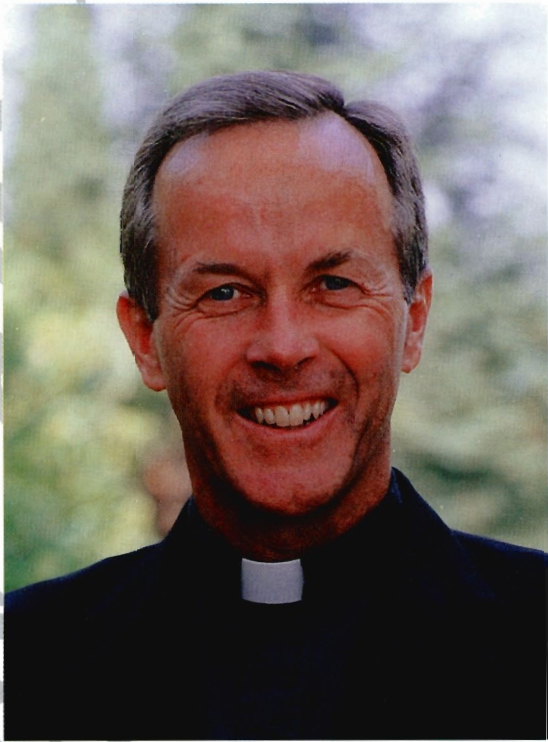


like a great fire



Vincent de Paul



“Like a great fire.” There could not be a more beautiful title than this for a magazine introducing us to the St. Vincent de Paul of yesterday and today. St. Vincent evangelizing and serving the poor and enflamed by the fire of charity and zeal of the very heart of Jesus, “who came to bring fire on the earth in order to set it ablaze with his love.” What a beautiful title, too, for introducing the Vincentian family of today, Vincentians, Daughters of Charity, lay movements, all animated by the same fire of the spirit, the same fire of charity amidst the challenges of today’s world.

The words of St. Vincent, when speaking to the missionaries on August 22, 1655, which are relevant for the whole of the Vincentian family, reveal to us his most intimate secret: “Let us ask God to give this spirit to the Little Company, the heart of the Son of God that motivates us to go out as he would... He sends us out as he sent his apostles, to carry this fire everywhere, his divine fire, the fire of his love.”

More than merely acquainting us with a list of dates and events, even if they are important, reading a life of St. Vincent de Paul, enables us to enter into a spirit: it allows us to discover what inspired and possessed him, what touched his heart and moved him. It lets us encounter a person with his own aims and intuitions, hopes and undertakings; it teaches us to love those he loved and serve those he served; it imbues us with his spirit in order to follow in his footsteps and live the Gospel in the way he lived it. This marvelous publication succeeds in doing this very well. I thank the authors warmly.

The pages on the Vincentian family today are also very stimulating and alive. They show us how that fire that burned in the Vincentian family continues to burn today and how the charism that the Holy Spirit gave him is still present today, seeking responses which are suited to the new needs of the world, and waiting for hearts to open so that it can spread itself further.

This publication helps us enter into the spirit of St. Vincent. It incites us to go out to the poor around us and to those who are far from his spirit. It invites us to recognize in their faces the face of the Son of God, and to serve them “bodily and spiritually.” It urges us to carry the fire of the love of God everywhere to those who have not encountered it so that, experiencing it, they may love God as a Father and love one another as brothers and sisters.

I hope that this beautiful magazine will have a wide circulation among all the members of the Vincentian family and I pray to the Lord that he will revive in our hearts the Vincentian charism for the service of Jesus Christ in the poor.

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.
Superior General.

CONTENTS



1

A shower of sparks

biography

2

A human face, a reflection of God

meditation

3

Twigs and logs for feeding the fire

the Vincentian spirit

4

Called to bear the love of God everywhere

consecrated for service

5

When the love of God is fire

Vincentian laity





A shower **of sparks**

Without doubt, you already know him! His face is so familiar to you, filled with gentleness and compassion, that you would not need to ask him who he is. A subtle smile takes shape on his lips and his eyes are so piercing, alive and full of playfulness. As soon as you come close to him you have adopted him. He is a little bit yours. It is an intense pleasure, as if you were rediscovering a lifelong friend, for he is so close and teaches you over and over again that the only true love is a love that is shared.



Barthes : the marshy ground of Pouy (Landes)

On the banks of the Adour

He was the son of country people of the Landes. In 1581, the year of his birth, Gascony and Aquitaine had barely extricated themselves from a war. Jeanne d'Albret, converted to the Protestant religion in 1559, and involved all the Southern region in the rebellion. In order to hold out against the Catholic army, she appealed to the Protestant leader Montgomery who seized Orthez, Pau, Mont de Marsan and St. Sever. He devastated the diocese of Aire and set fire to the monasteries of Sorde, Arthous and Divielle.

In 1572, her son Henry of Navarre married Marguerite de Valois and became a part of the ruling family of France. Henry became a leader in the war and fought in the South-West against the 'Ligueur party.' In 1580, the governor of Dax, the Marquis of Poyanne, recaptured Mont de Marsan from the Protestants but Henry of Navarre took it back once again by surprise.

Suddenly, the tables of history were turned: on the assassination of Henry III, the leader of the Protestants became the legal heir to the kingdom of France. He did not hesitate long to make the short step from abjuration to the throne. In 1598, the Edict of Nantes was signed.



Here Vincent was baptised.

- 1572 Massacre of Saint Bartholomew.
- 1580 Montaigne's Essays.
- 1581 Birth of Vincent de Paul.
- 1582 Death of Teresa of Avila (1515-1582).
- 1589 Assassination of Henry III.
Accession of Henry IV.
- 1591 Death of John of the Cross (1542-1591).
- 1598 Edict of Nantes
Death of Vincent's father.



A peasant in the town

One day Vincent's father met his brother, the prior of Poymartet, close to the hamlet of Gourbera. The two men's conversation turned quickly to the youngest son that morning, while the first mists of the early autumn rolled over the fallow land. The priest observed that Vincent had a natural aptitude for study. It would be a sin to bind him to the land. He was far from idle and showed a real talent for reading and writing. He already knew a few rudiments of Latin. His father showed some hesitation: "Soon there will be six mouths to feed in the de Paul household. Where am I to find the money to pay for board and lodging at the Gray Friars' school at Dax?" On his return to Ranquines he spoke to his wife Bertrande Demoras: she was worth consulting. Above all she had connections, for she came from a well-off family in Dax. She had an inspiration: she would speak to one of her relatives who presided at the court of justice. No sooner said than done. Was she convincing? Monsieur de Comet happened to be looking for a private tutor for his children. Why could not Vincent occupy this position while doing his secondary studies with the good Gray Friars?

That is how, at age 15, Vincent left his home. An ambitious plan was the reason for his departure. Why shouldn't he become a priest? A good ecclesiastical career would enable him to earn enough to live on and also provide for the needs of his family. So it would be worth a few months of study in the town of Dax! No doubt he made some good acquaintances there. He had already entered the world of people with influence. One day he was to admit: "I remember once at the college where I was studying, I was told that my father, who was a poor peasant, was asking for me. I refused to go and speak to him, which was a great sin." He had difficulty in publicly acknowledging his father who was "badly dressed and limped a little."

Already how far away seemed the blessed and unpretentious times at Ranquines. The future saint was always to feel a deep home-sickness for them. He would always remember the staunch family values which had shaped his heart: the love of the land, an intelligent and wily realism, a keen faith, like that of the poor of whom he would say one day: "they touch, they feel the Word of life." He remembered with emotion his mother's spontaneous catechism lessons, the Sunday masses celebrated in the Church of Pouy in front of the magnificent altar-piece of Saint Peter in Bondage. He was to keep alive the memory of a large family brimming over with faith. There would be pride in his humiliations one day: "I was a swineherd." Don't ever doubt it, that was his trademark!



The house where
he was born

The galloping of his horse

Since his departure from Ranquines, the great adventure had only just begun. Nowadays it is commonplace to see an inhabitant of Pouy set off for University! In 1597 the journey was unusual, especially for the son of a peasant. Young Vincent, who was used to walking on foot and even more to the galloping of a horse, undertook his first expedition. It was merely a prelude to the rest of his life which he would spend traveling. Freshly tonsured by the ex-Abbot of Arthous, now Bishop of Tarbes and a friend of his mother's family, he was ready to take his place on the student benches of the school of Theology. His father had made a great sacrifice: a pair of oxen had been sold to ensure the payment of tuition for his studies. Toulouse was swarming with students: he had to discover a means of paying his expenses. On the death of his father in 1598, he resolved that he could no longer study at the expense of his family. He agreed to run a little boarding house for young boarders and gentlemen's children. Without being aware of it, he also began a career as an instructor which would prove to be very useful to him later on. For the time being he continued his 7 years of theological study. The most important events in his life succeeded one another. In 1598, on September 19th, he became a subdeacon and on December 19th a deacon, thanks to the bishop of Tarbes, the family friend.

In September 1600, he was ordained to the priesthood by the elderly and blind bishop of Perigieux, Mgr. de Bourdeilles, at Château l'Evêque and, a few days later, celebrated a first mass at a chapel in the mountains of Buzet. He was only 19 years old. One day he would regret his haste. "If I had known what the priesthood entailed, as I have discovered since, when I was rash enough to enter into it, I would have preferred to plow the land rather than commit myself to such a formidable profession." For the present he had only one idea in his head: succeeding!

He skillfully obtained a nomination in his diocese - to the parish of Tilh near Dax. Already acquainted with legal quibbling, he realistically decided not to follow up his claim, for a bull from the Roman curia gave preference to another candidate. Using the Jubilee Year as an excuse, he arranged a trip to Rome in order to improve his position. He then sat for his Theology degree, that is the equivalent of a good Bachelor's degree nowadays. Suddenly he disappeared in the labyrinth of history. "He vanished into obscurity," remarks his latest biographer. This "lost" period still excites historians' curiosity.

Like a file in the hands of a craftsman

The Arab proverb "God writes straight with crooked lines" is right. The young Vincent de Paul's geographic itinerary was fairly tortuous, Dax, Bidache, Tarbes, Toulouse, Périgueux, Marseille, Rome at least twice, and Avignon. When in 1608, aged 27, he went up to Paris, he was a young man of unscrupulous ambition who sought the company of high society. He made contact right away with the Gascons in Paris. A judge from Sore, a little village in the Landes, agreed to share with Vincent his residence in the Faubourg St. Germain. Alas, a scandal put a quick end to this happy arrangement. One morning, the judge left for the law courts leaving Vincent sick in bed. Compelled by necessity, Vincent called upon a chemist's assistant to obtain the appropriate medicine. The delivery boy brought it and while administering it took a glass from the cupboard along with a purse which was a little too visible. When the judge became aware of the theft he accused Vincent and then and there kicked him out of this house, without making any form of inquiry. The moral damage to his reputation was immense. Vincent was publicly accused of stealing two Sundays running by the parish priest of St. Germain. He thus was thought to be someone whose company should be avoided. The affair lasted at least six months. He experienced the bitterness of this injustice. This was to be his first experience of the world of poverty, an unwanted sharing in the universe of the poor. Without him realizing it, someone was working on him.

Very rapidly Vincent was to discover a completely new dimension: spiritual poverty. Thanks to an influential man who was very mindful of priests, a Father de Berulle who was very influential in the "right" circles in Paris, Vincent was able to resume relations with these persons. In the meantime the real thief had been found. At last our friend from the Landes was freed of all suspicion. De Berulle then offered him a fitting employment: official almoner, that is dispenser of alms, to Queen Marguerite, the first wife of Henry IV who had been set aside by the King. Vincent engaged in good works through his position. But he was under-employed and got bored. Providentially, he came across someone in a similar situation in the person of a theologian in despair who was unable to free himself from grave temptations against faith. The man was foundering; he confided his distress to Vincent, who took an interest in his soul. Sensitive to his suffering, Vincent offered counsel after counsel. It was a waste of time: his doubts intensified. For the sake of peace and quiet, and after a period of prayer and reflection, Father Vincent struck a bargain with God: he begged for peace for his friend even if he was to pay the price dearly and experience the same spiritual trial in exchange. God took him at his word. The theologian was healed whereas Vincent wavered in spiritual doubt for at least three years.



“O savior of our souls, who listened to what you were told and were yourself obedient to the point of preferring death to disobedience, through this very example of obedience you gave on earth, grant us in your divine goodness the obedience we need in order to do nothing that is contrary to the will of God.”

Vincent de Paul

Options for the poor

Doubt, forever doubt. He had doubts about God, and doubts about himself. Vincent suffered greatly. He sought a means of counteracting this. He tried anything to divert his attention. He visited the poor. His priesthood motivated him: he believed firmly in God, knowing him to be present in his distress even if he was suffering terribly. One morning, no doubt when he was in prayer, an idea came to him. His wounded faith needed a crutch. Why not write the Creed on a parchment paper, pin it under his shirt and thus carry on his person the backbone of the Catholic faith? This practice was common among religious people of his time, such as Jane de Chantal and Louise de Marillac, with whom he was soon to become acquainted. Every time the temptations became too strong for him, he placed his hand on his chest and made

an act of faith in the truths written there. Yet the peace resulting from this was short-lived. So he groaned and cried out to God!

He prayed, meditated, sought an answer, and suddenly the Holy Spirit answered his prayer. His first biographer, Louis Abelly, ex-vicar general of Bayonne and then bishop of Rodez, notes “One day he took it into his head to make a firm and inviolable resolution to honor Jesus Christ more deeply and imitate him more perfectly than he had done so far. This resolution consisted of devoting his entire life to the service of the poor out of love for Jesus Christ.” A promise, a vow, a resolution? Everything points to a powerful determination. The result was instantaneous: his doubts vanished, his soul was liberated. He became a man of certainty. Vincent’s whole being was flooded with the truths of the faith, “and with a very particular light,” further notes his biographer.

Having already shared the unjust lot of the poor, he also had just experienced their spiritual anguish. He had become someone who was in “communion” with their condition. Above all he discovered the joy which springs from the gift of oneself to God and to others. He emerged from his self-centeredness, and the spirit of careerism that had brought him to Paris, the city of ambition, and rediscovered the true meaning of his existence and his priesthood: the only way to live is to give!

It was 1612-1613. Vincent was in touch with a priest whose advice he would follow scrupulously, André Duval, Doctor of Theology at the Sorbonne. Vincent, now in his thirties, was definitely someone who attracted attention. Although he willingly called himself “a little schoolboy” or “the son of swineherd,” or a “poor laborer,” he kept company with great intellectuals. He kept up his contact with Berulle who founded the Oratory in Paris. Vincent was at first attracted to this nascent religious community but then discovered that his vocation did not lie there. He looked elsewhere and accepted an offer from the founder, succeeding Father Bourgoing as parish priest of Clichy. At last he was a “Shepherd of souls.”



Parish priest of Clichy

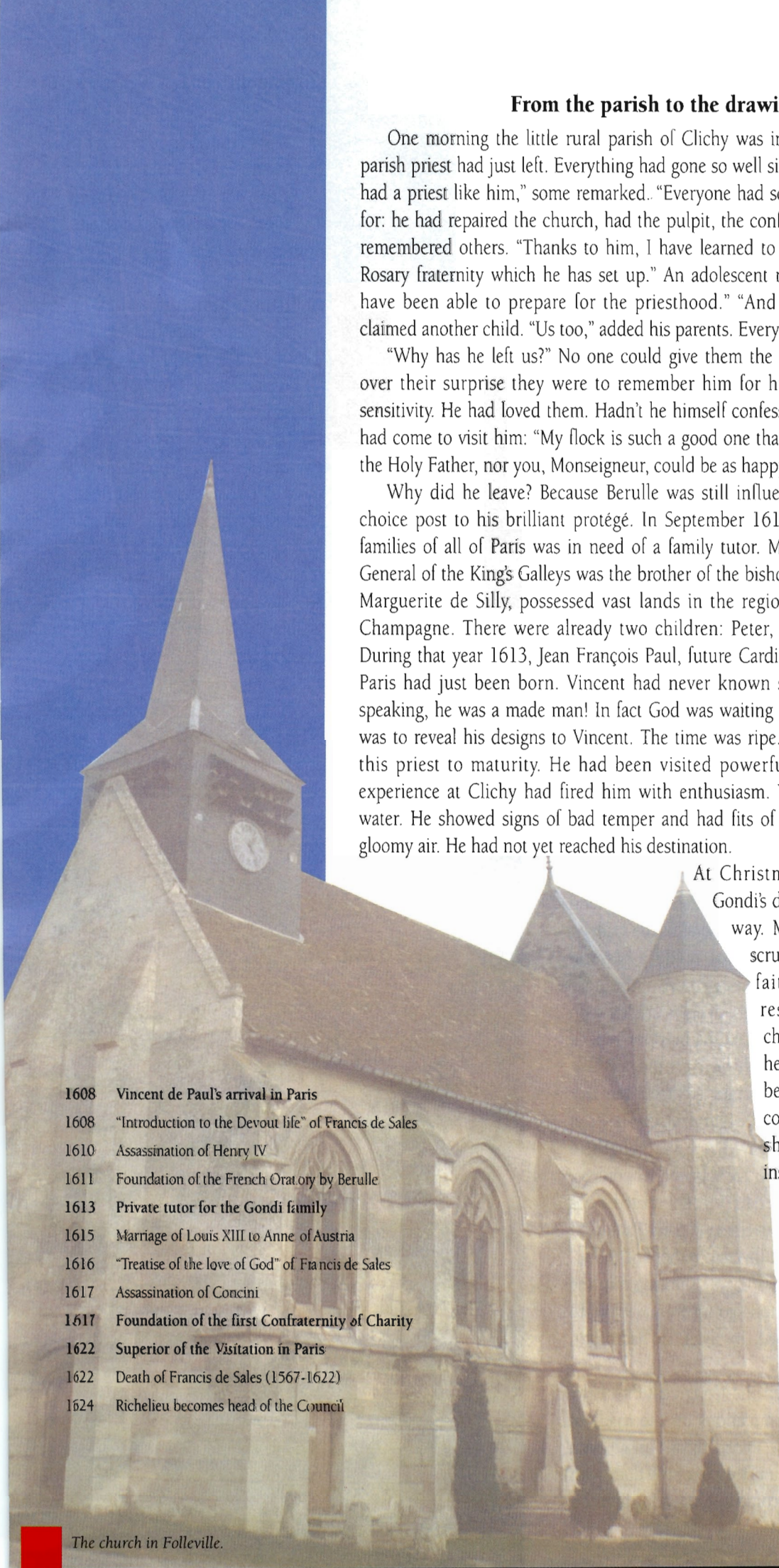
From the parish to the drawing-room

One morning the little rural parish of Clichy was in a commotion. Their beloved parish priest had just left. Everything had gone so well since his arrival. "We have never had a priest like him," some remarked. "Everyone had something to be grateful to him for: he had repaired the church, had the pulpit, the confessional, and the font rebuilt," remembered others. "Thanks to him, I have learned to pray by becoming part of the Rosary fraternity which he has set up." An adolescent remarked: "I and some friends have been able to prepare for the priesthood." "And I know my catechism well," claimed another child. "Us too," added his parents. Everyone was unanimous.

"Why has he left us?" No one could give them the answer. Once they had gotten over their surprise they were to remember him for his goodness, and his pastoral sensitivity. He had loved them. Hadn't he himself confessed to the bishop of Paris who had come to visit him: "My flock is such a good one that I think to myself that neither the Holy Father, nor you, Monseigneur, could be as happy as I."

Why did he leave? Because Berulle was still influential in his life and offered a choice post to his brilliant protégé. In September 1613 one of the most honorable families of all of Paris was in need of a family tutor. Monsieur de Gondi, Lieutenant General of the King's Galleys was the brother of the bishop of Paris. His wife, Françoise Marguerite de Silly, possessed vast lands in the regions of Picardy, Burgundy and Champagne. There were already two children: Peter, aged 14, and Henry, aged 7. During that year 1613, Jean François Paul, future Cardinal de Retz and archbishop of Paris had just been born. Vincent had never known such good fortune. Humanly speaking, he was a made man! In fact God was waiting for him here. Before long God was to reveal his designs to Vincent. The time was ripe. Successive trials had brought this priest to maturity. He had been visited powerfully by grace and the happy experience at Clichy had fired him with enthusiasm. Yet he seemed to be treading water. He showed signs of bad temper and had fits of depression which gave him a gloomy air. He had not yet reached his destination.

At Christmas in 1616, he left the de Gondi's dissatisfied and sought his own way. Madame de Gondi, who was scrupulous, sensitive, a woman of faith and aware of her responsibilities wished her children's private tutor to follow her on all her travels, for their benefit, for herself and for her countryfolk. Without realizing it she was to become the instrument of the Holy Spirit.

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- 1608 **Vincent de Paul's arrival in Paris**
 - 1608 "Introduction to the Devout life" of Francis de Sales
 - 1610 Assassination of Henry IV
 - 1611 Foundation of the French Oratory by Berulle
 - 1613 **Private tutor for the Gondi family**
 - 1615 Marriage of Louis XIII to Anne of Austria
 - 1616 "Treatise of the love of God" of Francis de Sales
 - 1617 Assassination of Concini
 - 1617 **Foundation of the first Confraternity of Charity**
 - 1622 **Superior of the Visitation in Paris**
 - 1622 Death of Francis de Sales (1567-1622)
 - 1624 Richelieu becomes head of the Council



The castle of Folleville

God's rhythm

As tutor to the de Gondi children, spiritual director of their mother, respected adviser to the General of the Galleys, Father Vincent followed his employers everywhere. From château to château, he taught catechism, evangelized the servants and the peasants in the countryside. Once again he was happy, as in Clichy. In this way God showed him his will.

It was January 24, 1617. Madame was in Gannes, near Amiens. Vincent related the event several times: "One day, I was called to go and confess a poor man who was gravely ill. He was reputed to be a most upright man, or at least one of the most upright men in his village. Nevertheless it happened that he was laden with sins he had never made known in confession, as he subsequently declared out loud in the presence of the late Madame General of the Galleys, telling her: "Madame, if I had not made a general confession, I would have been damned because of the grave sins that I had never dared to confess." This man died soon after and my said lady, having realized the need for general confession asked me to preach on this subject the next day. I did this and God blessed my preaching in such a way that all the local inhabitants made a general confession afterwards, and with such urgency that I was obliged to have two Jesuit priests called in to help me to confess, preach and catechize." "The next day," Vincent related, "was January 25th, the feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul. God did not permit this to happen on this day without purpose." Wasn't this a providential sign? God was showing him the way. His plan was set in motion: going from village to village, Vincent preached, listened, absolved. He had begun the work of a missionary.

Later when he had founded the Congregation of the Mission, launched his first companions on the roads of France, and as often as possible joined them himself on a mission, he would look back on this decisive date with emotion. Everything was to become luminous for him, he



was to meditate frequently upon all these events as being nothing short of evidence of the grace of God. God likes to let time take its course. One has to follow his rhythm, "not encroach on the role of Providence" but "await peacefully God's hour," know and remember that "the work of God does not come to fruition in one event, but only gradually." At the age of 36, Vincent had learned that God does all his work when and as he wishes. We are merely his instruments.

Turmoil in the ranks

The year 1617 was like a beacon in Vincent's life. Since the famous 25th of January, he had not stopped laboring in the fields of the Father. "The wheat is ready for the harvest." He rolled up his sleeves, and with Monsieur Portail, his first recruit, born in Beaucaire in the Gard region, he went from village to village preaching



The covered market at Châtillon. In the background, the parish church

the Gospel and inviting everyone to change their ways: "I only had one subject matter for my preaching: the fear of the Lord." This itinerant mission lasted only six months. Madame de Gondi had indeed pushed him into action with her famous remark. "Ah! Monsieur Vincent, so many souls are being lost! What is the remedy for that?" But she was too anxious and interfering for a man with Vincent's temperament. So there was yet another departure. Yet again, it was Berulle who was the one to find him a field of mission: it was to be Châtillon-les-Dombes (nowadays Châtillon-sur-Chalaronne), a parish with six respectable but mediocre priests.

He arrived there in August 1617, his heart filled with zeal. He could be a true shepherd again. In no time at all everyone mended their ways. Operation "charm" worked wonders. Vincent was evidently a born missionary. He sparked many conversions. He stimulated great zeal. On the August 20th when he was getting ready to say mass, he was informed that an entire family was very desperate, sapped by disease, living in an isolated house far from the village. He spoke zealously of them during

his homily. He spoke with such feeling that, first thing in the afternoon, the ladies went to aid the sick people. He himself hurried there to give the sacraments and was quite astonished by the commotion he had aroused: "It seemed as though there was a procession." He did not delay in appraising the situation. "There is great charity, but it is badly organized." Three days later he made a proposal for the formation of an association. Each one of the Ladies should pick a day and commit herself to helping "bodily and spiritually" the poor in the manner of assistance and service. Charity regained its true countenance, that of love, of personal contact, a capacity to listen and a smiling presence with a needed organization. The association of these first "Ladies of Charity" was placed under the protection of Mary: "Since the mother of God has been involved and taken as patroness for important matters, it is impossible that everything not turn out for the good and for the abundant glory of the good Jesus, her Son." On the December 8, 1617, the whole of Châtillon was celebrating and the vicar-general of Lyon came to establish the confraternity officially in the local hospital chapel. Thus was born the Vincentian style of Charity.



Register of a Confraternity of Charity in Paris

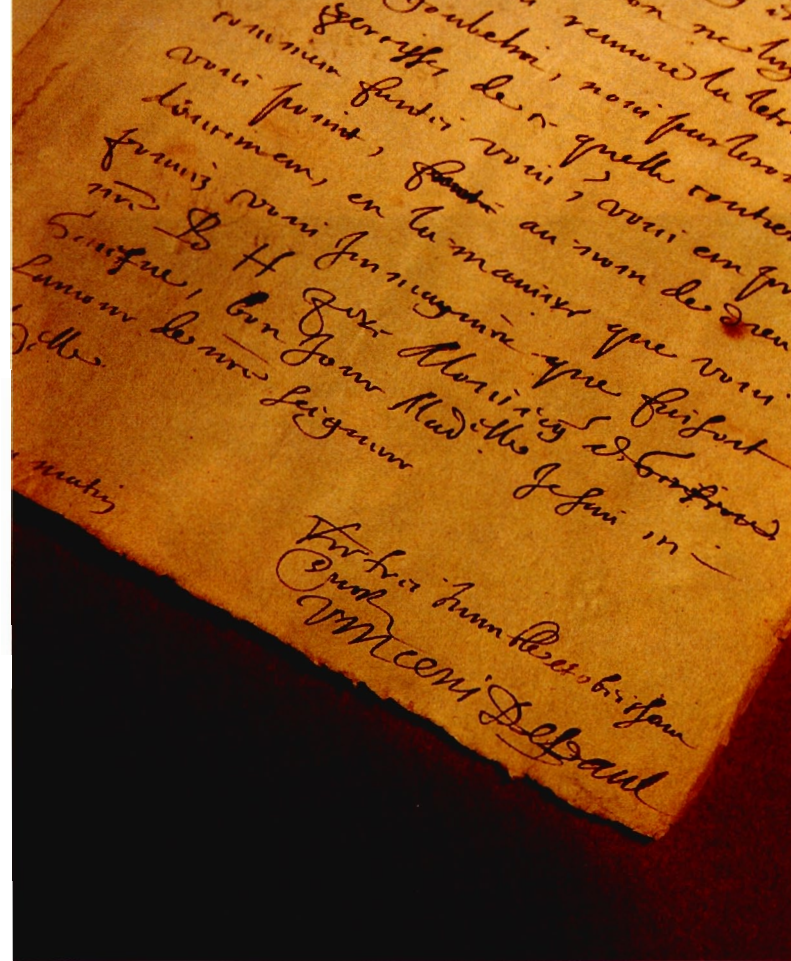
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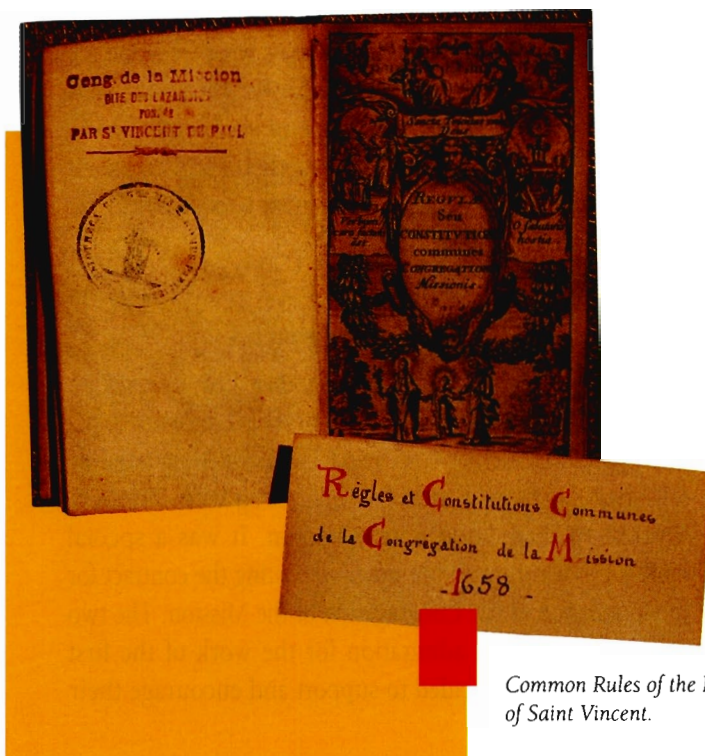
A two-stroke engine

In the 17th century the Church did not enjoy the same freedom that it knows today. The rich and powerful exercised their influence on the Church and its members. In spite of the saintly reputation she had earned, Madame de Gondi moved heaven and earth to tear Monsieur Vincent away from his new parish. Who did she ask to intervene in order to force him to come back? The eternal Monsieur de Berulle! In time for Christmas 1617, the good shepherd entrusted the care of his flock to his vicar, Louis Gerard, and returned to the Gondi mansion. Madame had written to him. "My soul is in a very sorry state. You can see that my children go downhill daily and that the good that has been done to my house and to the seven or eight thousand souls that are on my estates has come to an end." She was not totally selfish and she struck home when she spoke to Vincent of her good peasants. This was the crucial point and in it Vincent heard the voice of God. Madame assured him that from then on she would let him devote much of his time to his pastoral life! More especially since he returned from Châtillon enriched by the marvelously fruitful experience of the first Confraternity of Charity. The work of Providence was concealed behind this apparently bewildering and seemingly chaotic journey of Vincent de Paul. Thanks to Providence Saint Vincent from then on had two trump cards to play, in two interlinked facts: "The poor are in danger of damnation" and "they are dying of hunger." The people in the countryside were not living in unbelief but in religious ignorance: they were either no longer taught, or badly taught. In addition they were



living in miserable conditions often lacking the means for sustenance, and were victims of war, of infertile land or bad weather.

Those poor are at the heart of the spiritual strategy which would henceforth inspire Vincent's entire life and activity. He wished to preach the Good news to the poor in the countryside, first of all giving them the help and care they needed. Thus, right at the beginning of 1618, our saint went into high gear. He wanted to make up for lost time. He besieged the de Gondi estates and started up his two-stroke engine: "Mission" and "Charity." Villepreux, Joigny, Montmirail, Paillart, Serevillers became the witnesses to his first missionary ventures. At the end of each mission, a Confraternity of Charity was established. Already in 1623 the spider's web had spread out and the two-fold undertaking was pursued in the dioceses of Beauvais, Soissons, Sens and Chartres. From then on nothing could stop him. At the end of Monsieur Vincent's life, in 1660, the missions preached by the Vincentian missionaries would be estimated at 800. At the age of 78, he wrote to one of his confreres; "It seems to me that I would offend God if I did not do all in my power for the poor people in the fields..."



Common Rules of the Priests of the Mission from the time of Saint Vincent.



Galley slaves.

From one passion to several passions

Since Monsieur Vincent had arrived at the de Gondi home, a thought had touched General Philippe-Emmanuel's heart. He had noticed the zeal of his children's tutor, so moved by the misfortune and unbelief among the peasants. Seeing how effective Vincent was in combatting these realities, the General envisaged an additional task for Vincent which would benefit the galley slaves who were under his responsibility: why shouldn't Vincent become their chaplain? He could see the merits of bringing together in the same household the military leadership and spiritual welfare of the convicts and galley slaves. Monsieur de Gondi spoke of his idea to King Louis XIII, who appointed Monsieur Vincent to the post of chaplain general of the galleys on February 8, 1619. "The galleys have become my parish" the new chaplain was able to say. Without

interrupting the organization of the missions, and taking part in them when the need arose, he left for a tour of the galleys: in Paris and Marseille in 1622, and in Bordeaux in 1623. These men who were "treated like animals" haunted our saint's heart unceasingly. He went to see them, spoke to them, pacified, confessed and revealed the mercy of God to them and obtained for them the material help that he managed to extract from their masters. Legend has it that he put on himself the chains of an exhausted convict, an expression of the love he felt for those who were living in a hell on earth.

In Bordeaux he allowed himself a taste of paradise. He was not far from his beloved home town of Dax. His family awaited him. So he decided upon a trip to his homeland, the last one he would ever take. His keen sensibility made him quiver with emotion as he approached Ranquines. He was going to see his mother again, and his brothers and sisters. He was going to see the smoke rising up out of the chimney of the house where he was born! One can imagine the reunion, and his family's pride, but especially how moved was Father Vincent himself! Oh! Vincent hadn't forgotten the taste of the soup, the millet and the game that they shared once again that evening. And afterwards he was let into the secret of the people of Pouy. Three years previously a magnificent stone madonna, weighing 400 kilos, was discovered in a nearby swamp. The parish priest wanted to bring it to the village church but at the last minute our Lady refused to make the trip! The bishop of Dax had built a chapel to receive the marvel. Since then, all the people of the diocese had been coming faithfully to pray to the Virgin of Buglose. Before leaving his family, Vincent decided to follow in the footsteps of his compatriots. He celebrated the Eucharist there, surrounded by all his family and his friends. Good Gascon that he was, he bought them a dinner worthy of someone who knows what the good life is. The day after this pilgrimage he blessed them, and took leave of them in tears, with no hope of ever coming back. From then on he was to find his mother, his brother, his sisters in the poor. For them, he wanted to accomplish the will of God.

A band of missionaries

On April 17, 1625, there was another great commotion in the de Gondi household on the rue Pavée in Paris: Philippe-Emmanuel de Gondi and Françoise Marguerite de Silly had summoned their lawyers, along with Monsieur Vincent to their large drawing room. It was a special moment: it was time to put down in writing the contract for the foundation of the Congregation of the Mission. The two spouses, filled with admiration for the work of the first missionaries, had decided to support and encourage their



chaplain's zeal. A true fact lay behind this decision: the town-dwellers of the kingdom were taught by many learned priests, theologians and religious, however, "the poor country people remain left alone and abandoned." Thus it seemed proper to remedy the situation by creating "the pious association of a few devout priests known for their ability and doctrine." These priests were to "work entirely and purely for the salvation of the poor, pooling their resources and going from village to village, preaching, instructing, urging and catechizing, and encouraging them all to make a good general confession of all their past life."

In order that there would be no financial problems, Monsieur and Madame de Gondi deposited in the hands of their solicitors 45,000 francs intended to become a working capital of property or revenue, which would in fact guarantee the board and lodging expenses of the missionaries, and the gratuitousness of the Missions. In the strict sense of the word, the de Gondis were the true "founders" of the Congregation of the Mission. Madame de Gondi was to die unexpectedly on the 23rd of June of that year, as if she only had stayed alive long enough to give her assent!

"Converting Catholics to Catholicism," as André Frossard has expressed it so well, was the pressing call for Vincent and his companions. From September 1626 onwards they were four in number: Antoine Portail, François du Coudray, an erudite man, who was to sacrifice his beloved biblical studies for the Mission at Vincent's request, and Jean de la Salle, originally from the region of the Somme and a reputed theologian, destined to be responsible for the formation of priests. This band of missionaries worked wonders, but along with success came the first criticism. People were already protesting at his influence! Despite this, Vincent was forging the spirit of his Company and insisting on five basic virtues: simplicity, humility, gentleness, mortification and zeal. He knew instinctively that God works without us being aware of it and with the utmost discretion.

- 1625 **Foundation of the Congregation of the Mission**
- 1626 Peace of La Rochelle
- 1627 Martyrs of Nagasaki
- 1629 Death of Pierre de Berulle (1575-1629)
- 1630 Suppression of the Jesuits in France
- 1630 "Dupes" day
- 1632 **Installation of the Congregation of the Mission in the priory of Saint Lazare**
- 1633 **Foundation of the Company of the Daughters of Charity**
- 1636 **Beginning of aid to the region of Lorraine**
- 1637 "Discours de la méthode" of Descartes
- 1638 **Beginning of the Home for Foundlings**
- 1640 Publication of the Augustinus
- 1640 Corneille's "Le Cid"



Dynamic and complementary roles

Thus Monsieur Vincent and his missionaries set out on the roads of the “flat lands” and of the Ile de France. He had never been so resolute. From then on he knew what he had to do: appease the spiritual hunger of the French peasants and care for all the poor and the victims of adversity of the

period. This implied tending the wounds of the sick, hospital visiting, organizing soup-kitchens with the women’s help, preaching, confessing and reconciling. It was at this time that there was a decisive encounter with a noble lady, Louise de Marillac, then married to one of the Queen’s attendants Antoine Le Gras. Widowed prematurely, she took an excessive interest in her son Michel, worrying about him and her own future, while she still yearned for the religious life. She too had experienced a real night of faith. On the feast of Pentecost 1623, while she was praying in the Church of Saint Nicolas des Champs in Paris, she received a revelation from the Holy Spirit: “his Pentecost light.” In no time at all her doubts vanished, and her future became clear; she had the intuition that she would live a consecrated life with the help of a spiritual director. This priest was to be none other than Monsieur Vincent. Their destinies were linked. At a time when the Confraternities of Charity were increasing in number, Vincent had the genius to ask Louise to visit them, supervise their leaders, spur on the teams and strengthen their ties with the parish priests. In sending her out onto the roads of the Ile de France, Saint Vincent de Paul had hit upon Saint Louise’s vocation. He was to bring out in her his own qualities; each one was to discover their complementarity.

For his part, he was more available for the Missions. He improved his methods. Instinctively he took an interest in the formation of the priests. He could see clearly that the state of the parish communities depended largely on the parish priests. “The future of Christianity lies in the priesthood: without priests nothing is done in the Church.”

These thoughts were in his mind while he was travelling one day in July 1628 with the bishop of Beauvais. Monseigneur Potier confided in him and spoke of his concern as a pastor. An initiative was taken as a result of their conversation: the preaching of a retreat to those who were preparing for the priesthood. The success of these “exercises,” as they were called at the time, was considerable. Everyone got something out of them, and the faithful were the first to benefit from this rudimentary formation. With time, the scheme was to be perfected and was to train numerous priests in the new priory he had just acquired: Saint-Lazare-les-Paris. It was the January 8, 1632! He had become a pioneer in the Church in France!

The undertaking snowballed

One day Saint Vincent de Paul heard some members of his young Company grumbling about him: he was taking on too much. His missionaries were meant to “carry out the office of the Son of God,” that is evangelize the poor. Yet Vincent was increasing unendingly the number of their commitments. Not only did he preach to the ordinands and priests but he also seemed to imagine he could attract to Saint Lazare the entire “upper crust” of the Church in France. “The Tuesday Conferences” included up to 250 priests of which 22 were to become bishops, such as Nicolas Pavillon, Jacques Bénigne Bossuet and the Fouquets. They were organized in the provinces, for example at Saintes or Bordeaux. Some of their members even helped the missionaries in their apostolate. Then, in 1641, Monsieur Vincent opened in Annecy the first seminary run by his Congregation. At the end of his life he would have founded more than 15 institutions of this type. Therefore he had the right to respond to the objections: “It would be a mistake, a serious mistake, not to do all that was in one’s power to form good priests, because the Church needs them badly.”

All of a sudden the unthinkable happened. Since the noble ladies of Paris had founded the confraternities, there had been problems. Their fancy clothing was inappropriate for the rough, hard work. A princess or duchess can easily give a lot of time and money to the poor, but it is less easy for her to dirty her hands! One day a girl from Suresnes, Marguerite Naseau, came to see Monsieur Vincent: “Monsieur, I have heard that you need a helping hand. I am not very learned, but I don’t spare myself at work... If you want me, I am ready to serve the poor.” She was a cow-girl, and had learned to read in the fields, stopping passers-by and asking them to help her decipher the letters. She had taken in the village children in order to teach them in turn. Some of them were to enter the Seminary. Vincent and Louise saw the work of God in this. Marguerite was to become the first of many. The whole undertaking snowballed. In a very short time other volunteers joined her.

While Marguerite was dying in 1633, a victim of her self-sacrifice in tending someone stricken with the plague, Louise de Marillac was gathering around her the first girls who had resolved to live in community and love for the service of the poor. The Daughters of Charity had come into being. The first names ring in our ears: Barbe, Cecile, Marie, Jeanne, Marie-Denyse, Henriette, Geneviève... and all the others. They went out to the outposts of Charity. There was no turning back.



Mademoiselle la grande de Monsieur le grand seigneur fort amant vous sçait
 Jamais
 prendre vous bien, un enfant trouvé, qui sera
 apporté hier vray, par des gens de quelcun, qui le
 Honnêtement d'un un champ qui despend de son
 je ne que deux ou trois jours, & sera baptisé hier
 au jour vray a St Laurent, estant de la qualité de
 En fait trouvé je ny a rien a redire, sinon que
 vous ne le prenez point a la cour & ny a l'hôtel
 Dieu, si l'on juge quel soit expedient de faire
 une cérémonie bon de faire, je vous prie de
 respondre de la réponse Mademoiselle & de le remettre
 a la nourrice, bon jour Mademoiselle. Je suis en l'attente
 de votre seig^r

Mademoiselle

Monsieur madame

Vostre tres humble serviteur
 Vincent de Paul

LETTER OF SAINT VINCENT TO SAINT LOUISE DE MARILLAC

Letter 335 - date (1638 or 1639)

Mademoiselle,

The grace of our Lord be with you for ever!

Would you be so kind as to take in a foundling brought to me here yesterday by some titled people who found it in a field near their house?

It is only two or three days old and was baptized yesterday at Saint Laurent. Due to the fact that it is a foundling, there is nothing to be said against it, save that you not take it in at the Couche or the Hôtel-Dieu. If it is considered expedient to go through this procedure, ⁽¹⁾ you will do so. I beg you, however, Mademoiselle, to take it in, and entrust it to the wet-nurse.

Good day, Mademoiselle. I am, in the love of our Lord, Mademoiselle, your very humble servant.

Vincent de Paul

On this Tuesday

⁽¹⁾ Enrolment on the foundling register

Louise de Marillac

She was the niece of Michel de Marillac, Louis XIII's Minister of Justice. Born in 1591, she experienced the pain of being an orphaned and illegitimate child. At the age of 22, she married Antoine Le Gras and became the mother of little Michel. The death of her husband in 1625 left her very bereaved; it was at this time that she met Monsieur Vincent who was to give her moral support and involve her in the establishment of the Confraternities of Charity. In November 1633, she welcomed into her house several young peasant women who wanted to consecrate themselves to God in order to serve the poor: they were the founding members of the Company of the Daughters of Charity. Together Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac accompanied, nurtured, guided and organized this totally new community in the Church which had no cloister, no monastery. The sisters travelled the city streets and the village paths in order to come to the aid of those in need. "The love of Jesus Christ crucified urges us on." This was the motto that Louise de Marillac gave them. Louise de Marillac died on March 15, 1660, a few months before Vincent de Paul. She was canonized in 1934, by Pope Pius XI. And in 1960, the Pope John XXIII declared her patroness of all those who devote themselves to social work.



Let us accept everything as coming from the hand of God and say to him: "Lord, when I ask from you the grace necessary for suffering the afflictions that your goodness bestows on me, at the same time I am proposing to receive them from your hand.

Lord, since this world cannot be without pain, I am willing to accept out of love for you all the affliction that comes my way. I intend as well to rid myself of the spirit of idleness, to do well what is asked of me and to stand fast in the good already begun, because it is this that will be pleasing to you."

Vincent de Paul

Armfuls of children

From now on time seemed to fly for our saint from the Landes. In the film made by Maurice Cloche, Jean Anouilh has Saint Vincent, acted perfectly by Pierre Fresnay, say: "I slept very badly." The Queen of France is surprised and asks the unforgettable question: "What else could you do, Monsieur?" "More!" he replied.

What hadn't he done yet? In 1622, just before the death of his friend Saint Francis de Sales, "The Gentle Saint," he agreed to be superior of the Visitation in Paris and spiritual director of Saint Jane de Chantal, "the Saint with a fiery heart." He received the responsibility for directing the "Illuminati," a sort of sect which needed to be put back on the right path. Yet he wished above all to remain at the service of the poor. On his insistence, the Ladies and Daughters of Charity had taken on the responsibility of the foundlings, those "children of sin" as they were nicknamed at the time. Doing this, Vincent de Paul restored their true identity as children of God, and that of their mothers too. They had never been shown so much tenderness, devotedness and true love. Popular devotion immortalized Saint Vincent, retaining this powerful symbol: he always had children in his arms or close to him. Vincent de Paul above all had a huge heart!

He found himself faced with the serious events which were breaking out all over his country. One heard of nothing but war and famine. From the Thirty Years war to the Fronde of 1648 he started relief-operations in Lorraine, Ile de France, Picardy, and Champagne. He put into action hidden reserves of ingenuity and organization; he publicized what was needed in terms of supplies, clothes, seed, and even articles for worship. He wanted those directing these operations to have first hand experience of the poor to avoid, right from the start, all inappropriate or excessive assistance and, most especially, all injustice. Once the preliminary aid had been supplied, the priority in Vincent's policy could be summed up in **work**. Everyone should be able to work and thus recover their strength and their dignity.

The records still in existence don't belie the situation. In Guise, La Fère: 35 villages wrecked, 66 destitute, 500 sick. In Laon, 100 churches wrecked, priests and religious poverty-stricken. In Soissons, in 30 villages, 25 churches wrecked, 1200 sick.

In Paris, at Saint Lazare, soup was distributed to thousands of poor twice a day. In June 1652 the Daughters fed 1500 poor and took care of 88 refugees in their Motherhouse. Monsieur Vincent was a fighter.

An impassioned peacemaker

A large painting often adorns the houses of Monsieur Vincent's daughters or sons: it is a copy of the 19th century work of Jean François de Troy. In it can be seen Monsieur Vincent seated with the Regent Anne of Austria, Cardinal Mazarin, Prime Minister, the Chancellor Seguier, the Dauphin Louis XIV, and Monsieur Charton, the Paris Penitentiary priest. They are holding a meeting of the Council of Conscience to deal with matters concerning the moral and religious life of the country. Our saint sat on this Council from 1643-1653. His role was that of a "minister, a minister without portfolio" but his activity was sustained and happy in its outcome. He had the publication of books supervised, put an end to unwholesome theatre, campaigned against duelling and blasphemy. He especially safeguarded the just and responsible distribution of the bishops' revenues and watched over their nominations. Here lay his real talent, his touch of genius even. He also intervened in the Jansenist controversy, collecting the signatures of 88 bishops in order to oppose the five propositions in the Augustinus.

Vincent tried his hand at politics. Here his activity was more complex. He opposed Mazarin, courageously, stubbornly, going so far as to demand his departure. The cardinal never forgave him for taking sides against him during the Fronde. The struggle became a public one in 1654-1655. Faithful to the de Gondi family, Vincent protected the Cardinal de Retz, who was incarcerated in Vincennes. When the latter escaped, he left for Spain, then Italy and there, to everyone's stupefaction, the first Vincentians in Rome received him. Furious, Mazarin persuaded Louis XIV to close this house in Rome. Vincent remained immovable, accepting the event with serenity. Anne of Austria rode above the uproar and kept her faith in Saint Vincent. One day she deposited 18,000 francs worth of jewels in the saint's hands for the benefit of the poor.



Council of Conscience

One of Vincent biographers has remarked: "he was only half-successful in politics, his true mission lay elsewhere." It remains to be said that he managed to find the right words in order to speak of peace to the clever and cruel politician that Mazarin was. There is no danger of downgrading him in saying that he compromised himself for the poor. His love for them drove him to take risks. In this sense he is astonishingly modern and all the pacifists in the world should feel at ease with him.

- 1641 Death of Jane de Chantal (1572-1641)
- 1642 Death of Cardinal Richelieu (1565-1642)
- 1643 Death of Louis XIII - Regency of Anne of Austria
Mazarin is minister
- 1643 Foundation of the Eudists
- 1645 Foundation of the Mission in Genoa
Consulate in Tunis





Trust... Jesus

Posterity has handed down to us the "Journal of the last days of Saint Vincent." It begins on June 5, 1660 and finishes on the 27th of September. The account is touching in its filial devotion, its precision and loving fidelity. All his confreres were gathered there around his bent and worn-out body which still sustained a quivering soul. But let the witnesses of the night of the 26th to the 27th September speak:

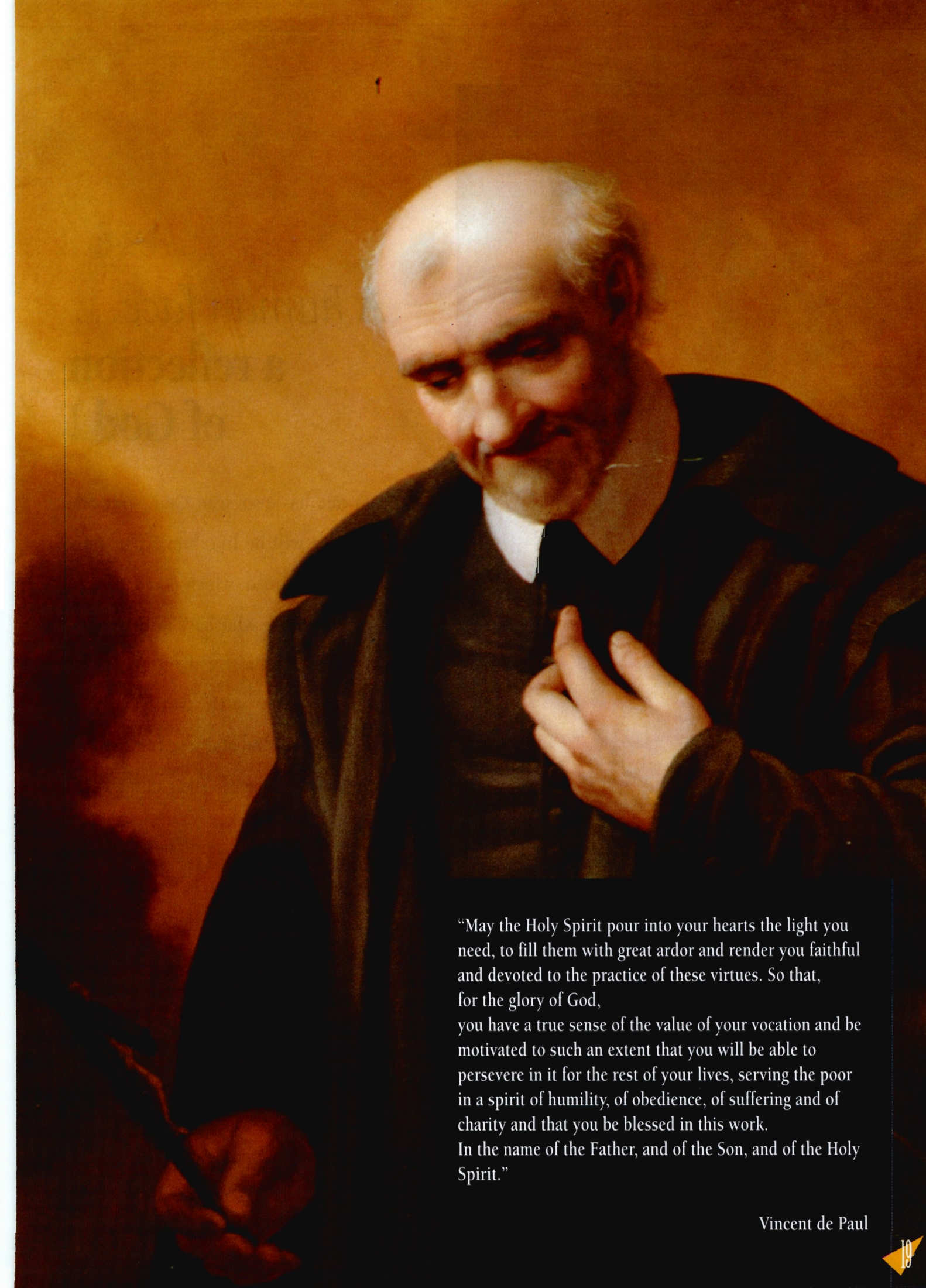
"At two o'clock, a second bout of sweating started; he appeared bright red and all luminous, and then became white as a sheet. Monsieur Gicquel kept repeating to him: "Deus in adjutorium," and, stirring, he replied "That's enough," meaning that we were talking too much and distracting him, for he still seemed very lucid, if a little drowsy.

We said to him: "Credo in Deum Patrem," and he repeated "Credo," kissing his crucifix. "Credo in Spiritum Sanctum," and he said "Credo"... and so on with all the other articles. We said: "Spero," and he replied cheerfully, "Confido," kissing his crucifix.

Around half past three, Monsieur Berthe came close and Monsieur Gicquel withdrew. Monsieur Berthe said to him: "In manus tuas," and he repeated: "In manus tuas..." A little before four o'clock, for the third time, a bright red and pleasant glow covered his face, and he seemed as if on fire, and then he became white as a sheet. Seeing that he was close to death, we repeated to him: "Deus in adjutorium" and he repeated with effort, no longer able to close his mouth, and only mumbling: "Deus in adjutorium." We said to him "Jesus," and he repeated: "Jesus," murmuring in the same way. This last fit became worse and at about half past four he entered into the labor of his agony and neared his last gasp. This lasted until quarter before the hour without any convulsions, symptoms or apparent effort. Breathing his last, he committed his fair soul into the hands of our Lord, and remained seated in the same position: handsome and, to look at, more majestic and venerable than ever. He died in his chair, fully clothed, at the fireside..."

- 1648 **Mission in Madagascar**
- 1648 Treaty of Westphalia
- Beginning of the Fronde
- 1649 **Vincent takes steps against Mazarin**
- 1651 **Mission in Poland**
- 1656 Pascal's "Les Provinciales"
- 1657 Death of Monsieur Olier (1608-1657)
- 1659 Molières "Les précieuses Ridicules"
- 1659 Treaty of the Pyrenees
- 1660 **March 15 th: death of Louise de Marillac**
- September 27th: death of Vincent de Paul**





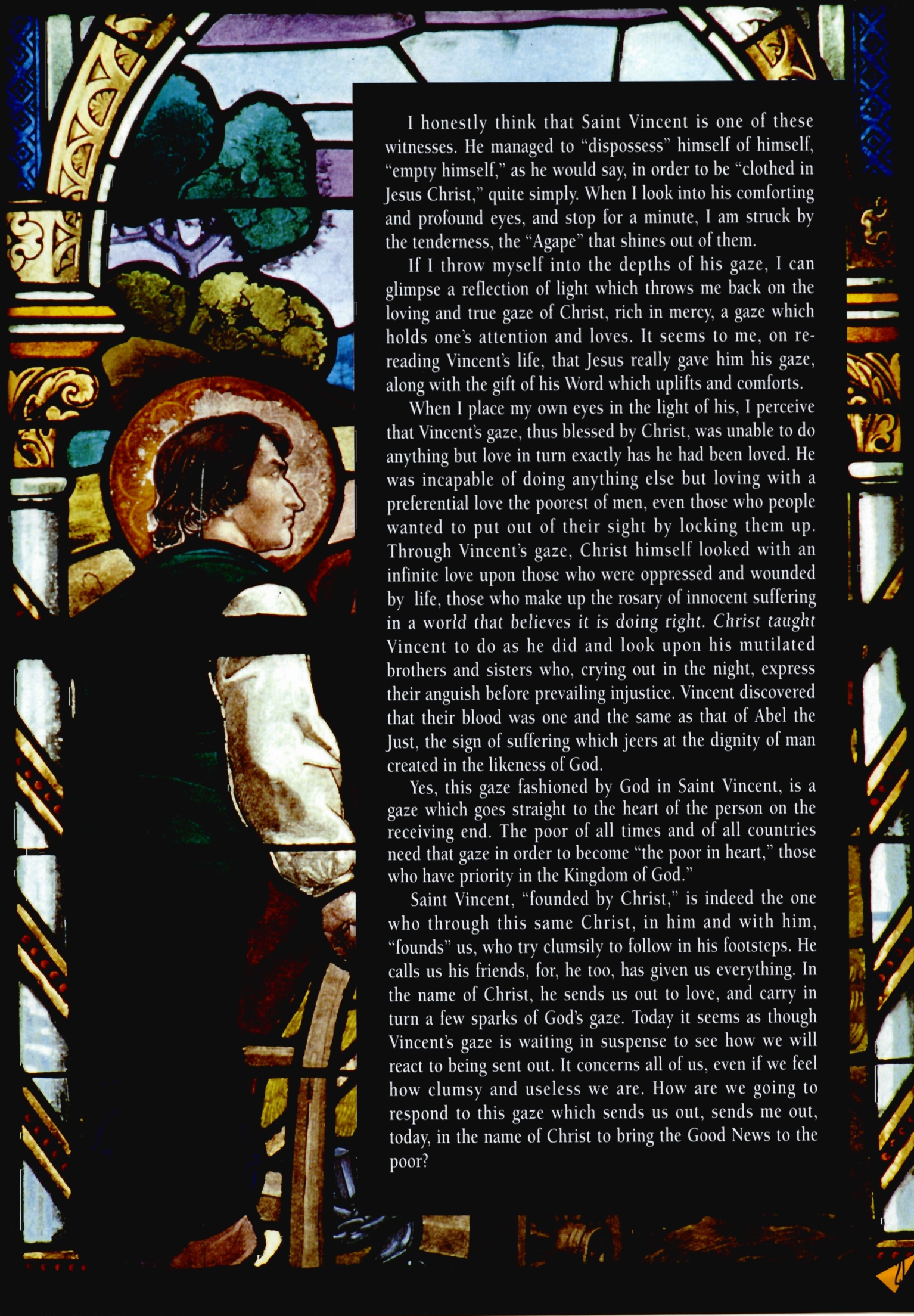
“May the Holy Spirit pour into your hearts the light you need, to fill them with great ardor and render you faithful and devoted to the practice of these virtues. So that, for the glory of God, you have a true sense of the value of your vocation and be motivated to such an extent that you will be able to persevere in it for the rest of your lives, serving the poor in a spirit of humility, of obedience, of suffering and of charity and that you be blessed in this work. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

Vincent de Paul



A human face... **a reflection of God!**

“No one has ever seen God,” but one day “we will be like him,” Our only help on the road, which is often steep, is the gaze of those who have witnessed to God’s love for us. Some of them lived such an intense union with God that his gentleness, compassion and love transfigured their human countenance. Their human eyes became the eyes of God.



I honestly think that Saint Vincent is one of these witnesses. He managed to “dispossess” himself of himself, “empty himself,” as he would say, in order to be “clothed in Jesus Christ,” quite simply. When I look into his comforting and profound eyes, and stop for a minute, I am struck by the tenderness, the “Agape” that shines out of them.

If I throw myself into the depths of his gaze, I can glimpse a reflection of light which throws me back on the loving and true gaze of Christ, rich in mercy, a gaze which holds one’s attention and loves. It seems to me, on re-reading Vincent’s life, that Jesus really gave him his gaze, along with the gift of his Word which uplifts and comforts.

When I place my own eyes in the light of his, I perceive that Vincent’s gaze, thus blessed by Christ, was unable to do anything but love in turn exactly as he had been loved. He was incapable of doing anything else but loving with a preferential love the poorest of men, even those who people wanted to put out of their sight by locking them up. Through Vincent’s gaze, Christ himself looked with an infinite love upon those who were oppressed and wounded by life, those who make up the rosary of innocent suffering in a world that believes it is doing right. Christ taught Vincent to do as he did and look upon his mutilated brothers and sisters who, crying out in the night, express their anguish before prevailing injustice. Vincent discovered that their blood was one and the same as that of Abel the Just, the sign of suffering which jeers at the dignity of man created in the likeness of God.

Yes, this gaze fashioned by God in Saint Vincent, is a gaze which goes straight to the heart of the person on the receiving end. The poor of all times and of all countries need that gaze in order to become “the poor in heart,” those who have priority in the Kingdom of God.”

Saint Vincent, “founded by Christ,” is indeed the one who through this same Christ, in him and with him, “founds” us, who try clumsily to follow in his footsteps. He calls us his friends, for, he too, has given us everything. In the name of Christ, he sends us out to love, and carry in turn a few sparks of God’s gaze. Today it seems as though Vincent’s gaze is waiting in suspense to see how we will react to being sent out. It concerns all of us, even if we feel how clumsy and useless we are. How are we going to respond to this gaze which sends us out, sends me out, today, in the name of Christ to bring the Good News to the poor?



Yes it's true: "he who does not love does not know God, because God is love."

We must listen, listen now to the sound of his voice which is speaking in the intimacy of our hearts, in the very name of God who is the only one to fathom the secret of our hearts.

Vincent's mouth, aged by the wisdom of the humble seems to utter these words. "Empty yourself of yourself and put on Jesus Christ." These words come back again and again, knocking at our hearts so that we let them be sculpted by the hand of God. If they come back like that it is so that we give them their full meaning.

A mouth that utters such words can only be turned towards the unique source of the spoken word, the Word made flesh. It is a mouth entrusted totally to the Holy Spirit, since it is the Spirit which enables it to express itself. It is a mouth at the living service of the word of God to which it is totally dedicated. One knows it, one can feel it; Vincent, like a faithful herald, keeps the word of God, for he loves God and God has made his dwelling in him. Yet he knows that this word does not belong to him: just as the earthen vessel was broken in order to spread its perfume, Vincent could only transmit the word by "emptying" himself. His life, a testimony of this word, meditated upon and given anew can prove, if it is necessary, that Vincent as a man "gave himself, in following Christ, for the service of the poor."

When I look upon this calm face, I see in the person of Vincent a privileged witness of the love of God for humanity, for all of humanity and all people. Everything in this face breathes the love of God who gives himself in the Son, who in turn will make of this gift a total victory of life over death. There is not one obstacle to this victory of light visible in this dazzled countenance. Christ found in Vincent a friend, and he made known to him everything the Father told him. Thus Vincent was really a man sent by God, not only to love God, but also to make him loved.

Like Vincent, we have chosen to serve Christ by living the Gospel and giving it to those who are most in need. Let us contemplate this face unendingly. He is the image of a man consumed by the love of the Father, aided by the Spirit, inhabited by the tenderness of Christ, the same Christ who gave his life out of love to save the world, especially the most forsaken among those who people it. These are the suffering members of Jesus Christ, beloved of God, our lords and our masters.

And I contemplate further those eyes that know how to look at me without wounding me. I can feel them praying endlessly to the Father so that he will bless each one's mission.

And I can still hear that rugged voice from a sunny land resounding like an echo: "Our Lord asks us to evangelize the poor; that is what he did, and what he wants to go on doing through us."

In order that our face may resemble his, "Let us seek to strengthen the inner man," and let us be happy that we are sent out to serve God, in the Church.

"He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor."

Jean Yves Ducourneau, C.M.,
on the day before his ordination.

“I must not consider a poor peasant or a poor woman according to their outer appearance, nor in what I see of the capacity of their mind; especially as very often they are so vulgar and earthly that they hardly seem to have the countenance or the mind of rational beings.

But see the other side of the picture and you will see with the light of faith that the Son of God, who became poor, is personified for us in the poor;

You will remember that in his passion he barely had any human likeness.

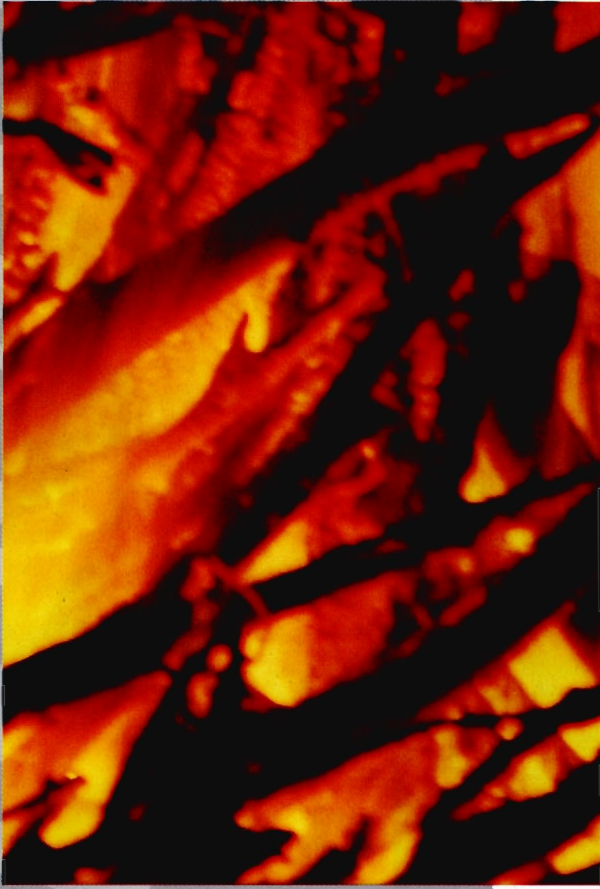
In the eyes of the Gentiles he was seen to be mad, and to be a scandal and a stumbling-block in the eyes of the Jews. And through all that, he became qualified to be the one who evangelized the poor.

God! How wonderful it is to see the poor, if we look upon them in God and with the esteem that Jesus Christ had for them! Yet if we look upon them with the sentiments of the flesh and the spirit of the world they will seem to us to be worthy of contempt.”

Vincent de Paul



Worship



Twigs and logs **for feeding the fire**

These lines attempt to summarize the essential elements of Vincentian spirituality. They take into account the founder's teaching, the tradition of the foundations, and post-conciliar development. They embrace all the forms of commitment claiming to be of Saint Vincent's inspiration: members of the "Charities," Priests and Brothers of the Congregation of the Mission, Daughters of Charity, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, Vincentian volunteers, Marian Youth Movements, the Vincentian Union, Congregations taking the saint of Charity as their patron, and all those who want to live his spirituality in their profession. The word "Vincentian" envelops all of these communities.

All our work is in action

They cannot be pictured otherwise. The disciple of Saint Vincent de Paul is an active person. At a desk, kneeling in the chapel, out in the mission field, visiting sick or stricken friends, they are filled by their commitment. They receive Vincent's instructions as a perpetual order to go out on mission: "Let us love God, my brothers and sisters, but let it be by the sweat of our brow and at the expense of our strength."



Burning ourselves up for God and the poor

They are said to be zealous. The word is old-fashioned but who can deny its burning relevance to our present day. An adventurer in his or her soul and a person with heart, the disciple of Saint Vincent wishes to take risks, venture out, rely on a certain fearlessness. He or she forbids him- or herself to be moody, or cowardly and introverted, what Saint Vincent called "indifference." A true missionary, a Vincentian layperson, is "capable of everything." When one is a Daughter of Charity, it is called "labor" or "ardor," when one is a Vincentian, it is called "zeal." The founder's remarks are always stimulating: "We must be wholly for God and the service of the poor. We must give ourselves to God for this purpose, burn ourselves up, give our lives for that. We must lay open our lives to carry the Gospel to the most distant lands." What a marvelous prophecy, come true in the case of Genoa, Ireland, and Madagascar where 14 confreres gave their lives for the mission in the time of Saint Vincent.

Being given to God

Yet where does it come from, this fierce energy capable of martyrdom? It comes from a deep belonging. Vincentians are riveted to God, anchored in him. God is their rock. They tirelessly repeat to themselves their original vocation: giving oneself to God. They are aware of the love of the Father and

that of the Son for his Father. They listen for the call of the Spirit. They live a privileged relationship with the Trinity. This relationship is the rule of conduct and the model for the dynamics of their spiritual life. They come back to this relationship as one comes back to the source.

Being a person of prayer

How? The disciples of Saint Vincent have only one secret: prayer. They know only one means of forming a bond of love with the God of Love: keeping a considerable period of time apart for daily prayer. They have learned from Vincent and his successors that prayer is a vital element: "the soul," "water," "the fountain," "air," "nourishment," "dew," "bread."

Saint Vincent spoke also of "the reservoir," "the central point of religion," "an impregnable fortress" or quite simply "the gift of God." The Vincentian never feels exonerated from this basic responsibility. Every morning he or she hears Saint Vincent's observation "give me people of prayer and they will be capable of everything." From time to time, out of weakness, they have the bitter experience of infidelity which leaves them defenseless!

Living for Christ

This "grace of prayer" is the vehicle which leads us straight to Christ. Therein lies our all: "the Rule of the Mission," "the life of our life," "the sole pretention in our heart." Familiar with the Gospel, we know that there is no other path, or other truth, or other life for a missionary, apostle or genuine servant. "Our Lord is the true prototype and the great invisible tableau according to which we should model all our actions." We should make our own the sublime words of Saint Vincent: "I like nothing outside of Jesus Christ." Each and every Vincentian layperson, consecrated person, or priest, venerates in Christ "the adorer and missionary of the Father, the servant of his plan of love. He claims as his own the words of Saint Luke's Gospel (4:18):

"He sent me to preach the good news to the poor," and of Saint Matthew's (25:40): "Whatever you have done for the least of these brothers of mine, you have done it to me." He encourages these little seeds to take root within him as he would cultivate the family garden, his own little plot.



The Charity of Christ Urges Us

Seal of the Daughters
of Charity

In serving the poor, one is serving

Jesus Christ

Christ continually draws us forward towards our privileged objective: the poor. They are our heritage, and therefore our testament. Out of fidelity to Christ and to Vincent, the heir wants to belong to the poor and to them above all, even if it entails turning traditions, structures, or persons upside-down. One is the friend of the poor because one is the friend of Christ. Despite our shortcomings and fears, we live in the present this "love in proximity": a humble and hidden service, the word of encouragement, the smile that accompanies, the Gospel that liberates and uplifts. Given to the poor through vows or simply out of vocation - but always thanks to a call of God - we know that the poor are "our masters," "our kings" and that God will repay us royally. "In serving the poor one serves Jesus Christ." There is no reality that is simpler nor a revelation that is greater. God does not put one off with fine words and when he pays back he does so a hundredfold - the gift to the poor is transformed into a heart-to-heart relationship with Jesus. This relationship is like a new sacrament, the backbone of the Vincentian spirituality through which the whole Vincentian tradition becomes one large family. Didn't one of the first unknown Daughters of Charity remark: "I will look upon the poor in Jesus Christ and I will serve them out of love for him." How well she knew her lesson! Like a sponge, even though she was illiterate, she instinctively soaked up what Vincent wrote to Louise de Marillac, his close collaborator, and often a source of inspiration for him: "I will look upon the poor in Jesus Christ and I will serve them out of love for him." Out of fidelity the Vincentian goes out to them, cultivates a personal relationship, with great warmth, goodness and comprehension, bringing material and spiritual aid, care, respect, benevolence and untiring mercy. He or she can never forget that Vincent wants them to be "people of reconciliation." Like Vincent, they train their eyes, seek to become perceptive observers of persons and things in a passionate regard for truth, effectiveness and pure goodness even to the point of seeming "naive" if necessary!

Serving the whole person

The serving of Christ in the poor is never limited to bodily or material service alone even if these have priority. The Vincentian knows he or she is responsible for the whole person and seeks the promotion of "every person and all people." They are scrupulously "missionary" in their approach towards others and desire to announce the Gospel because it has a liberating power for everyone, and in a special way for those who are visited by suffering or

who are oppressed and overwhelmed by injustice.

"Making God known to the poor, preaching Jesus Christ to them, telling them that the kingdom of God is close at hand and is for the poor, oh how noble it is." Nowadays, they like to hear theologians repeat, quite rightly, 'the priority that God gives to the poor means above all that he takes into account the state of inequality in which they find themselves (Alain Durand). They like to hear them speak of the "preferential option for the poor."

Wanted to, and being able to

An ambitious program? Castles in the air? Fair words? Already in the time of Saint Vincent, peoples' conversations were filled with reproachful gossip. He stormed against the timorous and the idle: "Is basking in one's creature comforts being a missionary?" Being well acquainted with human nature from his own experience, Vincent gave advice and pointed out the areas to work on. The Vincentian makes them his or her own. Here they are:

The virtues of the Vincentian state of life

First of all, these virtues must be lived out. Charity, simplicity, humility if one is a Daughter of Charity or member of a Charity. Simplicity, humility, gentleness, mortification and zeal if one considers oneself a Vincentian. Joy, cordiality and justice are the preferred virtues of Ozanam's Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

Simplicity is the virtue which brings us close to God. In living this simplicity the Vincentian bears in mind that he or she is thus in the likeness of God, for "God is a simple being." Living this simplicity from day to day means keeping 'God alone' in view. Experience has taught this: "God is only at home with and gives his grace to simple souls." One must go 'straight to God' or to use a peculiarly Vincentian expression, 'plainly and simply to God.'

Humility is the best way to approach oneself. One is humble in order to learn to know oneself well. Jesus himself took the way of humility and made it holy. He invites Vincentians to consider themselves quite frankly as being worthy of little, not being afraid to appear brimming with faults and in the end to be nothing but a very ordinary instrument at the service of the Lord. Humility is his password. It is also a virtue dear to missionaries who meet simple and poor people in their apostolate. A properly lived humility helps to adapt to these people.

At this rate, **Mortification** soon comes into play because one must "empty oneself in order to put on Jesus Christ." How can one be credible, and speak of the Cross and mortification, if one has not learned to live the 'hard

way, combatting one's passions and faults without sparing oneself or taking oneself too seriously? If Vincentians wish to live in a team or in community they must "harness" themselves, otherwise they will find themselves bickering perpetually over trifles.

Such a commitment asks for **Gentleness** too. Jesus himself picked it out as one of his favorite virtues: "Learn from me for I am gentle and humble of heart." Through gentleness one inherits the earth! Vincent adds: "it opens men's hearts." Gentleness is a means to an end apostolically-speaking, for it gives us credibility as ambassadors of the Good News. Saint Vincent had this experience: through anger one "padlocks peoples' hearts," through gentleness one "wins them over" to God.

The **Zeal** characteristic of the Vincentian is the flame of the fire of **Charity**. All the Vincentian virtues shine out in this zeal which unites hearts, gives them a new dynamism and enables us to live as brothers and sisters. Vincent's instructions are astonishingly appropriate for our time "Let nothing happen, nothing be done, nothing be said without everyone knowing. This reciprocity is essential." Charity between us, charity towards the little ones: what comes out of our hearts "is a little fire which enters into the heart of the sick person." The following affirmation is worth its weight in gold and fills the heart of a Vincentian with joy: "God loves those who love the poor."

Vincentians must also live in **Joy**. By avoiding knitting one's brow, dismissing the clouds that darken the horizon, or

doubts about one's vocation, one obeys Saint Vincent's repeated advice to Saint Louise: "Be ever cheerful." Every Vincentian would like to be able to imitate the response of Sister Andrée to Vincent's question: "My Sister, is there really nothing in the past that you can reproach yourself for?" "No, Monsieur, nothing at all, except that I felt too pleased with myself when I went through the villages to see those poor people; I was flying high, such was my joy in serving them."

Cordiality "that outpouring of the heart" thus goes without saying. It communicates this joy to others. It reveals the union between hearts: "no gap between them but unity in one and the same affection, one and the same regard for virtue, one and the same horror of evil." The most wonderful consequence of charity and joy is being content with others. Vincentians have taken to heart the famous motto: "If charity was an apple, then cordiality would be its color." They can never accept disagreement or division. They are people of endless patience and gifted for dialogue, always maintaining the link with the entire Vincentian family, living fully and shining with "the spirit of Saint Vincent."

Finally, they want to be just, enamored of **Justice**, in the name of the poor. For this reason they pay special attention to those who are helpless, respecting their person above all, refusing to take sides and remembering in the name of the natural law that the duties of justice take precedence over those of charity.



Together

All these counsels ask for a fraternal life or team work. It is unthinkable for Vincentians to work 'free-lance' even if they are apt to see themselves as 'prophets.' Out of fidelity to Saint Vincent they should gather people together and know that community is the 'keynote' of their vocation. Brother, Sister, Confrere, Companion, friend, with an enthusiasm which is invincible even when faced with antipathy, anger or malice. Deliberately fraternal, for life, and happy to be so.

God's good pleasure

They are convinced of doing the will of God, the great masterword of Vincent's spiritual counsels! Saint Vincent marveled at his missionaries' good fortune in "doing the will of God always and in all things by doing what the Son of God himself came to do on earth." Everything that contributes to this development of the whole person accomplishes the will of God, so they cannot allow themselves to doubt for one second that they have done what God wishes. This is the keystone of Vincentian spirituality.

With this outlook they can do no more than live in abandonment to the will of Providence. The means for this are availability and trust. They always put themselves in the hands of Providence since their patron had made it his practice: "True wisdom consists of being attentive to Providence at every step."

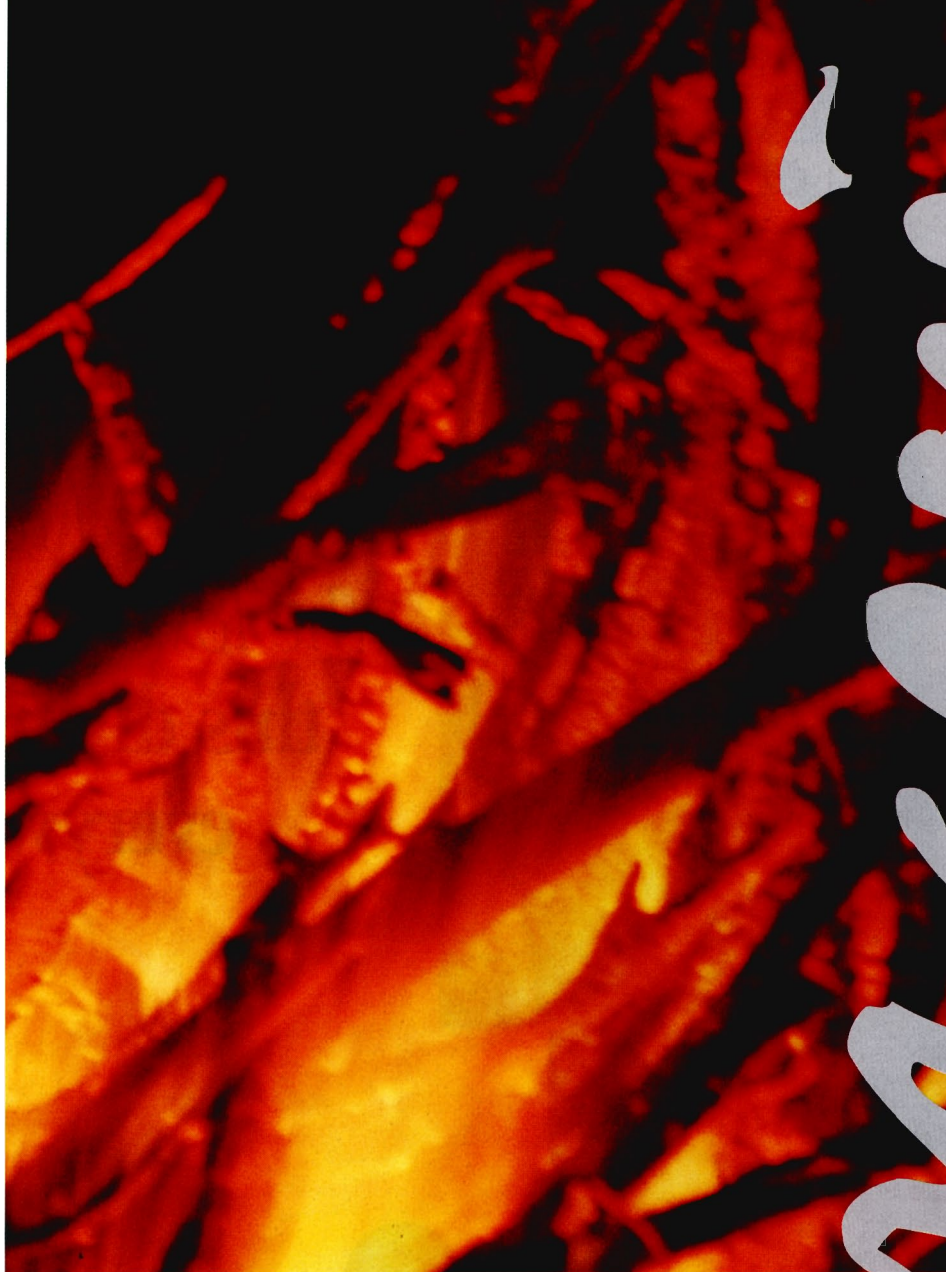
From day to day they are attentive to the signs from God who manifests his desires through events. The Vincentians' whole vocation consists of putting their life and activity in harmony with this "pleasure of God" and of proving themselves to be "infinitely inventive" in their choice of the means of relaying Jesus and being a good "Gospel worker." In the wake of Jesus, the Vincentian is missionary and servant of his brothers and sisters in humanity, the poor that God loves and wants to welcome into his Kingdom.

Words for the future

For the true Vincentian, a life-time and even eternity are hardly long enough for giving thanks to God! They are aware of living a thrilling life and of being urged on by something "greater than they are." They know they are filled with the very Spirit of Jesus: "A spirit of perfect charity, filled with a marvelous respect for the divinity and an infinite desire to do honor to it in a worthy fashion." The Vincentian is a person who is filled in this way.

Grace flows within them since baptism, which is renewed by their commitment. This grace is like the sap in the old oak in Ranquines which has been flowing in its trunk and branches for eight hundred years, struggling against the ingratitude of time and civilization. For Vincentians this tree is a symbol and every time they see it and think of Vincent's heritage they catch themselves saying: "I will stick it out!"





Zeal

Zeal is the fifth maximum and consists of a pure desire to make oneself pleasing to God and useful to one's neighbor, a zeal for enlarging God's empire, a zeal for obtaining salvation for one's neighbor. Is there anything more perfect in the world?

If the love of God is a fire, then zeal is its flame; if the love of God is a sun, then zeal is its rays. Zeal is what is most pure in the love of God.

Now, my brothers, how can we possess this spirit of simplicity, of humility and gentleness if we do not have the spirit of mortification which has us see good in everything? And how will we possess this spirit of mortification without zeal, which helps us rise above all sorts of difficulties, not only with the force of reason but also with that of grace..."

Vincent de Paul



*“Called to bear
the love of God...
**this divine fire,
... everywhere”***

Vincent de Paul

Consecrated for service

“Let us seek out the poorest and most abandoned among us, and recognize before God that they are our lords and masters, and that we are unworthy of rendering our little services for them.”

Vincent de Paul

The extended family of Vincent and Louise

Members of the Vincentian family have adapted the charism of Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac to address new signs of the time and respond to changing social needs. The result has been new institutes to serve the Church.

- The foundress of the Dominican Sisters of Charity of the Presentation of the Holy Virgin (1696, France) was **Marie Poussepin** (1653-1744, beatified 1994), daughter of a Lady of Charity, who was involved with the Daughters of Charity through the Confraternity of Charity at Dourdan, instructed young girls and cared for the sick poor of the countryside.

- **Joan Antida Thouret** (1765-1826, canonized 1934) was a Daughter of Charity in Paris (1787-1792) when the community was dispersed. She later founded the Sisters of Charity of Saint Joan Antida (1799, France) to teach poor children and to care for the poor. The rule she developed for her institute was based on the *Common Rules of the Daughters of Charity*, which she had memorized.

- **Reverend John Gowan, C.M.**, (1817-1897) and **Margaret Aylward** (1810-1889), a Lady of Charity, cofounded The Sisters of the Holy Faith (1867, Ireland) to deal with the poverty resulting from the potato famine.

- **Reverend Thomas Judge, C.M.**, (1868-1933) founded the Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity (1912, USA) and the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity (1929, USA) in order to preserve the faith in areas where Catholics were in a minority and to serve the poor. The Trinitarian family now includes a lay group, the Blessed Trinity Missionary Institute (1964, USA).

- **Sister Lourdes Lopez** (b. 1916), a former Daughter of Charity (1943-1976), founded the Missionary Sisters of the Poor in Christ (1978, Philippines) for service of the poor and uneducated.

- The **Sister of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul of Kerala** (1994, India) began in 1973 as a new branch of four distinct German congregations of Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul of Freiburg, Fulda, Heppenheim and Paderborn, members of the Vincentian Federation. The founding congregations thought that their mission in India would be more effective through collaboration and inculturation, rather than by separate German-based institutes.

The legacy of Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac lives on in numerous institutes, both religious and lay, throughout the world. Many foundations have been influenced by the rule of Vincent which Louise helped develop. Some examples include: Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's (1809, USA); Sisters of Charity of Nazareth (1812, USA); Sisters of Charity of Our Lady of Mercy (1829, USA); Sisters of Charity of Providence (1843, Quebec, Canada); Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati (1852, USA); Sisters of Charity of the Immaculate Conception (1854, New Brunswick, Canada); Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul (1856, Halifax, Canada); Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth (1858, USA); Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth (1859, USA); Sisters of Providence of Saint Vincent de Paul (1861, Ontario, Canada); Anglican Sisters of Charity (1869, England); Sisters of Seton Hill (1870, USA); Sisters of Providence of Holyoke (1873, USA); Vincentian Sisters of Charity (USA: Pittsburgh, 1902; Bedford, 1928); Vincentian Congregation (1927, India); Congregation of the Prehitharam Sisters (1964, India).



20th century:

Expansion and Diversity

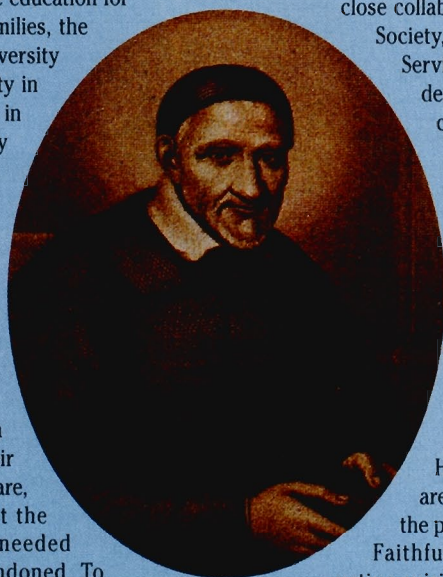
From the beginning of the twentieth century until the close of the Second Vatican Council, the American Vincentians and Daughters of Charity experienced together with the Church in the United States a tremendous expansion in membership and ministries.

As the need grew for more diocesan priests to serve the Catholic population, local bishops entrusted their seminaries to the care of the Vincentians, especially in the Midwest and West. To meet the demand for access to a college education for children of poor working-class Catholic families, the Vincentians founded colleges; Niagara University near Buffalo, New York, St. John's University in Brooklyn, New York, and DePaul University in Chicago, Illinois. These latter two are today among the largest Catholic universities in the nation. All these Vincentian universities continue to foster leadership opportunities and advanced education for minorities and working-class students. Within the last twenty years the number of provinces of the Vincentians in the United States increased to five.

During this same period the American Daughters of Charity greatly expanded their traditional network of charitable, health care, and educational institutions throughout the United States providing desperately needed services to the poor and the most abandoned. To accomplish this mission more effectively the number of provinces of the sisters also was increased to five.

In the decades since the close of the Second Vatican Council, the American Vincentians and Daughters of Charity have sharpened their focus to respond to today's needs. Yesterday's immigrant European Catholics are today's successful affluent middle-class Catholics. However, economic changes in our society have produced a new class of working poor and unemployed as well as triggered a new wave of Catholic immigrants to be served. Seminaries once reserved for priesthood candidates now offer a variety of programs to train a new generation of lay and religious as Church ministers. The parish mission now serves as a key ingredient in the renewal of our local parishes and fosters the establishment of small basic Christian communities to support the Catholic faith of our people.

In each province of the Daughters of Charity the sisters are impelled by the "charity of Christ crucified" to seek out and serve Christ in the person of the poor and needy. National realities regional trends, and local needs call for diverse programs and services to respond most effectively with compassionate care for persons of all ages without discrimination. In a rapidly changing Church and modern world the sisters' services are holistic in order to serve the whole person corporally and spiritually in the Vincentian tradition whether in the inner city, rural America, or in the foreign missions. Programs and ministries are increasingly collaborative and continue to include education, health care, and a wide variety of social services according to the needs of the local Church and God's poor.



The 21st Century:

Vincentian Vision 2000

As the world prepares to celebrate the Jubilee of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Catholic Church is being called by Pope John Paul II to a rebirth of missionary activity, and a "new evangelization." The Second Vatican Council recalled the importance of the baptismal call of every Catholic to share in the work of evangelization and renewal. The Vincentians and Daughters of Charity of the ten provinces of the United States, in close collaboration with the Saint Vincent de Paul Society, the Ladies of Charity, the Vincentian Service Corps, as well as diocesan priests, deacons, religious and the laity, are being challenged to develop new models of mission and collaboration here at home as well as overseas.

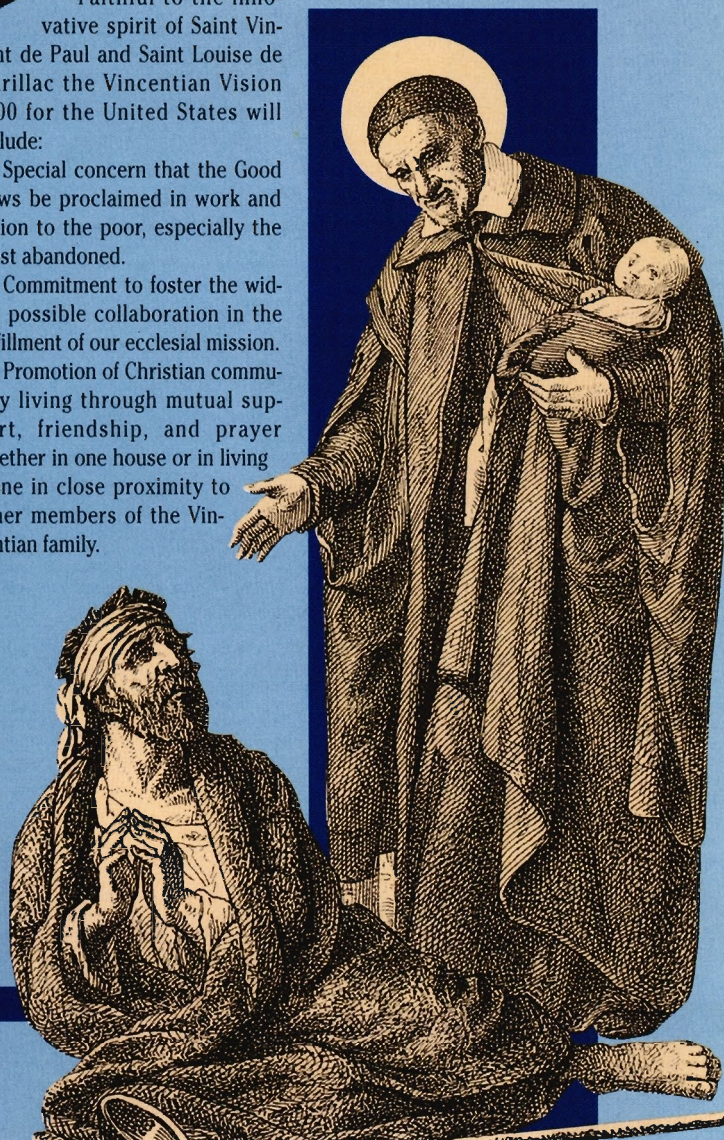
Tomorrow's Vincentians and Daughters of Charity will continue to work coast-to-coast across the United States from apostolic centers in Los Angeles, Emmitsburg, Phoenix, Denver, Dallas, San Antonio, St. Louis, New Orleans, Chicago, Evansville, Albany, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Los Altos Hills, New York City, New Haven and any other place to which we are called by divine providence to serve the poor.

Faithful to the innovative spirit of Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac the Vincentian Vision 2000 for the United States will include:

Special concern that the Good News be proclaimed in work and action to the poor, especially the most abandoned.

Commitment to foster the widest possible collaboration in the fulfillment of our ecclesial mission.

Promotion of Christian community living through mutual support, friendship, and prayer whether in one house or in living alone in close proximity to other members of the Vincentian family.



“American Foundress”

The “American Foundress” of the Daughters of Charity in the United States did not enter the “European community picture” until the early 19th century. The young widow Elizabeth Ann Seton, like Louise de Marillac two centuries earlier, had a dream and a desire to serve others. In 1809 Elizabeth Seton and a small group of companions founded the first community of American sisters in Baltimore, Maryland. The fledgling community of Sisters of St. Joseph soon moved to Emmitsburg, Maryland where in 1810 they founded St. Joseph’s Free Elementary School an event which is considered the beginning of the parochial school system in the United States.

The American sisters were, however, seeking a more definite pattern and spirit for their newly established community. When Bishop-elect Benedict Flaget sailed for France he was asked to secure the Rules and Constitutions of the Daughters of Charity as well as some members to train the American sisterhood. The documents, as well as the conferences of St. Vincent de Paul were sent from Paris, but the Napoleonic government refused to let any of the Daughters of Charity leave France. Nevertheless, Mother Seton had the French Rules translated, adapted to American conditions, approved by Archbishop John Carroll, and adopted by her sisters, who henceforth were known as the “Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph’s.”

Mother Seton died on January 4, 1821. Within the first ten years of its existence, Sisters were sent to open orphan asylums in Philadelphia and New York City. During the second decade, the community established free schools and orphanages in Baltimore, Frederick Maryland, Washington, D.C., Harrisburg, Pennsylvania and Albany, New York. In 1828 Sisters traveled to St. Louis to found the Mullanphy hospital, the first Catholic hospital in the United States, and the first hospital west of the Mississippi.

It was not until March 25, 1850 that the union of her American sisters with the international Daughters of Charity finally was accomplished. On November 1, 1850 the province of the United States of America was erected, and the spiritual direction of the American sisters passed from the Sulpician Fathers to the Vincentians. On December 8, 1851 the American Daughters assumed the blue-gray habit and distinctive white cornette of the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul. At the time of the union with France some of the American sisters chose to remain under the authority of their local bishops and thus, there are six communities of Sisters of Charity that attribute their foundation to Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton. These communities, together with the Daughters of Charity, form the Elizabeth Seton Federation in the United States.

By the end of the century, the community had expanded into seventeen more states opening scores of schools, hospitals, orphanages and other social service institutions. Considering the wide distribution of community houses and the difficulty of visitations, the superiors in Emmitsburg sought a division of the American province. On July 31, 1910 the province was divided in two with one province remaining headquartered at Emmitsburg, and a second headquartered in St. Louis.



Serving the Church Coast to Coast

Vincentians and Daughters of Charity in the United States

A Missionary Congregation arrives in the United States

In July 1816, the United States was still a young country when the first members of the Congregation of the Mission of Saint Vincent de Paul arrived in Baltimore. Known popularly as "Vincentians," these first missionaries from Italy were continuing a two hundred year old tradition of preaching the gospel to poor people and training good priests for the Church.

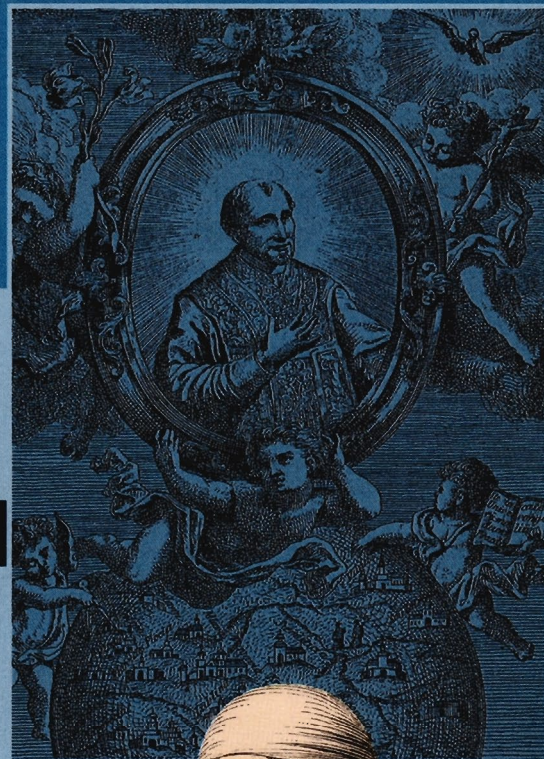
In response to the invitation of Bishop Louis William BuBourg of the territory of Upper Louisiana, a band of Italian Vincentian priests, brothers and seminarians set out from Baltimore by wagon, flatboat, horseback and sometimes on foot to reach the heartland of America. In 1818 a small seminary college was established in a settlement of Catholics near the Mississippi River south of present day St. Louis, Missouri. For over 150 years under the patronage of Mary Immaculate, Saint Mary of the Barrens Seminary in Perry County, Missouri trained overseas missionaries, classroom professors, mission preachers, chaplains, and parish priests to go across America as well as to Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

19th Century: Extending the Frontier

Within a decade of the foundation of the Vincentian Motherhouse in Perryville, Missouri, Vincentians had begun to establish new foundations across America. Working from a missionary center in Philadelphia, East Coast Vincentians founded diocesan seminaries, established parishes to care for the influx of poor European immigrant Catholics, and preached parish renewal missions in large cities and rural communities.

The opening of the frontier in the West drew Vincentian missionaries to Monterey and Los Angeles shortly after California was admitted into the Union. Up and down the Mississippi River Valley, small local seminaries, secondary schools, parishes, and mission stations were founded in New Orleans, St. Louis, and Chicago. A vanguard of American Vincentians was sent to serve a struggling Texas Church soon after the declaration of the Republic of Texas.

Despite ethnic and racial conflicts, financial crises and a scarcity of personnel, the American Vincentians continued to be committed to preach the Gospel to the poor, to help train future priests and to support each other through shared community living.



Differently

At the invitation of the French government the Daughters of Charity arrived in Algeria in 1842: the schools, hospitals, kindergartens, day-nurseries, centers for the protection of mother and child and for the handicapped all give an idea of the Sisters' capacity for adaptation and their great love for the poor.

How many events have changed the face of this country in 150 years! Now the Sisters' presence is different, but still attentive to the suffering and isolated: whether they are nurses or doctors, speech-therapists or midwives, educators or social workers, each of them brings their skill and tenderness to the population.

Algeria



Germany

Germany

Helping hands

In response to the needs of those who are suffering, the Sisters have created their own charitable institutions or collaborated with those who attempt to alleviate today's poverty. They visit the aged and destitute, the vast numbers of single women in the country (nearly two million), distribute meals and clothes to the homeless, welcome all those in distress, teach German to the children of foreigners, refugees or immigrants.

A group called 'Helping Hands' founded by Sisters and laity visits poor families and obtains all sorts of aid for them. Particular attention is given to the mentally handicapped in order to enable them to find a dignified home.



Germany

Argentina

Integral development

El Obraje (forestry exploitation) is a camp of Chaguanco Indians located in the Salta province (Argentina) close to the Bolivian border. The missionary team of Our Lady of Lujan, made up of twenty-odd young lay-people and their chaplain has committed itself, on the request of the bishop, to the religious and social sponsorship of this population. The mission lasts one month every year. The Indians of the tribe live in mud and straw huts, and their water is entirely residual. Insufficient nourishment causes malnutrition and frequent illness. Infant mortality is very high. The Indians believe in a Supreme Being.

The mission consists of visits in the home in the morning to assess the situation and offer medical care and vaccinations. The afternoon is devoted to instruction in cooking, sewing, hygiene and catechism for the children, the evening to the explanation of Christian doctrine and the history of salvation.

The results after several years are notable: the construction of a primary school and creation of a literacy center for adults; medical visits, vaccinations, improved nutrition after starting vegetable gardens; the construction of two wells providing drinking-water and an irrigation canal; deforestation, ploughing of the land to sow soya, maize and ground-nuts. The evangelization has also borne fruit: the Christian community is strengthened and the Family Club is responsible for the follow-up.

Foundation

Two priests from the Italian provinces went at the end of 1993 to join the Albanian people who yearn to be able live out their faith in freedom. The Church in Albania has proven to be a young, fervent Church filled with hope. Nearly 300 Albanians in the region of Rreshen are preparing for baptism.

Albania

Australia

Man, image of God

The Saint Catherine villa in Eastwood is a home-clinic for people suffering from Alzheimer's disease. A welcoming atmosphere of freedom and love reigns in the entire house with no discrimination with regard to race, color or creed. The tender and wise smiles of the residents reflect a conviction that they are precious in the eyes of those who take care of them at Saint Catherine's.

Alzheimer's disease, which gives rise to such a change in one's personality, often has a devastating effect on the sick person's family: it is a veritable 'way of the Cross' that they must follow, torn between fatigue,

impatience and guilt, for someone dear to them has become a stranger! Support and assistance are essential to prevent a breakdown in family relations. The Sister responsible for admissions first visits the family home of the sick person and interviews the close relations. Bringing comfort and hope to those who suffer from deteriorating health, loss of memory and self-esteem brings us close to the deep meaning of human existence.



Australia

Pastoral activity on the road

This is an experience which enables the Mission to reach people who are marginalized by society and by the parishes. In Brazil there are about 120,000 truck-drivers. Almost 77% of all merchandise is transported by road. Yet the low cost of freight and the precarious state of the roads constitute serious problems for the workers who make their living from it and are permanently on the move.

Three Vincentian priests devote their time to this pastoral activity. In practice, evangelization takes place in small groups, for example a few people gathered in the restaurants or snack-bars situated near the 27,000 gas stations. The aim of this activity is to give the drivers a sense of their dignity and an awareness that they themselves are missionaries of Gospel values by helping them understand the value of their profession, their family and their personal life.

Each confrere has a chapel-truck, where all those who wish can have direct contact with him and where the sacraments, especially Holy Mass, are celebrated. Through this pastoral activity, the Church is present on the endless roads of Brazil and Latin America.



Brazil (Fortaleza)

Brazil

Those people are our business

Poverty has a new face. In our day and age it is a pervasive evil to an extent similar to that of the 17th century. The entire world is opening up before us like an immense and hazy universe of poverty in which is accumulating the refuse of a consumer society riddled with injustice which casts aside vast numbers of people. These people are our business. People asking for asylum file through our relief offices, unwanted because they are a burden and threaten our tranquillity.

"They are in danger!" This is the cry of alarm of two communities, the Jesuits and the Daughters of Charity, who are trying to help them in a common action. They have made an alarming discovery. There is a serious gap in the application of the Geneva Convention for refugees: 85 to 90% of the applications are considered unacceptable. Yet one does not flee one's country out of sheer pleasure! "Faced with what appears to be a new phase of inhumanity, we cannot remain inactive," says Sister Agnes. "If all those seeking asylum cannot be recognized as refugees, they all have the right to be recognized in their human dignity."

With the clergy and volunteer lay-people, we are seeking answers. We have made the government aware of the situation, we are making inquiries with the appropriate authorities, which already helps to avoid certain violations and sort out difficult situations. Saint Vincent used to say: "Put a few tools in their hands." Perhaps they will be able to give their own answers to our questions like those two people from Zaire and the Angolan who said: "Help us now to prepare for our return to our country. We want to be useful at home."

If Saint Vincent had a profound impact on the attitude of the Church and of society towards the poor it is because he was a struggler, an inventive man-of-the-moment.

Belgium

Neither in front nor behind

The service of the Daughters of Charity is both corporal and spiritual, a work of human and evangelical progress in the spirit of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise. This service aims as far as possible to witness to Jesus Christ and encourage the growth of his presence in the life of the poor and those who work with us.

We want to give the poor the possibility for growth in making them aware of their dignity as human beings and sons and daughters of God. We are convinced that our fellow-workers are as capable as we are of 'becoming,' of 'doing,' and of 'being responsible' in their own right. It is therefore essential for us to be 'with' them, do 'with' them, rather than do 'for' them, even if this requires of us a great deal of patience, humility and self-effacement.

In the domain of health, the emphasis is on education and prevention. Contact with women enables us to meet them in their daily life and help them to maintain or rediscover their dignity as women. Through simple means we seek to improve the conditions of their existence: boring wells, fixing up springs, and building storehouses in view of training people to manage their affairs and avoid famine. A small training-center attempts to combat illiteracy or backwardness among the young. Pastoral work has an important place: catechism, preparation for the sacraments among the young and adults, and basic Church communities.

At the moment, one of the Sisters is helping with formation in a new diocesan Congregation "Accompany us on the road, neither in front, nor behind. Seek with us to live and achieve the best for each one" (a bishop of Cameroun).



Cameroun

"It is not sufficient for me to love God if my neighbor does not love him."

Vincent de Paul



Eritrea

SAINT ELIZABETH ANN SETON, APOSTLE OF CHARITY



She was the first North American woman and first native-born citizen of the United States to be beatified (1963) and canonized (1975).

She was born in New York on 28 August 1774 just prior to the events leading to the Declaration of Independence. Losing her mother at the age of three, she was raised as a devout Episcopalian and brought up in a family marked by her father's medical career and his remarriage.

At the age of 19 she married William Magee Seton (1768-1803), an import merchant. The socially prominent Mrs. Seton was one of the founders of the Society for the Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children in 1797. Soon faced with bankruptcy and illness, she found strength in reading the Bible and prayer, especially the psalms. Courageously she accompanied her husband, ill with tuberculosis, on a sea voyage to Italy for his health. After his premature death, she struggled to raise their five young children.

Introduced to Roman Catholicism in Italy by the Filicchi family, she was impressed by their faith and charity. After much soul-searching, she became a Catholic in 1805 and met rejection by many of her family and friends because of her conversion. Teaching became the means to support her family. The invitation of Reverend William Valentine Dubourg, S.S., (1766-1833), later bishop, and her desire to educate young girls led her to Baltimore, Maryland, where she and her companion adopted a religious habit and made vows. She became an apostle through charity.

In 1809 she founded the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's, at Emmitsburg, Maryland. Sulpician priests continued to be her spiritual guides and introduced her to the way of Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac and their *Common Rules of the Daughters of Charity*. She adopted this rule after making some modifications to meet the needs of her institute, the first religious community founded in the United States. The political situation prevented the arrival of French Daughters of Charity to orient the young community to the rule of Vincent. She died 4 January 1821. The Emmitsburg community merged with the Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul on 25 March 1850.

A woman radiant with charity, five North American institutes trace their roots to her foundation and are charter members of the Elizabeth Seton Federation. Transformed by the Word of God, Mother Seton left behind her a powerful legacy, sensitive to injustice and the situation of African-Americans and filled with a thirst for the Eucharist and a passionate love for the Church. "She made into her own family the poor, the persecuted, the weak, the sick, the suffering," remarked John XXIII.

Over the barrier

The Daughters of Charity in Quebec collaborate with the different organizations that work for the less fortunate. Their commitment to the Vietnamese refugees has been considerable: the language barrier seemed insurmountable, until the arrival of a Vietnamese Daughter of Charity who had spent nine months in a camp. The support and accompaniment of immigrants from many countries is carried out by the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

Canada

With the Indians

The Congregation of the Mission has been in Chile since 1854. In association with the Daughters of Charity the missionaries have been present in times of war, calamity, plague and earthquake.

The preferential option for the Latin American poor is at the origin of commitment to the Indians, the Mapuches and Huincas. In 15 years nearly 20 communities have been established. The missionaries visit them once or twice a month, say the Eucharist and train group-leaders who are responsible for their communities when the priests are absent. Traveling is extremely difficult, with hours and hours spent on foot or on horseback, but love of the Mission lightens this heavy burden. The most important aspect of this is that the Mission can only exist with the collaboration of the Indians themselves.



The Costa Rican plane

A life-saver

Since 1895 the Congregation of the Mission has been in Talamanca, on the Atlantic side of the country. The missionaries are involved in the human and Christian growth of the inhabitants: a daily radio program encourages the cultural, artistic and religious development of the listeners. The means of transport are so limited that Father Bernadito's little plane has become a 'life-saver' for it enables rapid transportation to the hospital.

Costa-Rica

Chile





St. Louis

A Vincentian professorship

In the United States, many of the poor are truly "our lords and our masters." The Vincentians of the Philadelphia province work in seven urban parishes, several of which are located in the poorest urban ghettos in the country, and close to the migrants (North Carolina, Long Island near New York).

In 1870, on the request of the bishop, the Vincentians founded the University of Saint John, which has now become the biggest Catholic university in the United States. Efforts have been made to increase the university's commitment to serve the poor. A Vincentian professorship has just been created, dedicated to the study of poverty and justice-related problems. A Vincentian Service Corps gathering together young lay volunteers, is committed to a more concrete service of the poor. Its members devote one or two years to full-time service.



Sardinia: rehabilitation center.

Prison children

A simple story which began in 1983-1984: some Daughters of Charity and young people took special notice of children between 18 months and 15 years of age whose parents are in prison. Some of them live in prison with their mothers, others were born there. They are all marginalized and suffer from the effects of this.

The ASIR movement gathers together volunteers ready to take on educational tasks, aiming to help integrate these young children into society through home-visiting, weekend trips, holiday-camps, and staying with volunteer families in order to avoid spending too long periods in prison. One of the main preoccupations is helping the child integrate into a group: at school, at play, or in a profession.

The emphasis is placed on a personal relationship with the children in order to give them or help them discover a little affection and encourage a healthy development. The ASIR movement ensures a human and Christian formation for the young children.



Brother William



Evansville

Living close

You want to live close to people.

Your community implanted in the heart of a city should be the sign of the Lord's closeness to everyone.

In order to live this you must be attentive to peoples' different needs, giving priority to your commitment to serve the poorest of the poor.

You want to be present to the most helpless... You will be attentive to the needs expressed by the young, the sick and the most abandoned...

You are putting yourselves at the service of the life of the Church.

(Letter from the bishop to the Community, sending it out on mission).

We live in a low-cost housing estate "La Viste" in the northern district of Marseille. It consists of 700 families of different races and backgrounds. The unemployment level is at 37%, a figure which speaks for itself! Our desire is to be close to those for whom the Church is distant and who are not taken into consideration by society.

For the moment we are present in the Social Center in the "Young" and the "Family" committees. We are asked to say who we are, why we have chosen this life, what we are seeking... All ways of expressing how we become inserted in the life of the neighborhood. It is a form of witness!

We also take part in the CSF (Family Trade Union Movement). What an experience to meet and talk with people in their own homes! What an experience in the open doors, the smiles...and in the closed doors and faces!

Through "Relais Espérance"; an association born during the diocesan Synod, we are present to the world of those who are outcasts: the prisoners of Les Baumettes and their families, people with AIDS and those who take care of them. These young people are mostly outcasts due to their Maghrebin or gypsy origin, or their drug-addiction. Some of them have been damaged by their time in Les Baumettes or in psychiatric hospitals. For us they are witnesses: suffering, treatments, solitude, nothing can take away their smiles and their hope. They fight for their lives with great human and spiritual courage. There is still a lot left to do for the outcasts of all types: we are challenged by the world of the homeless, the tramps, prostitution, etc...

We are linked to the team of priests for the sector, and take care to give responsibility to lay people through the animation of Sunday Schools, catechisms, the chaplaincies and, movements in the

polytechnics. It is the love which took on a name and a face in Jesus that gathers us together and sends us out. It is the movement of life, the source of all true joy.

Dying with dignity

The care of the sick and the elderly has always been a great concern of the Daughters of Charity in Great Britain, and all the more so today, with the real possibility of the legalization of euthanasia. In several hospitals and nursing homes the Sisters provide long term care or a period of respite for families of deaf and/or blind persons and terminally ill patients ensuring a high quality of life for them and enabling them to die with dignity.

Great Britain



In the tropical forest

The Indians were forced to flee and leave their land because they were persecuted by the army; they have fled to the neighboring country, Mexico. After a twelve-year stay there they have come back, as defenseless as when they left. The Guatemalan Church has sent some Daughters of Charity to them. They have joined the Indians in the north of the country in an unhealthy area of tropical forest.

They have become totally integrated in the population, learning to understand their own culture. They share the same type of accommodation, the "rancho," without electricity or running water. 'Doctors without frontiers' have set up drinking-water fountains in the village. The Sisters are real friends and supporters for the native peasants. They can turn to them on all occasions to ask advice and talk of their problems and their joys.



France



France

Guatemala

Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission

The evangelizing work that the Congregation of the Mission intends to accomplish must be characterized by:

1. A clearly expressed preference for an apostolate among the poor: their evangelization is in fact the sign of the coming of the kingdom of God on earth (cf. Mt 11.51).

2. A concern for social realities, especially for the causes of unequal distribution of wealth in the world, in order to carry out better our prophetic role of evangelization.

3. A certain participation in the conditions of the poor, not only to evangelize them, but to be evangelized by them.

4. A true sense of community in apostolic work in order to strengthen ourselves mutually in our common vocation.

5. A readiness to go all over the world following the example of the first missionaries of the Congregation.

6. A continual attempt to seek conversion on the part of each individual and of the entire Congregation, consistent with St. Paul's admonishment:

"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind" (Rm. 12: 2)



FERNAND PORTAL

Born in 1855 in the Cevennes (France) and son of a cobbler, Fernand had the privilege of studying despite his modest origins and entered the minor seminary of Montpellier. He wanted to become a military officer to help France to recover its dignity after humiliation by the Prussians. He grasped, however, through contact with the Lazarist priests at the seminary, that it would be possible to be the soldier of another cause, that of the missions in pagan lands. At the age of 19 he was received into the Congregation of the Mission, carrying in his heart the secret desire to leave for China. He was ordained a priest in 1880. His health had not been taken into account. It declined and made it impossible to take on difficult tasks or cope with harsh climates. Appointed as professor of dogma teaching in the seminaries he presented the Catholic Church to his pupils as an unquestionably perfect institution. But in studying his spiritual master, Vincent de Paul, he discovered the faults and failings and the evolution of this Church which attempts to remain faithful to its mission while at the same time adapting to new needs.

On making the acquaintance of a young Anglican, Lord Halifax, he heard a pressing call from the Spirit to become a missionary by fighting the divisions among Christians. He discovered a spiritual life and a living presence of Christ outside the Roman Church. He yearned to re-establish visible unity in a community which was to remain part of the Body of Christ. He attempted to bring together the Anglican and Roman authorities, but it was a complete failure which ended up with the confirmation of the invalidity of Anglican orders.

In 1903, from his first direct contact with Protestants and Orthodox Christians, emerged an ecumenical vision of the problem of Unity. At this time he founded the Catholic Review of the Churches, and the Javel community for which the path to Unity lay in the service of humanity. He gathered around him Catholic university scholars such as Georges Goyaux, Jacques Chevalier, Marcel Legaut, Jean Guitton, Robert Garric etc...

In 1921 he started the first official meetings between Catholic and Anglican bishops, theologians and canon lawyers (the Malines discussions).

Fernand Portal died in 1926 amidst the Javel community.



Honduras

40,000 children in the street

In San Pedro Sula and la Mosquitia, pastoral activity is centered around the evangelization of children and adolescents. Despite a certain initial reticence the schoolmasters and teachers have agreed to work on an educational theme for the year with their pupils: such as friendship, life, the town, different peoples. Nearly 30,000 to 40,000 children participate in a huge demonstration in the streets of the town at the end of the year. Radio and television are present to enable everyone to witness the event. It is a great day of festivity on which the entire nation supports the children.

With the Souras and the Khonds

At their provincial assembly in 1987 the priests of the Indian Province reflected on their mission: "the evangelization of the poor." They considered that this entails the total liberation of the people. This perspective is considered absolutely urgent. The confreres decided to make a concerted effort to sponsor the Souras and Khonds tribes which are the most abandoned sector of the population of the Orissa region. The program includes: the rehabilitation of the lepers, adult education, an association whose

aim is to give legal aid to villagers exploited by usurers, land owners and the administration, a center for the unemployed and illiterate, centers for apprenticeship of the young in carpentry, printing, ironwork, etc... the traditional organizations for formation and training like homes, schools, orphanages.

The result has been extraordinary: the entire population of the area has become aware of Christ and his message of love and many people accept Christ as their Savior and their God. The socio-economic situation of those among whom the fathers work is improving slowly but surely.

Shared joy

A little group of French and Irish Daughters of Charity arrived in Ireland in 1858. The country was just beginning to recover from a famine in which a million people died. Since then the Sisters have responded to the needs of those afflicted by illness, homelessness, unemployment, or those outcast by society in Ireland or other countries in the world.

At present 300 sisters are working in 40 locations in Ireland as well as in Sierra Leone, Nigeria and Romania.

The aim of their service is to collaborate with others in working for justice and encouraging development.

There are 5 houses of the Daughters of Charity in Belfast

Sainte Catherine Laboure

Born on 2nd May, 1806 in Fair-les-Moutiers, a little Burgundy village: 60 kms from Dijon, Catherine was the eighth child of a Christian family of ten. At the age of 12, on the death of her mother, she took charge of their farm. The call of the Lord became evident little by little and in 1830, at the age of 24, she arrived at the Seminary of the Daughters of Charity, 140, rue du Bac in Paris, to prepare herself to give her whole life to Jesus Christ by loving and serving the most unfortunate in the footsteps of Saint Vincent de Paul.

There, in secret, the young sister had an astonishing spiritual experience. The Virgin Mary, who Catherine had chosen as her mother from childhood, appeared to her.

On the night of 18th to 19th July 1830, in a two-hour long dialogue, Mary told Sister Catherine to "come to the foot of this altar," showing the importance of prayer and of the Eucharist.

On the following November 27th, at 5: 30 pm, during community prayer, Mary entrusted Sister Catherine with a message to be transmitted to the world in the form of a little medal bearing this inscription: "Oh Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee."

After her training Sister Catherine was sent to another house in Paris where she did simple tasks: cooking, poultry, laundry, helping the elderly. She supported the poor families in the neighborhood during the riots of this troubled epoch. Nothing distinguished her from the others: she worked, prayed, and kept silence while the little medal, nicknamed the "Miraculous Medal" by the crowds, traveled around the world.

On the December 31, 1876 Sister Catherine prepared for death: "Why should I be afraid? I am going to see our Lord, Our Lady, Saint Vincent."

Sister Catherine was proclaimed 'blessed' in 1933 and 'Saint' in 1947. Her incorrupt body lies in the chapel of the Apparitions at the rue du Bac in Paris.



St. Louise's School, Belfast

and the Sisters have shared peoples' suffering during the years of injustice, violence and death. In Belfast the Sisters are also responsible for the biggest school in Europe. The 2,400 pupils are educated with Vincentian values and participate in a direct service of those who are in need.

The Irish Daughters of Charity share the life of terminally ill patients, those who are suffering from Alzheimer's disease, the mentally handicapped, abused children as well as those who live in the poorest parts of Ireland and the world.

Go to Ain Karem

The Ain Karem centre looks after 68 children between the ages of 18 months and 18 years, both physically and mentally handicapped: 50% of these children cannot walk. Various activities fill the day: drawing, visual awakening, tactile stimulation with the help of toys and auditory stimulation with music. The clapping of hands, the nodding of heads to mark time, and the laughter witness to the general participation.

How can one express the happiness and spiritual riches that these children bring to all those who work for them? Their spontaneity, their joy and their tenderness make them very endearing. Even if the volunteers and the personnel have to work hard, they are contented and deeply impressed. Very often, at times of separation, tears come to their eyes.

Israel



Constitutions of the Daughters of Charity

“The Daughters of Charity, in fidelity to their baptism and in response to a call of God devote themselves entirely and in community to the service of Christ in the poor, their brothers, in an evangelical spirit of humility, simplicity and charity.

A single love animates and governs their contemplation and their service. They know, in faith, that God is awaiting them in those that are suffering.

Saint Vincent expresses this dynamic unity in their life when he says: “You are poor Daughters of Charity who have given yourselves to God for the service of the poor.”

The Apostolic Delegate in Jerusalem often replies to the pilgrims who ask him about the Church in Israel: “Do you want to see today’s Church? Go to Ain Karem.”

The “Casina Verde”

In 1974 on the initiative of a Vincentian, an association was set up to start and fund a therapeutic community for young drug addicts. It is one of the first programs in Italy for young drug addicts. At the heart of this community Vincentians, Daughters of Charity and lay persons collaborate.

The community’s activity is based on 3 important activities: psychotherapy in the form of three group-meetings a week, socio-therapy, or relationships in which evangelization is given an important place, ergotherapy, or work-therapy.

The young drug addicts in the community are desperate. God has touched their hearts, for they still find the strength to ask for help. We are thus their only hope. Our major preoccupation is not merely to bring them to a relationship with God, but rather to accompany them along a spiritual path. Although Vincentians and Daughters of Charity are present in the team, the young residents are neither bound nor obliged to carry out any form of religious practice: it is up to them to decide. They are simply offered the possibility of participating in certain spiritual events: the Eucharist, meetings for dialogue together about subjects concerning daily life, and for a basic religious formation.

Seeing the evolution of the world of drug addiction and the spread of AIDS, the directors of the association want to take new initiatives to help seropositive drug addicts at the initial stages of the illness. This ambitious project is not an easy matter. But Saint Vincent said: “Charity is infinitely inventive.”



Betania-Lecce, Naples



Poor in a rich country

The Justice and Peace commission has drawn their attention to people who are being discriminated against. These Japanese are almost banished from society, mistreated, forced to do the work that others do not want to do. They live in and are particularly numerous in Kyoto. Three Sisters are directly responsible for them, to ensure hygiene and nourishment. But the service reaches farther in the form of an awareness campaign in schools, churches or various cultural centers.

In Kobe, a Sister helps Russian and Vietnamese refugees who can neither read nor write Japanese. She has organized a Catholic women’s group. While their children are at school, these volunteers are present to those who are in need or who come to their door. Jesus said: “You will always have the poor among you.” Even in Japan, a wealthy country, this is confirmed.

Japan



Naples

“We must hasten to the aid of our neighbor who is in spiritual need as one would hurry to put out a fire.”

Vincent de Paul

From passage to passage

Saint Vincent sent his sons to bring the Good News to Madagascar in the middle of the 17th Century. Yet this initiative could no longer be pursued because of difficulties met by the India Company and because of the havoc caused by tropical illnesses which killed so many missionaries unable to withstand them.



In 1896, yet again, the Jesuits called upon the Priests of the Mission to help in the evangelization of the southern part of the island. For many long years they sowed the seeds painfully. From 1962 onwards teams of young missionaries brought about a renewal: Christian communities became more structured, new ethnic groups were evangelized and vocations to the priesthood and to the religious life started to appear. Today most of the confreres are at the service of the dioceses: in the parishes, chaplaincies and doing apostolic rounds in the bush. At the heart of this pastoral activity, an important place is given to charitable and social work in collaboration with the Daughters of Charity: for example training-centers, rehabilitation centers for the homeless, homes and sheltered workshops for the handicapped. On top of this there are the rescue operations for the southern peoples threatened by an endemic drought. This is in collaboration with international organizations such as UNICEF (PAM) and FAO. The confreres attempt to help local populations to extricate themselves from their poverty through micro-projects: plantations, water supplies, the development of equipment co-operatives.

These peoples' missions develop progressively with the increase in numbers of Madagascan Vincentians. Indeed it seems as though the Madagascar province is at a turning-point in its history. In the years to come we will have to leave to the diocesan clergy the main centers and the more developed Christian communities for which we are responsible at the moment. We will have to implement and structure a new form of presence and activity which are more strictly missionary: the evangelization of the more remote areas and those less in contact with the faith.

In the heart of the desert

In 1984, in answer to an urgent appeal from the bishop, three Daughters of Charity arrived in Mauritania to respond to the needs of the nomadic populations who were fleeing the drought and squatting around Nouakchott. In no time at all the capital had grown in size from 70,000 to 400,000 and was encircled by massive shanty towns.

At present the Sisters have various activities which are growing very fast: dispensaries in the shanty towns, literacy programs, social services in the prisons and animation of the young prisoners, feeding young children and educating their mothers, the sponsorship of women. For the Christians, often swamped by the Islamic population, the Sisters provide catechism classes and parish activities.

In Chihuahua

The community of San José del Pinal made up of 300 Tarahumares families (Mexican Indians) is situated in the state of Chihuahua in the north of the country. The village center consists of the church, the school, the Sisters' house and three other little houses. You have to walk for several hours on dangerous roads to go and visit the families scattered far and wide. The Daughters of Charity arrived in this village in 1989. It is one of the most abandoned in the parish due to the lack of communications. Their mission is to respond in community, accompanying the people in their attempt at self-determination and consolidation, and working for the Church with priests and laity.

The Tarahumares are confronted with being robbed of their lands by the "raromars" (other more powerful Indians) and deforestation by the timber companies. Poverty is growing worse: many people are undernourished, and the sick are not treated. This people's culture is threatened by the neo-liberalism that is devastating and destroying all the places in which this culture can manifest itself.

This people is aware of the love of Onorugame (who is God the Father and Mother) who protects them, is present everywhere, and leads them to live in joy. From birth until death they keep their faith and hope: they know that God wants them to be alert, organized, free, relying on Mother Earth which they have inherited.

Like Jesus, with a similar way of life, integrated into the culture, treating the sick, consoling them in their suffering, the Sisters wish to serve their brothers and sisters with a simple and humble love, taking the Virgin Mary as their example.



Mexico - Tarahumaras from Chihuahua



All together

One of the main services rendered by the Daughters of Charity in Nigeria is work with prisoners. They do this in collaboration with the Vincentians, the seminarians and the members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. The prisoners' needs are immense and are varied. Good relationships with the prison directors enable the Sisters to visit the different units, and bring extra food, clothes and sanitary products when they are lacking. The women volunteers of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul visit the prisoners who have young children, offering them friendship and support on the educational level.

Medical care is practically non-existent in the prisons. The sick are sent to a hospital but have to pay for medication. Thanks to the help of several associations it is possible to pay these expenses. The Sisters attempt to make contact with the families who do not always know what has happened to their next-of-kin: have they been killed, are they victims of a car accident?

The Vincentians often get in touch with the judges or barristers, and don't hesitate to pay the legal bills so that the prisoners are defended, especially those who are unjustly condemned. Some seminarians give a basic education or help those whose studies have been interrupted by their imprisonment to prepare for their exams.

During the visits, the capacity to listen and be attentive to each prisoner helps them to overcome their pain and solitude, and start to discover the Word of God and prayer. The Eucharistic celebration every Sunday often brings together prisoners of different religious persuasions for they find comfort and friendship there.

When they are set free the prisoners are helped, even financially if necessary, in order to help them to recover their independence. For some this entails the renting of a plot of land, for others a little shop, for others their journey home is paid for.

Nigeria

*“If the love of God
is a fire,
then zeal is its
flame.”*

Vincent de Paul



SAINT JUSTIN DE JACOBIS

Born in 1800 in the Kingdom of Naples, he entered the “Little Company” at the age of 18. He was ordained a priest six years later. He was a missionary with the apostolic zeal of Saint Vincent for 15 years in southern Italy before being sent in 1839 to the Ethiopian mission as Apostolic Prefect.

He gathered many of the faithful around him until the 1849 persecution which provoked his expulsion to Sudan in addition to the arrest of many Christians. He came back to Ethiopia to strengthen the faith of his brothers, already confirmed in his own by the martyrdom of Ghebre Michael in 1855. Bishop de Jacobis pursued tirelessly his arduous attempts at evangelization.

On the July 31, 1860, during an exhausting trip in the valley of Aligadé, he left this world. He was buried in Hébo where he is still venerated by the local people. The odor of his sanctity spread rapidly beyond the Ethiopian borders. Paul VI canonized him on October 26, 1975.

BLESSED GHEBRE-MICHAEL

Born in Ethiopia in 1791, his name in itself is the program for his whole life which was given to God: “Servant of the Archangel Michael.” His life was a true reflection of his name. Influenced by the Monophysite heresy he encountered the true face of Christ in 1844 in the writings of Justin de Jacobis and was thrown into confusion. At the end of a period of patient reflection he accepted the Catholic faith and felt called to the priesthood. Justin de Jacobis ordained him in 1851 at the age of 60 in the Congregation of the Mission, and recognized in him an Abyssinian genius who was shrewd, upright, active, and exemplary and who had always sought knowledge of the true faith through rigorous study.

In 1854 amidst the persecutions he was arrested with other Christians. He was imprisoned in a dark and damp dungeon. He died in the Ouello area on the 28th August 1855, weighed down with chains, on a forced march.

Ghebre Michael is considered to be one of the finest products of this heroic Ethiopian Mission. He was beatified on October 3, 1926.





MONSIEUR POUGET

Jean Guitton made him famous with his well-known "Portrait" (1941) and his "Dialogues" (1954). Jacques Chevalier left us his "Logia" (1955). Lord Halifax and Bergson asked to meet him. Guillaume Pouget is the leader of the "learned and humble" Lazarists, the "treasures of the Church."

Professor of Science, Philosophy, History and Scripture in Dax, then in Paris, his eyes failed him little by little. The blind man of Saint Lazare, whose face was burnt by an explosion in his Physics lab, enlightened the intellectual elite of his time. Paul VI, it is said, had his "Pouget" on his bed-side table. At the age of

86 he departed, discreetly, into full light on February 24, 1933. He illustrated marvelously one of his own thoughts: "Freedom is the ability to become all that we should be."

BLESSED FRANCIS REGIS CLET

A martyr in China,... a martyr of the Cross. He is inseparable from Saint John Gabriel Perboyre even if he was 54 years older.

Born in Grenoble on August 19, 1748, he entered the Congregation of the Mission in 1769. After his ordination he became, in succession, professor of moral theology in the seminary in Annecy and director of the internal seminary (novitiate). In 1791 he was sent to China where he was a missionary for 28 years. His letters are brimming with faith, piety, a zeal which never wanes, and an infectious joy. Persecution forced him into hiding and wandering on the road.

Denounced by a Christian, he was arrested and put in chains on June 6, 1819. He died hanging on a cross in the night of the 17th to 18th February 1820.



Philippines

With audacity

Contemplating the massive poverty provoked by injustice, corruption and disasters, the plenary Council of the Philippines has affirmed the Church's "preferential option for the poor."

In the footsteps of Saint Vincent the Daughters of Charity have committed themselves with audacity to the evangelization of the poorest among the poor: the Philippine tribes, the refugees, the landless, the displaced families in need after flooding and earthquakes. Fifteen communities have been inserted in the poor parishes to encourage the creation of basic Church communities.



The people's mission

The priority in Portugal is work in the people's mission which is normally requested by the bishop. Then a whole series of preparations are begun: visiting the parish priest and the people, preparing animators (priests, Daughters of Charity and young and adult laity).

During the Mission all the energies in the parish are channeled. All other activities are suspended. Each day is marked by a festival: the Bible festival, the festival of water, of fire or of light, the festival of the children, the young, the sick, the families. The different institutions are visited: hospitals, old peoples' homes, schools, kindergartens. Christian groups or teams are made up during these periods. Monthly meetings then enable these groups to continue. More often than not the bishop comes for the end of the Mission.



Portugal

Netherlands

The Church outside the walls

Despite our retirement age we have implanted ourselves in working class areas at the heart of the Church and the world. Living and working both on the fringe and in the heart of the parish we are a lifebelt for foreigners and compatriots, often bereft of human and spiritual contact. We are intermediaries between the poor and the Church, the poor and the government, between the poor and their brothers and sisters. We are confronted with an incredible gap between two worlds that seek each other but meet very rarely on a religious level. Our mission as Daughters of Charity is to serve as a link.

We offer language courses for foreigners who are looking for a new homeland in our land. What human and religious solitude! What a psychological and theological abyss! One would think that until now we have not been inhabiting the same planet, and that all over this planet we need a new Pentecost to bring together such diverse cultures and understand others' language: "Veni Sancte Spiritus..."

A new path

After the fall of the Communist regimes in eastern Europe in 1989-1990 the Sisters from Great Britain took part in humanitarian aid convoys to Romania. In response to the request of the association "Health-Aid UK" three Sisters have stayed in Romania to take care of the children who have AIDS or are seropositive. These Sisters have created links with the Romanian Daughters of Charity who have survived the Communist era. There is great hope that soon young Romanian sisters will be able to take over.

Rumania

Return to freedom

Thanks to the religious freedom won in 1989 the Daughters of Charity can take an active part in the attempt to reduce poverty. They have left the isolated places they had been confined to by the totalitarian regime and have come to the parishes where they visit the elderly and the lonely, take part in catechism and help the young to discover true values, especially through the Marian Youth Movement. Fourteen sisters work in the teaching world which was under the strict control of the authorities, and thus the Marxist-Leninist ideology, for 40 years.

The Daughters of Charity and Vincentians have committed themselves to the formation of young people preparing for the priesthood or the religious life and lay people who wish to live and work in the spirit of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise. A National Association, linked to the International Association of Charities, consists of 175 members!

The new conditions of life are signs that call for conversion and to a greater commitment to those who are suffering and those who are victims of a false conception of freedom.

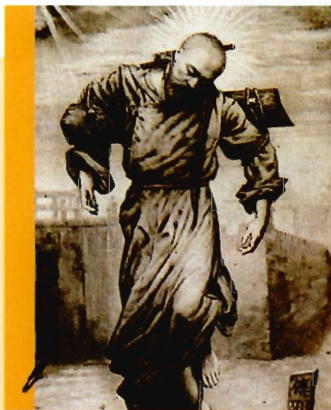


Slovenia

More

The Daughters of Charity have no work of their own, thanks to the past Communist regime. They work in state institutions: hospitals and old peoples' homes. Since the war in Bosnia started, they have been looking after refugees, helping them materially and giving moral support in this time of trial. With the help of Caritas they also provide food for the poor in Serbia, severely affected by the embargo.

Evangelization can again take place in public: catechism in the parishes, participation in the peoples' missions given by Vincentians.



SAINT JOHN GABRIEL PERBOYRE, MARTYR IN CHINA

Born in 1802 in Mongesty, in the heart of the rocky and undulating country of the Lot region (France), John Gabriel grew up with his brothers and sisters in a Christian family, living off the difficult farm work. In 1816, he was sent to his uncle Jacques, director of the minor seminary in Montauban. A year later he announced his desire to become a missionary for the Gospel. He was ordained a priest in 1826 in the chapel of the rue du Bac, where the body of Saint Vincent de Paul lay at the time.

At first, he was sent to teach in the seminary in Saint Flour because his health seemed too delicate for him to be sent on a distant mission. He was then called to Paris to help the director of the Novitiate, and was soon held in repute because of his virtue.

Whenever foreign missionaries were to leave he reiterated his desire to leave for the missions despite the objections about his health. At last he received a positive response in 1835 and left for China on March 21st. Five months later he disembarked in

Macao and in December was already on his way to Hankow and Houpe. He devoted himself entirely to the mission in the Honan region. At the beginning of 1836 he evangelized for three years but was betrayed and arrested in September 1839. He was imprisoned in Ouchanfou, in the very place where the blessed Francis Regis Clet was martyred. John Gabriel was judged and condemned to death by strangulation. He had written at the age of 18: "Oh how beautiful is that cross planted in the middle of infidel lands and so often sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ's apostles!"

He died a martyr on 11th September 1840 "suspended, apparently kneeling on a cross." The recognition of his virtues and merits brought about his beatification on November 10, 1889, and his canonization in 1995.

Cross-country

The Daughters of Charity, settled on this small but highly populated island, concentrate mostly on the mountainous regions inhabited by natives where health services and contact with the Church are limited. The hospital of Sainte Marie in Taitung, offers training to young girls in addition to health care for the mountain village people. In Luikui, the Sisters brave the problems of transportation in buses or on mopeds in order to reach those who are isolated. They do all they can to get running water for some villages or to help the families get hold of water pumps.

Taiwan is not listed among the poor countries, but many forms of poverty still exist there. One of the numerous services offered to the poor is the hospice of the Miraculous Medal in Taiwan. It only accepts the terminally ill cases who are totally abandoned.

The service consists of caring for them tenderly, preparing them for death and ensuring a decent burial should the occasion arise. The service has different branches, since those who want to come to the hospice have to be visited at home and those who cannot be accepted helped to get aid from the social services.



A funny note

Chaldean children

The first group of Lazarists arrived in Constantinople in 1782. After the trials of the French Revolution which had suppressed all the religious congregations, the Mission came to life here. Daughters of Charity were in demand to teach little girls. Yet, it was asked madness to send Sisters among the Turks wasn't it? After their arrival in 1839, a letter related: "These brave girls have not been chosen for their beauty, for our Fathers made it clear that they shouldn't be physically beautiful! They were astonished when they saw them, for they hadn't asked for them to be so ugly! But what does it matter, let us pray that they be messengers of the charity of Christ for all men without exception."

In 1995, the Daughters of Charity are still in Istanbul, a presence of the Church on Islamic territory, servants of their sick brothers in the Peace Hospital, and taking care of the education of young Chaldean children in Bebek.

Ukraine

Thirsty for God

Each people has its own history, qualities and specific mentality. The people of the Ukraine are known for their cordiality and hospitality, but also for their natural religiosity. The communist and atheist era disturbed them deeply. For the last few months the Slovak Vincentians and the Daughters of Charity have turned towards them. Pastoral work, children's catechism, visiting the poor in their homes and in hospital for which the harvest is plentiful and the workers few! There are already vocations to the priesthood!

The three daughters of Charity who work in a small Ukrainian village 80 kilometres from Chernobyl witness: "what is marvelous is that the 70 years of threat and persecutions didn't succeed in suffocating the faith of these people. It was transmitted secretly within the family. These people live in great material and spiritual poverty. Even bread is sold à la carte! An immense thirst for God characterizes the Ukrainian faithful. It is common for parents to have discovered the faith through their children! What seems most important is daily, friendly contact with the village people."



Classes for street children

The soup-pot does the rounds



Vietnam

A guiding compass in the storm

The events of 1975 were a dividing-line in the history of our country. As Daughters of Charity we were perplexed and grieved by the reversal in the situation: the community's belongings, the results of our work, everything slipped from our fingers. But trust in divine Providence was like a guiding compass in the storm.

Most of the nursing Sisters have stayed put. In order to serve the sick and the lepers they have accepted bad working conditions and frequent supervision because they are suspected of sabotage. The incurably sick are often very ill, with no family. How to help them, and get hold of the bare essentials that they often lack?

The community is as poor as our countrymen. Nevertheless we have organized a way of sharing the "soup-pot" with bed-ridden tuberculosis patients. At the beginning there were 10, then 20, and then 30. In ten years the number has increased tenfold. At the beginning a Sister prepared the soup secretly under a staircase in the hospital, but now fifteen years later this has become an accepted activity and is even encouraged by the hospital administrators who have set aside a special room.

The educational system was the exclusive domain of those in "Power," but one day the Children's Fund invited our community leader to become director of the sub-committee for "street-children." All these children that live in the streets, collecting bottles or plastic bags, or selling lottery tickets, are welcomed on various premises: church verandas, renovated pigsties, thatched-roofed huts. They receive an education that they don't get otherwise, not being able or wanting to go to school. According to their talents, they are taught a little profession. The Sisters speak to them discreetly about God. Where possible they gather the children together for catechism at 5:30 a.m., for they have to be in the fields at 7 o'clock.

Submerged by the poor

In 1925, the Daughters of Charity arrived in Mbandaka, on the riverside and the Vincentians founded their first outpost in Bikoro on the edge of Lake Tumbo. Despite the country's enormous potential, the lower classes are extremely poor and the Vincentian Mission is the last hope for the swarming crowds of people who have nothing. It is unnecessary to go out and look for the poor. We are submerged by them!

Zaire

"Let us look upon the Son of God: Oh! What a charitable heart! What a flame of love! O my Lord, from this moment on may I be enlightened by the splendor of your example and carry all men in my heart...

Set me on fire with your love!"

Vincent de Paul



A LOVE STRONGER THAN DEATH

Sister Odile Baumgarten and Sister Mary Anne Vaillot, in Angers

In 1640, Louise de Marillac herself led a little community of six sisters to Angers to tend the sick in the old hospital of Saint Jean. At the time of the French Revolution there were 39, among them Sister Mary Anne, the bursar, and Sister Odile in the dispensary. On refusing with others to take the required oath in support of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy they were imprisoned, condemned to death and shot with a large number of Christians on February 1, 1794 outside the town in the field of La Haie aux Bonshommes, now called the "Martyr's field."

The officer in command of the execution squad said to them: "Citizens, you still have time to escape death... Since you disagree with the oath, do not take it. I take it upon myself to pretend that you have made it and I give you my word that no harm will come to you or your companions in prison."

Sister Mary Anne replied: "Citizen, thank you for your offer! Not only do we not wish to take the oath, but we do not want to be credited with having done so either."

Sisters Odile and Mary Anne were beatified by John Paul II in February 1984, with 98 other martyrs of Angers.

Sister Mary Magdalene Fontaine and her companions: Sister Mary Frances Lanel, Sister Theresa Fantou and Sister Jane Gérard in Arras

They also refused to take the oath that their conscience rejected. Arrested on the February 15, 1794, imprisoned because of false witnesses, they comforted those who were unjustly accused like them. After 4 months of detention they were transferred to Cambrai to be guillotined. In the cart that carried them to their death they sang the *Salve Regina* and prayed the rosary. "Christians, don't be distressed, you will not die," Sister Mary Magdalene assured them, while mounting the scaffold steps, "we will be the last victims"... and so it was. It was the June 26, 1794.

Sister Mary Magdalene and her companions were beatified by Benedict XV in June 1920.

Three members of the Congregation of the Mission have been beatified for having refused to take the oath to support the Civil Constitution of the Clergy.

Louis Joseph Francis and John Henry Gruyer

These two priests of the Mission were imprisoned and shot in the Seminary of Saint Firmin in Paris, the *ex-collège des Bons Enfants* where Saint Vincent de Paul had founded the Congregation of the Mission. The execution took place on September 3, 1792 at 5 o'clock in the morning.

Peter René Rogue

A professor at the seminary of Vannes, he carried out a clandestine ministry in this town. Arrested on December 21st when he was taking communion to a sick person, he was condemned to death and executed on March 3, 1796.

Just like these witnesses of the faith who died during the revolutionary turmoil, many other priests, religious and laity have suffered persecution or given their life in many countries in the world. Today, other names are still being engraved on the pages of this "Register of Martyrs." The courage of our brothers in faith is a challenge to us.





When the love
of God
is fire...

Vincentian laity

Charity is the primary mission of the Church. The task is immense, and requires all sorts of gifts and all forms of organization, using the most varied methods and inspirations.



International Association of Charity - IAC

For us Charities, Vincent de Paul is our guide since he is our founder.

376 years ago he gave women a role in the church by organizing female charitable organizations.

Therefore today the Charities throughout the world which claim this affiliation under very different names but united by the International Association of Charities, bear the responsibility of keeping their vocation for charity alive and efficacious. Today, as yesterday, Saint Vincent de Paul's mission is the example which guides our activity.

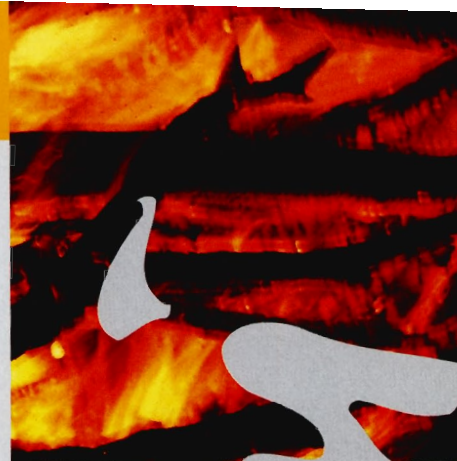
FROM SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL TO THE PRESENT DAY

One Sunday in August 1617, in Châtillon-sur-Chalaronne near Lyon in France the parish priest, Vincent de Paul, had just been informed by his parishioners of the dramatic situation of a nearby family dying of poverty and illness. He got up into the pulpit and made an appeal. How surprised he was after mass to see a procession of women going to the aid of this family in distress!

Straight away the priest organized these women into teams, wrote a rule and on the December 8, 1617 the first official "Charity" was set up. They multiplied very quickly all over France and spilled over into Italy and Poland.

After a lull caused by the French Revolution the charities grew up again in France around 1830 under the impetus of Jean Baptiste Etienne, a Lazarist, and they developed enormously, as much in France as abroad.

In 1971, twenty-two national federations established the statutes of the International Association of Charities, which gathers together 250,000 women in the world in 40 countries. They attempt to follow in the footsteps of Saint Vincent de Paul and to carry on his immense undertaking.



A school reinsertion project



A MODERN MOVEMENT

"Your company is the work of God and not the work of men... If you were to abandon it, you would ruin the work of God," wrote Saint Vincent de Paul in 1645.

A women's movement

It was a group of women who responded instantly to his call. Until the end of his life Vincent de Paul perfected and developed these women's teams.

He gave an explicit role to women in the church: "I have wished to give women a ministry in the Church, the ministry of charity" and again: "For more or less eight hundred years women have had no public occupation in the Church. Now this same providence is appealing today to some of you."

He made women responsible for action on the spot, for the animation, the reflection, the administration and the development of the movement. Saint Louise de Marillac was the first of these women, before she founded the Daughters of Charity. "The feeding and instruction of the poor in the Hôtel-Dieu, the nourishment and education of foundlings, the provision for the spiritual and bodily needs of the criminals condemned to the galleys, aid to the ruined provinces, contribution to the missions in the East, North and South. There, Mesdames, are the occupations of your company. What! Women doing all that! Yes; that is what God has already given you the grace to undertake and carry out for the last twenty years."

He wanted women whose Mission with the poor was both spiritual and material and implied also an apostolic mission: he acknowledged for women a Mission of proclaiming the word of God.

He wanted women who could work in teams together in a spirit of friendship, communication and concord. He wanted women who lived in community in faith, prayer, sharing, expressed fully in the monthly meeting with the team chaplain, "Nothing lasts if there is not this spiritual union and intimacy together!"

An organized movement

“The poor suffer less from a lack of generosity than from a lack of organization,” said Saint Vincent. This organization is necessary for action to last and be effective: the teams are organized in each country on a local level, federated on a national level and grouped together on an international level. The IAC is the mouthpiece of the charities of the entire world for international organizations like the United Nations and the Holy See.

A movement of social action

Concern for the reality of what helpless people live in all its dimensions, economic, social and personal, leads the teams to an analysis of concrete situations, to social surveys, and the search for information which will render their action efficacious.

This volunteer work is carried out in very diverse forms of solidarity. All ages of life are included: children, adults or elderly persons, and in all circumstances: isolated persons, immigrants, homeless, handicapped, families, prisoners, unemployed. This activity occurs in a constant dialogue with social services, public authorities and other associations.

A movement for the promotion of persons

The respect for the dignity of each person, the search for more justice, the refusal to outcast, respond to the Church's concern for the integral development of all of humanity and all people.

The Mission of our teams is to encourage the participation and self-expression of each person, in order to help them rediscover their personal resources, restore self-confidence, and learn to look to the future again.

A team movement

This service of the poor takes place and is built up in a community structure in order to avoid the traps of individualism. Indeed a team guarantees things that a single person cannot offer: efficiency, modesty, continuity in action, the spreading of charity out into society.

The team is also a source of dynamism, developing each person's skills, the sense of responsibility and of service, the sense of others. Through the sharing of responsibilities and a sense of collegiality, authority is lived out as a service and not as a means of dominating or claiming superiority. Thus these teams are a place of growth for so many women throughout the world.

The heart of the team's life is the monthly meeting with the chaplain in which the team places its action in the light of the Gospel, as Saint Vincent would have wished.

A Church movement

Commitment in the heart of a Church movement is a witness of trust in and love of the Church. Through positive solidarity this commitment renders the Church present in the world of the poor and the poor present in the Church. It is also an invitation to grow in charity and in intimacy with God.

In the whole world the charities are a place of Mission for women in the Church, a contemporary choice.



The National Council of Teams of St. Vincent IAC (France) on pilgrimage in the birthplace of Saint Vincent de Paul



The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul

*An international
movement born
in France*

It was in 1833 that Frederic Ozanam and his five companions - Paul Lamache, Félix Clavé, Auguste Le Taillandier, Jules Devaux and François Lallier, all students, founded the first Confraternity of Charity with the help of Emmanuel Bailly, anxious to gather together and form young students in 19th century Paris. In February 1835 the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul came into being. Guided in their first attempts to serve the poor by Sister Rosalie Rendu, the small group of friends whose number had increased, decided, to split up into several groups in order to make a new start and organize their activities in different parts of the town (mustn't we die to ourselves to be born again?).

Rapid spreading

When the students returned to their respective regions, the Confraternity teams were to spread all over France and rapidly into other countries: Rome in 1842, then in Belgium, Scotland, Ireland, England, Germany, and in 1845 in the United States and Mexico. More than 400 Confraternities could be counted in 1847, about 3,500 in 1860, and some 8,000 in 1913, the centenary year. Today the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul consists of nearly 90,000 members spread out in 46,000 confraternities in 130 countries of the five continents.

Always on the alert

Whatever the primary cause of suffering, sooner or later it can plunge its victim into total anguish. One must act quickly, because complete uncertainty about the future strikes a person more deeply than the pennilessness of the day. In order to be on permanent alert and to bring to light cases of distress the members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul create a network of friendships, activities and sources of information in each country in which they are present. They do this with their own means.

Service through sharing

The aim is to come to people's aid in order to enable them to reduce and even master their own suffering themselves. Encounters with others can become a heart-to-heart, friendly relationship: beyond the sharing of one's possessions - an elementary form of solidarity - lies the sharing of an existence which is to be attained, the gift of oneself.

Charity in closeness helps one look upon humanity as an icon of Christ when it is humiliated, fragile, or handicapped.

A meeting with a confrere of Saint Vincent de Paul becomes evangelical when the two partners in service respond to the call of the Lord, reveal it to one another and end up recognizing each other as the actors in an mediation which is God's work.



**SISTER
ROSALIE RENDU**

Born in an old family of the region of Gex, Rosalie Rendu lost her father in childhood and lived through the Revolution watching her family hide the bishop of her diocese in secrecy. She entered the Daughters of Charity at the age of 16, thanks to the counsel of Jacques Emery, Superior General of Saint Sulpice, and her godfather. Stationed in Paris, Sister Rosalie served the poor "her masters" for fifty years and opened a school, a soup-kitchen, an orphanage, a rest home, and an infirmary for them. She lived through wars, revolutions and epidemics.

She is known in social history by the name of "Apostle of the Mouffetard neighborhood." Napoleon III was to congratulate her in person on March 18th 1854. She died on February 7, 1856. Her tomb in the Montparnasse cemetery in Paris is always covered with flowers.

FREDERIC OZANAM

Frederic Ozanam was born in 1813 in Milan in a family originally from Lyon. While still very young he came to Paris for higher study. He placed first in the state examinations and chose a teaching career as professor of foreign literature at the Sorbonne, intending to reconcile learning and morality.

At the age of 20 he longed to affirm his faith in other ways than with the spoken and written word. With a few friends he decided to put his faith into practice with the underprivileged. These young people made the acquaintance of Sister Rosalie Rendu, who led them to visit the poor of the Mouffetard neighborhood. What took precedence for them was personal relationships, the will to break the cycle of solitude and isolation, the weaving of human bonds. This project, under the patronage of Saint Vincent, gave rise to the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

Married to Amélie Soulacroix in 1841 he became the happy father of a daughter Mary in 1845. Frederic became a fervent and courageous defender of religion, truth and justice as much in University circles as in his writings, siding with the poor, the weak and the oppressed. His electoral program in 1848 was a witness to his generous political intuition and his audacious social commitment.

He died prematurely in 1853 at the age of 40, leaving behind as his heritage the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, his battle for lay apostolates, and the ideas which inspired the fundamental encyclical of social catholicism "Rerum novarum" (Leo XIII, 1891).

The radiance of his international influence, characterized by his youth and charity, led to the introduction of the cause for his beatification in 1925.

Pope John Paul II proclaimed him venerable on July 6, 1993.



A team service

It is in the Confraternities that one can draw on the wealth of friendship, the support of others' skills, the courage which strengthens one's action. These teams mostly bring together about fifteen members and meet regularly, most often twice a month.

The quality of service towards others depends on the quality of life in the heart of these little fraternities. The real capacity to listen to the person before us, whose often complex situation is a challenge to us, depends on the capacity to reflect together despite the diversity of talents and temperaments. These Confraternities aim to be, simultaneously, oratories and laboratories of charity.

Service: how?

The different sectors of activity and modes of action are very varied and adapted to each of the countries in question: from the encounter of underprivileged persons where they live, to their welcome in specialized centers or 'open houses.'

But in every case one main idea is predominant: the search for individual contact and interpersonal relationship. It is there that one discovers the other, there that lies a durable relationship. This relationship will lead to the mutual trust necessary for every realistic and reliable solution and help to rediscover the human independence and dignity temporarily lost.

It is local realities and the needs they provoke, along with the charism and abilities of the volunteers that determine the varieties of activity of the Confraternities of Saint Vincent de Paul.

From one country to another different experiences are exchanged, new talents and means are discovered. This is how different Confraternities in the world are twinned. Across the continents the confreres of Saint Vincent de Paul learn to discover how one loves, shares and serves the poor on the other side of the globe, often in different ways but with the same goal. This is how projects for development are built up.

Fraternal and human accompaniment come first and occur on a long term basis both in these international relationships on the Confraternity scale and from

country to country on an individual scale. This enables the mutual enriching of partners. When situations require technical and material assistance, this is as far as possible limited in terms of time. It is conceived to be the logical extension of a new friendship, and the indispensable spring board so that the partner can make a new start and regain the independence and autonomy of which he is capable.



Young Vincentians walking in the forest near Buglose

The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul wants to be and must be a force of “proposal” and “mediation” thus responding to Frederic Ozanam’s insight: “The social question serves as a substitute for political questions, in the struggle against poverty and wealth, the struggle between the egoism that wants to snatch from others and the egoism that wants to keep everything for itself. And the clash between these two forms of egoism will be terrible unless charity intervenes and is a mediator, unless the Christians take control with all the power of love over the poor who have strength in numbers and the rich who have the power of wealth.”



“Help us to do without help”

In the diocese of Porto Novo in Benin the motto of the Confraternities of Saint Vincent de Paul is “help us to do without help.” Many Confraternities in the more well-off countries have understood the message and act in this direction:

Six projects for two acre collective farming have been financed.

The building of a corn crusher and the training of the miller are being organized, along with a fish-farming project on the edge of lake Nokoué.

The purchase of a motor-cultivator will enable a local Confraternity to rent out its services to landowners who have no machinery; this project also has the advantage of making the training of two mechanics possible.

In the valley of the Oueme, the villages on the lake are cut off from the world in the flood season; the dugout canoe acquired thanks to the aid of confreres from other countries is now used as an ambulance for the sick, and as a truck for going to sell their wares (pottery, food products) in town which is now only a few minutes away instead of taking several hours by foot!



In the Lebanon, the Frederic Ozanam Center

The Frederic Ozanam de Bourj Hammoud socio-educational center is an ambitious project.

The classical primary school and professional training-center take in young people with modest resources. In addition to its educational mission this center is intended to be a witness to peace in this country so painfully affected by the violence of war.

A home for social animation is intended especially for women who were transferred to Beirut in war-time. In the sewing workshop they have the opportunity to meet people, make friends with other women and also earn a few pennies for their daily needs by selling their craftwork.

After participating in the building of this complex, the Confraternities of Saint Vincent de Paul throughout the world support and encourage this project today by sponsoring the pupils of the center and helping with the distribution of the craftwork made there.

“We must hurry to the aid of those in spiritual need as we hurry to put out a fire”

Vincent de Paul



**Blessed
Pierre-Georges
Frassatti**
(1901-1925)

He never built a hospital, school or other social assistance institution, but he is indeed of our time. In the shadow of Frederic Ozanam, he is yet another witness of charity.

He committed himself in the Confraternities of Saint Vincent de Paul, to leading a daily, concrete life of service of his neighbor always linked to justice.

Despite his young age, he gave his life generously in the service of others. John Paul II called him the “worker of charity” when beatifying him.

*Saint Vincent de Paul,
apostle and witness of the charity of
Christ, give us the grace of loving God
through the work of our hands and the
sweat of our brow.*

*Help us to abandon ourselves to his
Providence,
faithfully discovering his action in all the
events of our lives.*

*Sustain us in our desire to discern and
accomplish the will of God.*

*Obtain for us a tender heart filled with
compassion for the distress and suffering
of others, especially the most helpless in
this world.*

*Accompany us in our service towards
mankind and intercede for us before the
Son of God so that in our work, our
families, our neighborhoods, our parishes
and our communities we become
impassioned by his Gospel of love.*

Amen

Prayer



*Chapel of the Miraculous Medal
140, rue du Bac, Paris*

Marian Youth Movement

The founding ideal of the Marian Youth Movement springs from a twofold call:

Touching primarily the young who are far from the Church, those who are in difficult or unusual situations.

Taking Mary as fellow-traveller to enter into the Gospel and live it.



Spain

The origin of the movement

It is Catherine Laboure who is at the origin of the Marian Youth Movement for the young “picked out of the ranks of the people” who hung around convent workrooms. In the 19th Century a Marian movement for the young of a ‘certain class’ already existed.

The Virgin Mary spoke to Catherine Laboure during her apparitions in the rue du Bac in 1830 and through her reminded the Church of the urgency of touching the young who are in difficult situations and who nobody is looking after. Indeed the hard conditions of 19th century life enormously affected the children and the young of the working classes.

This new movement in the Church, recognized by Pope Pius IX's decree of June 20, 1847, went out to these young people and enabled them to come together, share their life and receive a human and Christian formation so that they could in turn have an influence in their own spheres of life.

Goals of the movement

The spirit of the movement is inspired by the Gospel and most especially by the Magnificat.

The Marian Youth Movement, linked to Catherine Laboure's spiritual experience with Mary, insists on the following three points:

A way of living together: acknowledging each person's dignity and discovering the grandeur of the littlest ones.

A way of looking at things: being attentive to life and learning to see beyond appearances and recognize the presence of God and hear his call.

A way of acting: acting with others in a spirit of service in which each person is acknowledged and becomes an actor in the building of a fraternal world.

The movement thus takes responsibility for the education of the person, the education of relationships with others, especially those in difficulty, the education of faith in the Church. Service is a privileged form of evangelization.

The dynamics of the movement can be summarized in three words: “Living - Contemplating - Serving” and animates the young in numerous countries.

Guadeloupe



In India

Bodopota is surrounded by dense forests and large mountains, with few means of communication. Most of the inhabitants, including the young, are illiterate. The Marian Youth Movement has grown up in 14 villages, gathering 250 members. Despite their illiteracy, each group holds monthly meetings, and plans activities. The catechists help them. Every other month the sisters come to take part in the meeting, having traveled several kilometres through the forest and the mountains.

The young of the movement get together to help those most in need: carrying the sick on stretchers when they cannot get to the dispensary, helping the poor. They gather funds for their projects by signing on to work in the fields or clear the forest. The earnings are then pooled. In this way Christian values are developed in them, and the sense of unity in the realization of a project.

Seminars and camps bring the young together on a diocesan and national level: it is the place for a deepening of faith. All these young people are filled with enthusiasm despite their poverty and hard lives. The Marian Youth Movement has helped them discover the riches of their Christian life which is open to others; their joy and dynamism are stimulating for everyone.



Japan

In Colombia

The movement grows daily in Columbia. Thanks to the human and Christian formation they receive, the young people discover the need for intensifying prayer and living the sacrament of reconciliation and the Eucharist in order to confront the challenges of today's world. They become more and more conscious of the importance of apostolic commitment to the poor and the evangelization of the young among themselves. Many of them participate in the popular missions at the high points of the liturgical year.



Slovakia



Lebanon



In France

A mother tells how her children put her back on her feet "I am a widow, I have six children, the last of which will soon be three. My husband decided to commit suicide: he was unemployed and couldn't stand it. It was already hard before his death, but now it's worse. On the death of my husband, who was a believer, I was angry with God. "Don't talk to me about your Good Lord," I said to the leader of the Youth Movement who was in charge of my kids: "There's no question of them coming to you any more."

One evening I found my kids in prayer in their room before their statue of the Blessed Virgin! I stayed motionless, watching and listening to them without them noticing. It gave me quite a turn. They were saying to Mary: "Daddy is with you, he was always helping others; he didn't know how to say 'no' to a neighbor who asked him for something. Tell him that we want to stay in the Youth Movement. Mommy doesn't want us to; in our hearts we have promised to be in the movement, but we can't. We want to be faithful to our promise. Daddy must arrange things with you so that Mommy will understand and say 'yes.'"

I was glued to the spot. I don't know what prayer is, but I was there, fascinated by my kids. I had heard their words. The next day I said to my children "I've been thinking, I am going to call and say that you can carry on going to the Youth Movement." They hugged me and went back to their room. I found them in front of their little Virgin saying: "Tell Daddy it's fine, we can go...." That's all I heard at the time...

Now I say to myself. 'There must be a Good Lord in the heart of those who know how to listen to poor people without judging. We, the little ones, the people without a position, we are important to people who are capable of making our children into kids like all the others, capable of keeping their promise.'

If that's their Youth Movement, I say: go on, and tell everyone that we, too, the poor, need to find love and be thought highly of. The poor also have riches in their hearts. And I have told my kids: "Bring other young people to the Youth Movement, that will help them to cope and not to despair."

France



*Like the sap in an old tree,
the Vincentian spirit today nourishes
multiple branches in the world.*



Ancient eight-hundred year-old tree in front of Vincent's birth-place

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“If we are really called to carry the love of God far and wide, if we are to enflame the nations with this fire, if we have the vocation of setting the whole world on fire, if it is so, I say, if it is so, my brothers, then how much I must myself burn with the divine fire!”

Vincent Desaul

