alms, and that was the only assistance he ever asked for his relatives (Abelly, III, 292).

M. de Saint-Martin provides us with some details that give full meaning to M. Vincent's attitude: *"Having instructed one of his servants to go and fetch (his nephew) from the street where he was, dressed in the fashion of the peasants of that country, to take him to his room, this good servant of God had an extraordinary impulse to overcome himself, as he did, for, coming down from his room, he went himself to the street and, having found his nephew, he embraced him, kissed him, took* him *by the hand, and led him into the courtyard, where he called down all the gentlemen of the Company, told them that he was the most honest man in his family, and had them all greet him. He had him perform the same courtesy at the first spiritual exercises he gave afterwards, and publicly accused himself in front of the whole assembly of having felt some shame at his nephew's arrival and of having wanted to send him secretly up to his room because he was a peasant and poorly dressed"* (Abelly, III, 208).

In Dax, the young Vincent had relied on the kindness of Mr. de Comet, to whom he owed his appointment to the wealthy parish of Tihl. But he would soon speak of the “disasters” of his fortune. He had a young rascal imprisoned who had stolen 300 écus from him. Two years later, he wrote to Comet that his debts had scandalized those around him. He tried to pique the curiosity of the vice-legate in Avignon by telling him about the secrets of alchemy. But after a few months, the prelate dropped the young storyteller. When he left Rome (see above), he did not return to his diocese. He headed for Paris.

A few months later, we find him living with Jean de la Thane, master of the Mint. This was a stable residence for the morning, because on the evening of that same day, May 17, 1610, he was staying on Rue de Seine in the house with the image of Saint Nicholas hanging as a sign (XIII, 13). In the meantime, Antoine Leclerc de la Forêt introduced him to the court of Queen Marguerite de Valois (XIII, 13). He was never listed in the Estates of the Queen's Household.

He believed he had made an excellent acquisition when he obtained the Abbey of Saint Léonard de Chaumes, in the diocese of La Rochelle, from Paul Hurault de l'Hopital, Archbishop of Aix, of the Cistercian order. The archbishop, being a good prince, offered it to him in exchange for a pension of 1,200 livres to be taken from the abbey's revenues. Vincent realized, but a little too late, that the abbey had been abandoned for ten years and that it had only debtors who could not be found. Once again, Vincent went into debt and borrowed money. After quarrels and disputes, he resigned from this ruinous abbey on October 29, 1616 (XIII, 37).

1° THE THEOLOGIAN TEMPTED AGAINST FAITH

It was during his stay with the Gondis (1613-1617) that Vincent underwent the most profound purification of his entire being. A different vision of God and the world would illuminate his path. No one chooses his poor, it is he who chooses you, or rather it is God who delegates to

him the mysterious power of evangelization. Much later, Vincent would understand the supernatural nature of this mysterious encounter with the suffering Christ.

“A famous doctor was called to Queen Marguerite de Valois for his knowledge and piety,” Vincent tells us. "Since he no longer preached or taught catechism, he found himself assailed in his repose by a harsh temptation against the faith... This doctor, finding himself in this unfortunate state, came to me to tell me that he was agitated by very violent temptations against the faith and that he had horrible thoughts of blasphemy against Jesus Christ, and even despair to the point that he felt compelled to throw himself out of a window. He was reduced to such an extreme that he finally had to be exempted from reciting his breviary and celebrating Holy Mass, and even from saying any prayers; especially since, when he began to recite the Pater, he seemed to see a thousand specters that greatly disturbed him; and his imagination was so dried up and his spirit so exhausted from acts of renouncing his temptations that he could no longer produce any.

Being in this pitiful state, he was advised to do the following: whenever he turned his hand or one of his fingers toward the city of Rome or toward any church, he should mean by this movement and action that he believed everything that the Roman Church believed.

What happened after all this? God finally took pity on this poor doctor, who, having fallen ill, was instantly delivered from all his temptations. The blindfold of darkness was suddenly removed from the eyes of his mind*, he began to see all the truths of the faith, but with such clarity that it seemed to him that he could feel and touch them with his finger; and finally he died, giving loving thanks to God for allowing him to fall into these temptations in order to raise him up with such advantage and give him such great and admirable feelings about the mysteries of our religion"* (Abelly, III, 116-17).

What Vincent did not reveal to his confreres was the technique he used. His account must be supplemented by the testimony, given in writing after Vincent's death, by a person who was unaware of Vincent's discourse to his missionaries. At first, Mr. Vincent used classical therapy.

"Mr. Vincent, having set about consoling this man who had confided his spiritual sufferings to him, advised *him to renounce them and to do some good works in order to obtain the grace of being delivered from them; after that, it happened that this man fell ill, and during his illness the evil spirit redoubled its efforts to destroy him.*

As the traditional technique was ineffective, Mr. Vincent, seeing him reduced to this pitiful state, feared with good *reason that he would finally succumb to the violence of these temptations of infidelity and blasphemy, and that he would die poisoned by the implacable hatred that the devil bears toward the Son of God. He began to pray, asking divine goodness to deliver this sick man from danger, and offered himself to God in a spirit of penitence to bear within himself, if not the same pains, at least the effects of his justice that he would be pleased to make him suffer, imitating in this point the charity of Jesus Christ, who took upon himself our infirmities in order to heal us and who satisfied the penalties we had deserved. God, in a secret act of His Providence, chose to take the charitable Monsieur Vincent at his word; and granting his prayer, He delivered the sick man entirely from his temptation, restored calm to his spirit, enlightened his darkened and troubled faith, and gave him feelings of religion and gratitude toward Our Lord Jesus Christ as full of tenderness and devotion as he had ever known.*

But at the same time, O admirable conduct of divine Wisdom! God allowed this same temptation to pass into the mind of Mr. Vincent, who found himself vividly assailed by it from then

on. He used prayers *and mortifications to rid himself of it, but they had no effect other than to make him suffer these torments of hell with patience and resignation, without however losing hope that God would finally have mercy on him.*

However, he *recognized that God wanted to test him by allowing the devil to attack him with such violence, and he did two things:*

- The first was that he wrote his profession of faith on a piece of paper which he placed on his heart as a specific *remedy for the evil he felt; by making a general renunciation of all thoughts contrary to the faith, he made a pact with Our Lord that whenever he laid his hand on his heart and on the paper, as he often did, he intended, by this action and by this movement of his hand, to renounce temptation, even though he did not utter a word with his mouth. At the same time, he lifted his heart to God and gently distracted his mind from his pain, thus confounding the devil without speaking to him or looking at him.*

The second remedy he used was to do the opposite of what the temptation suggested, trying to act in faith and to honor and serve Jesus Christ. He did this in particular by visiting and comforting the poor sick people at the Hôpital de la Charité in the Faubourg Saint Germain, where he was living at the time. This charitable exercise, being one of the most meritorious in Christianity, was also the closest *way to show Our Lord how faithfully he believed in his words and examples and how lovingly he wanted to serve him, since Jesus Christ said that he considered service rendered to the least of his own to be done to himself.*

God granted Mr. Vincent the grace to profit so much from this temptation that not only did he never have occasion *to confess any fault he had committed in this matter, but even the remedies he used were like sources of innumerable blessings that subsequently flowed into his soul.*

Finally, three or four years had passed in this harsh exercise; Mr. Vincent still groaned before God under the *very unfortunate weight of these temptations, and nevertheless tried to strengthen himself more and more against the devil and to confound him. One day, he decided to make a firm and inviolable resolution to honor Jesus Christ more and to imitate him more perfectly than he had done before, which was to devote his whole life to the service of the poor for his love.*

No sooner had he formed this resolution in his mind than, through a marvelous effect of grace, all the suggestions of the evil spirit dissipated and vanished, his heart, which had been oppressed for so long, found itself restored to a sweet *freedom, and his soul was filled with such abundant light that he confessed on various occasions that he seemed to see the truths of the faith with a very special light…*

In addition to the person who gave this testimony, there are several others of merit and virtue, still alive, who have assured the same thing, having learned it from Mr. Vincent himself. He had confided in them what had happened to him on that occasion, in order to encourage them to use the same remedies to obtain relief and healing from similar spiritual pains from which they were suffering" (Abelly, III, 117-19).

"One heroic act is enough*," Vincent de Paul told the Daughters of Charity, "to give a soul the strength to do a million more."*(X, 74).

2° HUMAN NATURE

The experience of human weakness during these three or four years gave Vincent de Paul a particularly pessimistic view of human nature. He shared the vision of St. Bernard in his *Meditatio de humana conditione* (PL 184, 490). Man: a poor worm and a mere vapor (XIII, 31,36); he echoes Bernard's vision: “homo semen putridum, vas stercorum, esca vermium” (man is putrid seed, a vessel of dung, food for worms). We are nothing but worms, vapor, a bag filled with garbage, and a den of a thousand evil thoughts (XIII 36).

Even some seemingly good deeds are “full of smoke, without weight or substance” (XIII, 201). This miserable nature is also subject to continual change (IV, 163; 262; 279; 307; 359; 452; 580; V, 317; 446; 614; 617; 634; VI, 54; 59; 52; 123; 429; VII, 454-588).

Human reason, under these conditions, never or rarely attains the divine (II, 473; XII, 177). *“The righteous fall seven* times *a day”* (X, 6). *“Our eyes may deceive us, but God's truth will never fail in any place”* (January 31, 1634; X, 4).

3° THE FALSE LIGHTS OF THE DEVIL

Not only is human nature weak, it is also easy prey for the devil. It should even be noted that people who have withdrawn from the world are more exposed than others. Christ was only tempted when he withdrew into the desert. The devil does not have to make much effort to secure the people of the world. He only has to offer them what he wants and immediately he is obeyed, he is worshipped by them (XII, 343). Illusion is nothing more than a false light that the evil spirit puts into the imagination. Species go to the understanding, and influences and reflections to the will. The evil one can thus make what is black appear white and what is only a lie appear to be truth. To further complicate the human situation, there are natural illusions, such as the petrified trees at Montmirail. The tree looks like wood, but to the touch it is stone. If the devil can transform himself into an angel of light, as St. Paul assures us (2 Cor. 11:14), what can he not do? It is impossible to list all the categories of illusion. However, it is possible to identify at least five.

1) Illusions caused by humans, because their knowledge is small and limited.

2) Illusions caused by the devil. Knowing the moods that contribute to arousing this or that passion, he knows how to excite them, so that by the false days he puts into the imagination, he causes us to fall. He knows all our moods, he knows our specific and particular actions, he sees those that can give a false impression; he knows how to put these moods together and compose an impression that passes from the imagination to the understanding and from there presents itself to the will to induce it to give its consent.

3) The devil tempts us through creatures, which he uses as traps to make us stumble.

4) The devil also has the artifice of forming certain bodies out of air, so that the creature, seeing these objects, very often allows itself to be carried away.

5) Add to this the bad dreams that are quite commonly the work of the devil. Such was the dream of Pope Clement VIII (XII, 346-47).

4° SADNESS AND PESSIMISM

The endless temptation against faith plunged Mr. DePaul into deep sadness. His first biographer noticed and excused this singular sadness. *"Monsieur Vincent," he wrote, "was naturally bilious and quick*-tempered*, and therefore very prone to anger. Nevertheless, with the help of grace, he so mastered this passion by practicing the opposite virtue, which is gentleness, that far from causing him to commit any faults, it almost seemed as if he did not feel the initial attacks. It is true that when he was with Madame la Générale des galères, as he himself confessed to people he trusted, he sometimes gave in a little to his bilious and melancholic temperament, which sometimes caused the good lady some concern, thinking that he was dissatisfied in her house. But when he realized that God was calling him to live in community and that in this state he would have to deal with all kinds of people of different dispositions, I turned to God, he said, and begged him earnestly to change my dry and repellent mood and give me a gentle and benign spirit, and by the grace of Our Lord, with a little attention I paid to repressing the boils of nature, I have somewhat left my dark mood behind*(Abelly, III, 177-78).

5° INFLUENCES RECEIVED

1) *Benoit de Canfield*

No doubt as early as December 1608, upon his arrival in Paris, Vincent de Paul, advised by the good Monsieur Duval, in whom everything is holy, he would say, adopted this breviary of spiritual life that was *The Rule of Perfection*, "containing a summary of the entire spiritual life, reduced to the single point of God's will." The work had been put on sale on December 13, 1608, by the bookseller Charles Chastellain (1st edition at the Municipal Library of Troyes, 5,539). He never ceased to instill the doctrine of Benedict de Canfield in Louise de Marillac.

"Be therefore, my dear daughter, completely humble, completely submissive, and completely trusting, and wait patiently for the evidence of his holy and adorable will" (I, 26-30; October 30, 1626). He made the same statements on February 9, 1628 (I, 393; in 1626-1629 (I, 62; 68; 82). He gave the same advice to the priests of the Mission (II, 453; IV, 34; VII, 375-386). On March 7, 1659 (XII, 150-165), he expounded the Capuchin's doctrine and even borrowed some of his comparisons. "Perfection does not consist in ecstasy, but in doing God's will" (October 17, 1655; XI, 173).

2) *Johannine theology*

The Gospel of John provides Vincent de Paul with the identity of the Son of God, whose food is to do the will of the Father (John 4:34 = *Entretiens,* ed. 1960, pp. 469, 571, 574, 581; John 6:38 = *Entretiens,* p. 571; John 12:49 = *Entretiens,* p. 963; John 14:10 = *Entretiens,* p. 428). The Son of God sent by the Father is destined for the poor. Luke 4:18-20 is often recalled by Vincent de Paul *(Entretiens,* pp. 45, 75, 272, 416, 495, 506, 789, 896). The focus of Jesus' mission is spectacular. Paul (Phil. 2:3, 7, 8) recalls this, and Vincent never tires of repeating it. To accomplish

his mission, Jesus emptied himself and suffered a horrible passion. Vincent associates this image of the suffering Christ with that of the poor (Phil. 2:2 is quoted in Entretiens, pp. 666-67, Phil. 2:7 in Entretiens, pp. 525, 628, and Phil. 2:8 in Entretiens, pp. 618, 789, 849).

6° DECISIVE ORIENTATION

Vincent's meeting with François de Sales, who was in Paris between November 7, 1618, and September 13, 1619, fortunately led to a solid friendship that enabled Mr. Vincent to continue the work of the Bishop of Geneva and carry out his intentions. Vincent de Paul was prepared for this meeting. He had read and meditated on *the Introduction to the Devout Life,* which had been widely distributed since its publication by Rigaud in Lyon in 1609 and reprinted in 1610, 1612, 1614, 1615, 1616 (twice), 1617 (four times), and 1618. He read and had others read the *Treatise on the Love of God* (Lyon, Rigaud, 1616). Francis de Sales had already written to Mother de Chantal: “Monsieur Vincent gives you very good advice.” Before his death in Lyon, Francis de Sales entrusted to Monsieur Vincent the tormented soul of Jeanne de Chantal as well as the Parisian Visitation. The Parisian encounter was therefore crucial both for the Salesian tradition and for Vincent de Paul's personal life. He assimilated the doctrine of François de Sales and adopted his pedagogy. God, who until then had been only a great abstract force, took on the face of Christ Jesus, a face radiating gentleness, kindness, tenderness, and also generating a supernatural simplicity. Christ, “oh how tender he was,” Vincent de Paul would say (XII, 170), “he is the divine Poor Man who begs for our love.” “God is love and wants us to come to him through love” (I, 86). People are not what they appear to be; they are the image veiling the presence of Another. In the service of the Gondis, Vincent regarded Madame de Gondi as the Blessed Virgin (IX, 8; cf. IX, 386-87; XIII, 636).

Addressing the missionaries, the Superior General warns them: *"I must not judge a poor peasant or a poor woman by their outward appearance, nor by what seems to be the extent of their intelligence; especially since very often they do not have the appearance or the intelligence of reasonable people, so coarse and earthly are they. But turn the coin over and you will see by the light of faith that the Son of God, who chose to be poor, is represented to us by these poor people, who hardly looked like human beings in his passion and who were considered mad in the minds of the Gentiles* (I Cor. 1:23) *and a stumbling block among the Jews, and with all that, he calls himself the evangelist of the poor, “Evangelizare pauperibus misit me.” O God, how beautiful it is to see the poor, if we consider them in God and in the esteem that Jesus Christ had for them! But if we look at them according to the feelings of the flesh and the worldly spirit, they will appear miserable.* (Abelly, III, 9).

Vincent paints a portrait of the Christian whose only rule is the will of God.

"See the holy dispositions in which he spends his life and the blessings that accompany everything he does. He depends only on God, and it is God who guides him in everything and everywhere. ‘Tenuisti manum dexteram meam et in voluntate tua deduxisti me’ (Ps. 72:24). God holds him as if by the right hand, and, holding himself reciprocally with complete submission to this divine guidance, you will see him tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, all week, all year, and finally all his life, in peace and tranquility, in ardor and continual tendency toward God, and always spreading in the souls of his neighbors the sweet and salutary operations of the spirit that animates

him. If you compare him with those who follow their own inclinations, you will see that his conduct is all bright with light and always fruitful; you will notice remarkable progress in his person, strength and energy in all his words. God gives a special blessing to all his undertakings and accompanies with his grace the plans he makes for himself and the advice he gives to others; and all his actions are of great edification. But on the other hand, we see that people attached to their inclinations and pleasures have only earthly thoughts, slave-like speech, and dead works. And this difference comes from the fact that the latter are attached to creatures and the former are detached from them; nature acts in these lowly souls and grace in those who rise to God and breathe only his will" (Abelly, III, 40; cf. Vincent de Paul, Xll, 235).

In 1661, Mr. Gilbert Cuissot wrote to Mr. Dehorgny that after hearing Mr. Vincent in confession, he had "learned from him a grace common to Blessed Francis de Sales, who, during his lifetime, had the gift of preventing illnesses and mental anguish, *both of which were very violent, by laying his hands on a person of rare virtue who found no relief from the aforementioned ailments. The cessation was complete during the laying on of hands, and the person was relieved for a period of time thereafter. The same thing happened at that time through the laying on of hands by our late Most Honored Father, who, I believe, had been the director of that soul since the death of that great prelate"* (XIII 195). The same testimony of relief is reported by L. Abelly (III, p. 6).

Speaking of Communion, he once said to his confreres: “Do you not feel, my brothers, do you not feel this divine fire burning in your breasts when you have received the adorable body of Our Lord in Communion?” (Abelly, III, 77). On June 7, 1660, he shared with his confreres his vision of life in Christ: “To consume oneself for God, to have no goods or strength except to consume them for God, this is what Our Lord himself did, who consumed himself for the love of his Father” (Xlll, 179).

3. DOGMATIC BASES

1° THE TRUTH OF CHRIST JESUS

Since Christ is “the Way, the Truth, and the Life,” we must be wary of the maxims of the world, which are generally opposed to his. All the maxims of the world are uncertain in their formulation. All things are problematic except those determined by Holy Scripture (II, 3). Our own eyes can deceive us, but God's truth will never fail (IX, 4).

Those who rely on the maxims of the world will build on sand and see everything collapse at the first storm. Undoubtedly, there are maxims of the world that are true, such as “he who grasps at too much loses everything,” and we know them through experience of their effects. The maxims of the Gospel are recognized as true and infallible thanks to the Spirit of Jesus, who gives us the knowledge and insight to see where these divine consequences lead (XI 121, February 12, 1659). Moreover, those who act according to the maxims of the Gospel will have their hearts filled with balm and will walk with confidence (Abelly, III, 9).

How can we make faith operational? We must strive to see all things not as they appear, but as they are in God. This is what M. Depaul did when he entered the Gondi house in 1613. He

strove to see in Madame de Gondi the Virgin Mary and in Monsieur de Gondi, Our Lord (IX, 8; X, 336; 387; XIII, 636). Hence the general principle: to see things as they are in God (VII, 376, 388, Xl, 8). All states of humanity outline and present the states of the Son of God (Abelly, 1, 83). And Vincent de Paul concludes: “Nothing pleases me except Jesus Christ” (Abelly I, 83, 2nd edition).

Humanity is traversed and sustained by a double movement: the Father is in the Son, the Son is in the Spirit, the entire Trinity is in the baptized. On the other hand, the body of Christ is eminently in the poor, for true religion is in the poor, and it is from the poor that the movement rises back up to the Son, to the Father. This movement will continue until the end of the world, until God is all in all (I Cor. 15:28). Christians are invited to draw a threefold conclusion from this fundamental truth.

1) Since the human mind cannot embrace all revealed truths at a single glance, nor attach its consideration to all the divine attributes according to the inclination of its mind, the baptized person will meditate on one or another of the divine perfections, a choice which is not, moreover, an exclusion. “One need only rely solidly and strongly on one of God's perfections, such as his goodness, his Providence, his truth, his immensity, etc. One need only, I say, establish oneself firmly on these divine foundations to become perfect in a short time” (Abelly, III, 9). And Vincent, citing his own experience, says: “I have a particular devotion to following God's adorable Providence in everything.” We must follow it, walk alongside it step by step, not “step over it,” in a word, live under the banner of trust in God.

2) Mr. DePaul, referring discreetly to Bérulle, from whom he does not borrow a complete metaphysics, insists on the concern to look first at God, to see God's interest before human interest. To do this, “we must work to esteem God, strive to conceive a great esteem for Him” (XII, 110), “live in His presence, often lift our thoughts to Him, and judge things only after lifting our spirit to God” (XIII, 345, XI, 128). Even human imperfections, instability, and change should help us to look to the One who is perfect, unchanging in His being and in His love.

3) Rising even higher, Vincent considers the Trinity as a model of uniformity, unity, and charitable understanding (IV, 235; XIII, 633; XII, 257).

What Vincent retains from Bérulle is the vision of the intimate life of the Incarnate Word, a life that gives meaning to all his visible behavior. The interior life of Jesus is his prayer, his oblation as Eternal Priest, his annihilation through the Incarnation for the redemption of humanity.

Thanks to this fixation on the mystery of Jesus, Vincent restores Christ's fullness and prevents the imitation of Christ from degenerating into material “imitationism.” The Eternal Priest is full of esteem and love for his Father, and this explains his annihilation (Abelly, III, 90, XII, 108-09). . But precisely because Christ's priesthood is eternal, it cannot be subject to time and interrupted by death on the cross; it continues through others and in other human beings.

2° THE CONTINUATION OF THE MISSION

“To continue the mission of Jesus Christ, one must be clothed in his spirit” (XII, 107). The man who has become a Christian through baptism is an adopted son of God the Father, a brother of Jesus. Baptism has mystically brought about in him the death and resurrection of Christ.

Immersion and emersion symbolize death and resurrection. Everything begins with baptism, but nothing is accomplished there. Christians must, through asceticism and purification, make this participation in divine life effective and alive. This is what all industries strive for: to strip away the old man, to annihilate oneself before God, to empty oneself. “As soon as we are empty of ourselves, God will fill us, for he cannot bear emptiness” (XI, 2; taken from *The Imitation of Jesus Christ* IV, 15.3).

To fulfill the functions of Jesus, it is therefore necessary not only to be in a state of grace, to want to repeat his words and gestures, but also to act under the motion of the Spirit, who acts only in the annihilation of ourselves before God. “We must empty ourselves of ourselves and clothe ourselves with Jesus Christ” (Xl, 343; I, 295). “When we say that the Holy Spirit is at work in someone, it means that this spirit residing in that person gives them the same inclinations and dispositions that Jesus Christ had on earth, and they cause them to act in the same way. I am not saying with equal perfection, but according to the measure of the gifts of this divine spirit” (XII, 108).

4. HUMAN COOPERATION

To ensure God's freedom in man, Vincent placed extraordinary emphasis on the necessity of humility, which places man's corruptible nothingness before God's infinite and creative love. He himself practiced this virtue to a degree that surprised and disconcerted his contemporaries and misled many analysts of his writings. He did not set any degree of humility, but rather saw in this term a constant dynamic of annihilation intended to maintain the transcendence of God's love.

On this point, he is a disciple of Francis de Sales, as he writes to a young missionary: "Every day at Holy Mass we say: ‘In spiritu humilitatis...’. Now, a holy person once told me, as he had learned from the blessed bishop of Geneva, that this spirit of humility which we ask of God in all our sacrifices consists mainly in keeping ourselves in a continual state of attention and disposition to humble ourselves unceasingly on all occasions, both inwardly and outwardly... Who will give us this spirit of humility? Alas, it will be Our Lord, if we ask him and if we remain faithful to his grace and careful to produce its effects" (I, 183; January 15, 1633).

He sees the extensions of humility even in details that at first glance seem insignificant. Thus, in certain cases, he asks us to do less well so as not to take pleasure in an action, to hold back the most beautiful thoughts, etc. Vincent never ceases to enumerate the reasons for concentrating all asceticism on the acquisition of humility: it attracts grace (IX, 674), prepares the way for all other virtues (X, 129; XII, 210), is the source of charity, which can only exist in it (XI, 2); it brings peace and unity among the members of a community (IX 707- XII, 37, 106), is the foundation of generosity (XII, 368); upon it Our Lord establishes the execution of his designs (III, 279; V, 164; X, 199); sister of gentleness (XII, 184), it fills souls empty of themselves (XI, 312).

What should sway our judgment and lead us to practice it is that humility was practiced in a divine and compelling way by Christ Jesus (V, 633; IX, 672-73; XI, 137-39, 346, 347, 394, 440, XII, 196, 199-202). Everyone agrees that this way of being is beautiful in theory (XI, 54, XII, 197), but difficult in practice (XII, 198). Humility does not have degrees; it requires certain dispositions, a way of thinking and behaving. But first, one must seek neither esteem nor honors (I, 496, 528,

534, 536; II, 281, 314; V, 487; VII, 98, 312; IX, 303, 443-444, 675-676; X, 140, 148, 164; XI, 138-142, 188, 346-347, 440-441; XII, 22, 316-318; XIII, 712).

When successful, attribute that success to God's action (I 182, 183; X, 674; XI, 346). Remember that by relying on oneself, one spoils everything and is incapable of anything (X, 227). Humble yourself for your faults and sins (XI, 3, 54, 397). Love contempt (VII, 289, 467; X, 153, 228, 674; XI, 433; XII, 202, 208, 279, 316; XIII, 709-710). Consider oneself below everyone else, even the devil (IX, 303, 382; X, 153-154, 241, 438-439, 552; XI, 114; XII, 453). Be humble not only for yourself but for the community to which you belong (II, 233; V, 35, 37, 534; X, 200; XI, 60, 114, 323, 434, 439-440; XII, 203, 205, 279-280, 438).

A careful examination of the life, works, and spirit of Mr. DePaul allows us to find in all the Vincentian directives the authoritative voice of a master of Christian spirituality. His surprising lucidity gave rise only to prodigious devotion and a serious and penetrating tenderness. He is aware of his harshness, his outbursts, his severity, and he apologizes for them too often to appease the irritation of daily pride. He humbles himself enough to reconcile our distracted attention and entrust us with the essence of his teaching in a common and familiar tone, “goodly and simply,” as Our Lord Jesus Christ would do.

Two instructions emerge more clearly. First, to value the human journey by giving it a redemptive meaning. Human life is neither a beginning nor an absolute end: it is a continuation. It must continue the supernatural mission of love of Jesus, complete the mystical Christ for whom it is made and in whom it is understood. A divine intention supports activity, initiates an inner transformation, and postulates a continual surpassing of oneself. Secondly, and consequently, value every action. Do not bury in monotonous self-love the infinite love that reaches out to us to divinize us. Above all, do not anesthetize yourself in the habit that mechanizes and stupefies. On the contrary, conquer and defend with energetic asceticism this elusive freedom that is constantly threatened, keep your heart alert and protect within yourself the spirit of God, that clear and pulsating flame without which men and things would be only what they are. And then, in this one true light, see everything in God, where everything is grace, everything is love. Realize your life by realizing the adorable will of God. Do not do things for the sake of doing them, but to accomplish in them the beatific will of Jesus, “eternal sweetness of angels and men.”

5. IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF VINCENT DE PAUL

Three centuries of charitable history, sustained by the same inspiration, have given rise to two psychological types of Vincentians. They illustrate two ways of continuing Vincent's work and momentum in order to be more deeply and totally faithful to him.

1° MISSIONARY TYPE

The first way characterizes a type of men and women who can easily be called “missionaries” if this term means a spirit of initiative and adventure, a taste for risk, and a vigor in adaptation. Whatever their origin, these Vincentians, rich in gracious kindness, are naturally drawn to daring works and difficult conquests. Heirs to a strong temperament, they mark their existence

with original creations and mask their innovative attitudes with a warm smile, a disarming expression of fundamental modesty. In this group, which suspects its strength and ignores its originality, we find the great missionary bishops of China and Ethiopia, pioneers such as Messrs. Appiani, Mullener, Huc, and Gabet, Saint Justin de Jacobis (1800-1860; canonized on October 26, 1975), Ghebré Michaël (beatified on October 3, 1926); closer to us, certain missionaries with proconsular airs such as Joseph Baetmann, Lobry, Sarloutte, and Coulbeaux easily join them. If these missionaries of the open air needed patrons or protectors, they would choose Blessed J.G. Perboyre, martyred in China in 1840, or Blessed François-Régis Clet (beatified on May 27, 1900). But they hardly think about it, because they feel them in their lives. They will never lack admirers, and if they do not find memorialists, it is because their very existence will have been enough for the Church.

2° CONTEMPLATIVE TYPE.

Less visible and less enchanting, this psychological type is illustrated by a host of Lazarists who are akin to the Carthusians, whose silence they honor. They mingle with teachers who spend their lives in tedious repetition. Minor and major seminaries bring them together. They confine their values there. There, risks are taken silently and the adventure unfolds within the four walls of the bedroom or classroom. Outwardly, these Vincentians do not look impressive. Their modest and somewhat narrow presentation keeps them away from social gatherings. If they stray there, they get bored. They know full well that their grace lies elsewhere. Nourished by work, educated in simplicity, they always dream of being friends to the little ones and the poor. Their vocation is hospitality, appeasement, self-renunciation, and also simplicity, which facilitates communion of hearts. Do they need ancestors? If they wish, they can call on Monsieur du Coudray, whom Monsieur Vincent forbade from translating the Syriac version for the polyglot Oratorian Jean Morin. However, they would not dare to talk too long with Jacques Corborand de La Fosse, a passionate Hebraist and cumbersome original. He was the Desmarets of Saint-Sorlin of the nascent Society. Pierre Collet (1693-1770; DS, vol. 2, COI. 1121-23), a hard worker and esteemed theologian of the papacy, reassured them. His extremely vigorous opposition to the theology of Port-Royal and his solid biography of Saint Vincent allowed them to imagine the culture displayed by the best professors of the 18th century. And of course, these contemplatives felt a kinship with René Rogue (1758-1796), whom Pius XI beatified on March 10, 1934, just as they felt they belonged to the same family as Messrs. François and Gruyer, who were massacred in September 1792 (beatified on October 17, 1926), because they too had taught in seminaries. These colleagues do not refuse to be their patrons and, on occasion, their advocates.

Closer to us, within reach and close to our hearts, certain Vincentian figures continue and diversify this tradition. We think of the industrious Pierre Coste, tireless editor of the works of Vincent de Paul, also from the Landes region. Joining Pierre Coste, each according to his own grace, was Mr. J. Parrang, who rejuvenated himself in the dark rooms of the National Archives, and also the southern enthusiasm and extreme helpfulness of Fr. Joseph Guichard.

Father Charles François Jean succumbed at the age of 42 to the temptation of learning Babylonian from an English textbook, which led him to teach Hebrew at the École du Louvre for twenty-five years.

But above all, two great men illustrate this contemplative tradition, which is nourished by hopes and hidden successes. Both placed at the junction of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, they were born to be mediators.

The first, Fernand Portal (DS, vol. 12, col. 1929), a native of the Cévennes, felt called to an apostolate of friendship. “We do not believe a man because he is knowledgeable, but because we esteem and love him,” St. Vincent had told him. Thanks to his friendship with Lord Halifax, Mr. Portal succeeded in bringing Catholics and Anglicans, who had not spoken to each other for more than three centuries, into friendly dialogue. Mr. Portal, a disciple of Newman, a friend of Teilhard de Chardin, a spiritual father, this missionary ignored by his colleagues was, according to É. Poulat, a “networker” and a “true wall-walker.” This Lazarist without a degree was able to gather around him the “Tala” of the Rue d'Ulm, and this uncompromising cleric was the agent of the most anticlerical of our great statesmen, G. Clémenceau. He published Loisy. This priest with a “pen” found peace in serving illiterate children (cf. R. Ladous, Monsieur Portal et les siens, Paris, 1985). The disciples of Mr. Portal, Abbé Gratieux, Canon Hemmer, and Jesuit M. Viller, to name only those who have passed away, were friends and workers for this unity that haunts the contemporary papacy more than ever.

The second, Guillaume Pouget (1847-1933, DS, vol. 12, col. 2022-2025), had an obscure career and a vocation for seclusion. Blind but in love with light, he fascinated people with his fabulous memory. But he was also a relentless exegete and a thinker who was unaware of his own genius. Fortunately, this Christian Socrates, as Paul Claudel called him, found in Jean Guitton a sympathetic and seductive Plato. If we bring together some of those who are honored to have listened to Father Pouget: Jacques Chevalier, Emmanuel Mounier, Maurice Legendre, everyone will be amazed at the depth and secrets of his charity.

The Ladies of Charity, founded on August 23, 1617, in Châtillon-les-Dombes, became the “Équipes Saint Vincent” and are still at work throughout the world, numbering more than 300,000. To the joy and comfort of grandfathers and grandmothers, the Ladies brought the “Louise de Marillac” into the world in 1911.

Father Vincent was rightly suspected of having inspired both Bishop Jean Rodhain, who created Secours Catholique in 1940, and Abbé Pierre, who reclassified the unclassifiable, multiplying “Emmaus” centers around the world where those who had lost hope could rediscover their zest for life. Father Georges-Dominique Pire, who founded “Europe of the Heart” in 1949 and in 1950 established Aid to Displaced Persons, took up Vincent's initiatives for refugees from Lorraine and Ireland. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1958 (cf. F. Weyergans, *Le Père Pire et l'Europe du cœur,* 1962).

Just as Vincent was concerned with directing and adapting the Company of the Daughters of Charity, which had six different sets of rules between 1633 and 1660, many religious congregations adopted the flexibility of the constitutions drawn up by Mr. Vincent and Mademoiselle Legras. Among others, we need only mention the Sisters of Charity of Clément Auguste (1808),

the Sisters of Tilburg, the Sisters of Charity of Besançon, the Sisters of Divine Providence of Ribeauvillé, the Religious of Saint Vincent de Paul founded in 1845 by Father Le Prévost, and the Sons and Daughters of Charity of Father Anizan. all these groups adapted their methods to remain faithful to the spirit of Mr. Vincent, participating in the Spirit of Jesus. Currently, in 1991, several

hundred religious groups are guided by Mr. Vincent's boat. “Let God steer our little boat,” he wrote to all those who are fearful, “he will keep it from sinking” (V, 448).

CONCLUSION

Transcending the social structures of religious life, at the very heart of a life of piety, Mr. Vincent very discreetly continued his work as a religious educator. There is indeed an inner life that can be described as Vincentian because it adapts to best adopt his views on man and God. It embraces his themes of prayer and thought. It assumes his psychology and mimics his prudence. A few signs quickly betray his fundamental allegiance. It shows only limited benevolence towards extraordinary forms of religious sentiment. Vincent's opposition to certain pre-supernatural phenomena and his conduct toward visionaries of all kinds further reinforce her reflexes and inoculate her sensibility. Periodic reading of the lecture on false lights is a simple, effective, and highly hygienic therapy. Mr. Vincent knew certain mystical phenomena from experience. But he himself said in advance, regarding the vision of the globes representing the soul of Saint Chantal, that of Francis de Sales, and the Divine Essence in 1641, that he was suspicious of these manifestations of the Invisible. One must take into account both the wiles of the devil and the fatigue of earthly service. He does not even hesitate to declare that ecstasies are more harmful than helpful. The signs of good supernatural health are verifiable by everyone: participation in the Eucharistic sacrifice and purification through the sacrament of penance.

Paradoxically, Vincentian piety combines two attitudes that would seem to be mutually exclusive: concrete rationalism and a permanent refusal to cooperate with the “deceitful little nature.” “Sensuality creeps in everywhere.” The life of Christ in the baptized can only survive in a perpetual struggle. Zeal and humility, simplicity and prudence, mortification are the weapons particularly recommended in the spiritual arsenal.

With his friend Bishop de Genève, Mr. Vincent intends to give the piety of his own people, and very humbly to all French piety, a characteristic label: the close union between ethics and religion. Piety and religion are at once an expression, a proof, and an extension of moral experience.

The Marian piety called for by Vincent from the very first charitable organization in Châtillon-les-Dombes on August 23, 1617, has been perpetuated in the Vincentian tradition. The apparitions of the Immaculate Virgin to Saint Catherine Labouré in 1830 sparked Marian fervor in the 19th century, which was a “Mariological” century. The Chapel of the Miraculous Medal in Paris remains the most visited place of worship in the capital. *" The Mother of God being invoked and taken as patroness in matters of importance, it is impossible that all should not go well and redound to the glory of her good Son Jesus“* (XIV, 126).

”He has almost changed the face of the Church," declared Bishop Henri de Maupas du Tour solemnly in the first eulogy for Monsieur Vincent de Paul (November 23, 1660). What would the face of the Church be without the divinizing life and action of God through Monsieur Vincent? No one knows, and anyone who tries to imagine it is lost in reverie. All we know is that Monsieur Vincent was the visible embodiment of Providence in the 17th century. We are sure that he completely missed his “honest retreat.” What our hearts allow us to recognize, “the heart that sees wisdom,” is that at the end of his earthly service, he who wanted to die in the corner of a bush,

gently and humbly settled into the depths of Christian consciousness. At times, he seems to be asleep. Illusion! He does not want to surprise or rush us. If we think of him, humbly, as always, he comes to us. Motionless, silent, he is careful not to accuse us of our constitutional selfishness. So that we may believe that man infinitely transcends man, without a word, he begs for our love.

6. LANDMARK

1) *Vincent de Paul.*

By early 1658, Vincent was no longer able to go down to the church. In 1659, he resigned himself to celebrating Mass in the infirmary chapel. In July 1660, he agreed to be carried to the adjoining room, which had been converted into a chapel (August 15, 1660). He had attended the last Council of the Sisters on November 27, 1659. The conferences with the Sisters were interrupted on December 14, 1659; the conferences with the Missionaries ceased on December 19. He gathered the sisters three times at Saint-Lazare and the ladies once in 1660.

On December 19, 1660, Cardinal Paul Bagni wrote to him that the Pope had dispensed him from the Divine Office (VIII, 455-456). Mr. Antoine Portal had died on February 14. Vincent had said to Louise de Marillac: “You go ahead, I will join you soon.” Louise de Marillac died on March 15; Louis de Chandenier, on May 2.

On July 3 and 24, 1660, he had the sisters come upstairs to talk to them about the virtues of Mademoiselle Legras. The members of the council of the Daughters of Charity even returned on August 27 for the election of officers (National Archives, L. 1054, n. 17). The Ladies of Charity obtained the same favor for the drafting of their final regulations (letter from Edme Jolly dated July 20, 1682, in the Archives of the Mission).

On September 25, he fell into a state of drowsiness and when he awoke, he murmured: “The brother is coming while waiting for the sister.” On September 26 at 6:30 p.m., Mr. Dehorgny administered extreme unction. On September 27 at 3:50 a.m., he repeated “Jesus” once more. At 4:45 a.m., he expired and, according to Mr. Gicquel, “he gave his beautiful soul back into the hands of Our Lord and remained seated as he was, beautiful, more majestic and venerable to behold than ever. He died in his chair, fully clothed, near the fire” (XIII, 191).

The funeral, set for the following day, Tuesday, September 28, began at 10 a.m. He was buried in a lead coffin, enclosed in a wooden coffin and a square masonry tomb, located in the church of Saint-Lazare, “above the eagle” (XIII, 192).

Beatification on August 13, 1729, by Benedict XIII, bull “Justus et misericors”; canonization on June 16, 1737, by Clement XII, bull “Superna Jerusalem”; patron saint of charitable works on May 18, 1885, by Leo XIII, bull “Cum multa.”

2) *Louise de Marillac*

(Paris, August 12, 1591 - March 15, 1660, Paris): beatified on May 9, 1920, by Pius XI; canonized on March 11, 1934, by Pius XI; patron saint of all those who devote themselves to Christian social works by John XXIII on February 10, 1960.

3) Sainte Catherine Labouré

(Fains-les-Moutiers, 2 mai 1806 - 31 décembre 1876, Paris), béatification le 28 mai 1933 par Pie XI; canonisation le 27 juillet 1947 par Pie XII.

4) *Elisabeth Anne Bayley Seton*

(DS, t. 14, col. 745-748 - 28 juillet 1774, New York - 4 janvier 1821 Emmitsbourg), béatification le 17 mars 1963 par Jean XXIII, canonisation le 14 septembre 1975 par Paul VI.

5) *Justin de Jacobis*

(San Fele, 9 octobre 1800 - Aligadi, 31 juillet 1860), béatification le 25 juin 1939 par Pie XII; canonisation le 26 octobre 1975 par Paul VI.

6) *François Regis Clet*

(Grenoble, 19 août 1748 Ouchangfou, 18 février 1820), béatification le 27 mai 1900 par Léon XIII.

7) *Béatification de 4 Filles de la Charité* par Benoît XV, le 13 juin 1920 :

Marie-Madeleine Fontaine (22 avril 1723 - 26 juin 1794),

Marie-Françoise Lanel (24 août 1745 - 26 juin 1794),

Marie-Madeleine Fantou (29 juillet 1747 - 26 juin 1794),

Jeanne Gérard (23 octobre 1752 - 26 juin 1794).

8) *Louis-Joseph François*

(8 février 1751-3 septembre 1792)

et *Jean-Henri Gruyer*

(13 juin 1734 - 3 septembre 1792), béatification par Pie XI, le 17 octobre 1926.

9) *Pierre-René Rogue*

(11 juin 1758 - 3 mars 1796) béatification par Pie XI, le 10 mars 1934.

10) *Jean-Gabriel Perboyre*

(5 janvier 1802 - Outchangfou, 11 septembre 1840), béatification par Léon XIII, le 10 novembre 1889, canonisation par Jean-Paul II, le 2 Juin 1996.

11) *Ghebré Michael*

(Godjan, = 13 juillet 1855) béatification le 3 octobre 1926 par Pie XI.

Œuvres et sources

1. Œuvres

P. Coste a publié l'ensemble des œuvres de Vincent de Paul : *Correspondance, Entretiens, Documents,* 15 vol., Paris, 1920-1970 (le dernier vol. est un numéro de la revue *Mission et Charité,* janvier-juin 1970). Nous avons renvoyé à cette éd. en donnant le vol. et la page. On ajoute ici quelques éd. critiques récentes.

Correspondance: Coste, t. 1-8; plus 144 lettres éd. par A. Dodin, Paris, 1970 = t. 15 de l'éd. Coste. - *Entretiens aux Filles de la Charité,* t. 9-10. - *Entretiens aux Missionnaires* t. 1 1-12, éd. critique par A. Dodin, Paris, 1960, 1965. - Le t. 14 est la Table générale.

Le *Catalogue général des livres imprimés de la BibL Nat.* (de Paris), t. 211, 1972, col. 397-415, signale les éd. antérieures et de nombreux extraits tirés des écrits ou de la *Vie* par L. Abelly; tous sont de type spirituel.

2. Sources

Documents (t. 13 de l'éd. Coste). - Louis Robineau (un secrétaire de Vincent), *Remarques sur les actes et paroles defeu Mr V. de P.*, éd. par A. Dodin, Paris, 1991 : complète les écrits et est la source de la *Vie* par L. Abelly. L. Abelly (DS, t. 1, col. 65-67), *La vie du vénérable serviteur de Dieu, Vincent de Paul,* Paris, 1664 (3 livres), 1667 (2 livres); cf. *L. Abelly, historien de S. V. de P.,* 3 vol. ronéot. 1968, le t. I est édité par A. Dodin : *De Monsieur Depaul à saint Vincent de Paul* Paris 1985. - Pierre Collet (t 1770; DS, t. 2, col. 1121-23j, *La vie de S. V. de P., instituteur de la Congr. de la Mission...,* 2 vol., Nancy, 1748. - Sur ces biographies, A. Dodin, *État des études vincentiennes au moment du Quadricentenaire de la naissance...,* Dax" 1982, 16 p., et dans *V. de P. Actes du Colloque internat. d'Etudes Vincentiennes,* Rome, 1983, p. 115-28.

Biographies : par U. Maynard, 4 vol., 3° éd., Paris, 1896; - A. Loth, Paris, 1880; - L.É. Bougaud, 2 vol., Paris, 1889 (trad. ital., Turin, 1947), - A. Renaudin, Marseille, 1927; P. Coste, 3 vol., Paris, 1932 (trad. ital., Rome, 1937); - T. Casini, Rome, 1937; - E. Lucatello, Milan, 1943; - J. Calvet, Paris, 1948, 1957. - I. Giordani, Rome, 1959; A. Frossard, Paris, 1960. - L. Chierotti, 2° éd., Rome, 1960. - J.M. Roman Milan, 1986. LTK, t. 10,1965, col. 801-02 (bibliogr. allemande). - BS, t. 12, 1969, col. 1155-68 (bibliogr.).

Études. - A.-J. Ansart, *L'esprit de S. V. de P.,* Paris, 1780. - U. Maynard, *Vertus et doctrine spirituelle de S. V. de P.,* Paris, 1864. - J.-B. Boudignon, S. V. *de P., modèle des hommes d'action...,* Paris, 1886. - M.-É. Mott, S. V. *de P. et le Sacerdoce,* Paris, 1900. - G. Arnaud d'Agnel, S. V. *de P. directeur d'ames, Paris,* 1925; *... guide du prêtre,* Paris, 1927... *maître d'oraison,* Paris, 1929. - P. Defrennes, *La vocation de S. V. de P.*, RAM t. 13, 1932 (4 livraisons). - M. de Fels, *Mr Vincent,* Paris, i935. - S. Juva, M. V., *évolution d'un saint,* Bourges, 1939.

A. Molien, *La journée chrétienne d'après S. V de P.,* Paris, 1948. - I. Delarue, *L'idéal missionnaire du prêtre d'après* 5. V., Paris, 1946, 1951; *Sainteté de Mr Vincent,* Paris, 1959. - R. Muneta, *La espiritualidad de S. V. de P.,* Madrid, 1956. - R. Chalumeau, *La vie et l'âme de M. V.,* Paris, 1959. R.-J. Hesbert, *Mr V. maître de vie spirituelle,* Paris, 1960. R.-J. Hesbert et Éd. Bertaud, *Spiritualité de l'action. A l'école de M.V.*, Paris, 1960. - J.-B. Rouanet, S.V. *de P., prêtre instrument de Jésus Christ,* Bourges, 1960. - P. Renaudin, S. V. *de P. Introduction et choix de textes,* Paris, 1960.

F. Contassot, S. V. *de P., guide des supérieurs,* Paris, 1964. - M.R. Mathieu, *M. V. chez les de Condi,* Montmirail, 1966. - M. Leuret-Dupanloup, *Le cœur de S. V. de P.,* Paris, 1971. I.G. Zedde, *L'evangelizzazione dei poveri secondo S. V. dé P.,* Rome, 1972 (thèse de la Grégorienne). - L. Mezzadri, *Fra giansenisti e antigiansenisti. V. Depaul e la Congr. della Missione,* Florence, 1977 (bibl.). - G.L. Coluccia, *Spiriualità vincenziana, spiritualità dell'azione,* Rome, 1980 (thèse de Latran). - J. Kapusciak, ll *compimento della volonta di Dio come principio unif catore... in S. V. de P.,* Rome, 1982 (thèse de la Grégorienne).

A. Dodin, S. V. *de P. et la Charité* coll. Maîtres spirituels 21, Paris, 1960; 5° éd. *1983; L'esprit vincentien. Le secret de S.V. de P.*, *1981; Mr Vincent parle à ceux qui souffrent,* Paris, 1981, *En prière avec M. Vincent,* Paris, 1982; *François de Sales, V. de P., les deux amis,* Paris, 1984; *La Bible de M. V. de P.,* dans *Le grand siècle et la Bible,* Paris, 1989, p. 627-42; *Mr Vincent et le merveilleux,* Paris 1989. Voir aussi la revue *Mission et Charité,* Paris, 1961-1969.

Sur les institutions vincentiennes. - *Regulae, seu Constitutiones communes Congr. Missionis,* Paris, 1658, 1855 (en franç., Paris, 1856). - P. Coste, *La Congr. de la Mission dite de Saint-Lazare,* Paris, 1927. - G. Goyau, *La Congr. de la Mission des Lazaristes,* Paris, 1938. - J.-G. Perboyre, *Mémoires de la Congr. de la Mission en Pologne* (Paris, 1863); *... à Madagascar* (Paris, 1867); *... en Chine* (5 vol., 1865-1866). - A. Thomas, *Histoire de la Mission de Pekin* 2 vol., Paris, 1923-1926. - *Annales de la Congr. de la Mission,* 1834-1963: 127 vol., 506 n.

P. Coste, S. V. *de P. et les Dames de la Charité,* Paris, 1917. - L. Celier, *Les Filles de la Charite,* Paris, 1951. *Vincent de Paul. Actes du Colloque internat. d'Études vincentiennes,* Rome, 1983 (conférences très diverses). - Art. *Vincentians,* NCE, t. 14, 1967, p. 685-88. - Art. *Congregazione della Missione,* DIP t. 2 1975 col. 1543-51 (bibliogr.).

(Édouard Rosset, *Notices bibliographiques sur les écrivains de la Congr. de la Mission...,* première série, Angoulême, 1878.

DS: Les réfërences à Vincent de Paul sont très nombreuses, mais souvent allusives; retenir en particulier t. 2, col. 616-17 (charité), 1177, 1185-88 (vie communautaire), 1279 (communion fréquente), - t. 4, col. 227-28 (Ecriture sainte), 425-26 (Église); - t. 5, col. 929-30, 942 et 949 (France).

André DODIN.