



The Earliest Biographies of Saint Vincent De Paul [1]

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Abstract

This paper is three lesser-known biographical works on Saint Vincent de Paul written between the foundational biography by Louis Abelly (1664) and the more widely known work by Pierre Collet (1748). These early texts were closely tied to the saint's beatification and canonization processes and reflect the growing devotion to Vincent during the 18th century. The first is an official summary published by the Holy See in 1709, offering a structured account of Vincent's life, virtues, and miracles based on witness testimony. The second is Bernardo della Torre's *Ristretto cronologico* (1729), a chronologically arranged life of Vincent, notable for including details not found in Abelly's work. The third, by Gilbert Noiret, also from 1729, closely follows Della Torre's format. A Latin compendium published in 1737 by the Sacred Congregation of Rites concludes the collection. These texts provide valuable insight into the evolving image of Vincent and the foundations of the "Vincentian legend."

Cette étude examine trois ouvrages biographiques peu connus sur saint Vincent de Paul, écrits entre la biographie fondatrice de Louis Abelly (1664) et l'ouvrage plus connu de Pierre Collet (1748). Ces textes anciens étaient étroitement liés aux processus de béatification et de canonisation du saint et reflètent la dévotion croissante pour Vincent au cours du XVIII^e siècle. Le premier est un résumé officiel publié par le Saint-Siège en 1709, qui offre un récit structuré de la vie, des vertus et des miracles de Vincent, basé sur des témoignages. Le deuxième est le *Ristretto cronologico* (1729) de Bernardo della Torre, une vie de Vincent classée par ordre chronologique, qui se distingue par des détails qui ne figurent pas dans l'ouvrage d'Abelly. Le troisième, également daté de 1729, est l'œuvre de Gilbert Noiret et suit de près le format de Della Torre. Un compendium en latin publié en 1737 par la Sacrée Congrégation des Rites complète la collection. Ces textes fournissent des informations précieuses sur l'évolution de l'image de Vincent et les fondements de la « légende vincentienne ».

Este estudio examina tres obras biográficas menos conocidas sobre San Vicente de Paúl, escritas entre la biografía fundacional de Louis Abelly (1664) y la obra más conocida de Pierre Collet (1748). Estos primeros textos estaban estrechamente vinculados a los procesos de beatificación y canonización del santo y reflejan la creciente devoción por Vicente durante el siglo XVIII. El primero es un resumen oficial publicado por la Santa Sede en 1709, que ofrece un relato estructurado de la vida, las virtudes y los milagros de Vicente basado en testimonios. El segundo es el *Ristretto cronologico* (1729) de Bernardo della Torre, una vida de Vicente ordenada cronológicamente, que destaca por incluir detalles que no se encuentran en la obra de Abelly. El tercero, de Gilbert Noiret, también de 1729, sigue de cerca el formato de Della Torre. Un compendio en latín publicado en 1737 por la Sagrada Congregación de Ritos concluye la colección. Estos textos proporcionan una valiosa perspectiva sobre la evolución de la imagen de Vicente y los fundamentos de la «leyenda vicenciana».



Keywords: Vincent de Paul, Biography, *Ristretto cronologico*, Latin compendium.

Introduction

Anyone who studies the biographies of Vincent de Paul will find in first place the work of Louis Abelly (1604-1691), the author of the most important and earliest biography of the saint. The author's subject knew Abelly and worked with him. From here, students will generally turn to the work of Pierre Collet (1693-1770), who was born after the death of the holy founder. In between those two are other small works, either completely or partially unknown. The purpose of this study is to examine three of those works in the hope of shedding a new light on the development of Vincent's earliest biographies.

These small works focus on the beatification and/or canonization of Vincent de Paul, and their importance comes from their early publication located between Abelly (published in 1664), and Collet (published in 1748), eighty-four years later. These biographies show us how interest in the future saint was growing, especially in view of the official process of his beatification. They were not the earliest biographical works, however, since the Holy See published reports on the individual stages of the process beginning in 1704 and printed in 1709. That summary appears here as (I). It opens with a brief biographical presentation of the life of the saint in twelve pages, summarizing the results of the initial official process. It is summarized below following the headings of forty-five paragraphs. Comparison with Abelly, Collet, and later works shows the interest in the details of the witnesses, arranged by actions, virtues, and miracles.¹

Following that first work is a second one (II), attributed to Bernardo della Torre, C.M., (1706-1749).² He wrote *Ristretto cronologico della vita virtù e miracoli del Beato Vincenzo de Paoli fondatore della Congregazione della Missione e delle serve de' poveri, dette le Figlie della Carità* [Chronological listing of the life, virtues, and miracles of Blessed Vincent de Paul, founder of the Congregation of the Mission and the Servants of the Poor, called Daughters of Charity]. His purpose was to commemorate his beatification (1729) and hence it appeared prior to his canonization (1737). Although this was not an official biography such as Abelly's, the Congregation of the Mission distributed souvenir copies to various participants.

Della Torre's main sources were Abelly's biography and the various materials published by the Holy See presenting the records of the official process of beatification. This work fills 158 numbered pages, and Della Torre published it anonymously, in keeping with the Vincentian tradition of modesty. As the title reveals, it was arranged chronologically. This would be the same system used a few years later by Collet, the second major biography of Vincent de Paul. Both authors acknowledged that it was difficult to present the life and works of the founder while limiting themselves to a strict

¹ Sacra Rituum Congregatione. Eminintiss. et Reverendiss. D. Card. de la Tremoille, Parisien. Beatificationis, et Canonizationis Ven. Servi Dei Vincentij de Paulis, Congregationis Missionis, et Puellarum Charitatis Fundator. *Positio Super Introductione Causae*, Rome, 1709, "Vita Ven. Servi Dei. Index," pp. 1-12.

² [Edouard Rousset,] *Notices bibliographiques sur les écrivains de la Congrégation de la Mission*. Angoulême, 1878, p. 226.

year-by-year arrangement as Della Torre had done. Abelly, by contrast, had presented the saint's life in chronological order in book one, and then—in keeping with the requirements of the Holy See—he presented Vincent's works (book two) and then his virtues (book three). The page numbers are given in square brackets. The first three, [a], [b], [c], indicate materials appearing in a second edition, also published in 1729. The remaining numbers in square brackets indicate the pages of the original work.

The interest in Della Torre's *Chronological Listing* comes from materials that had not found their way into Abelly's classic work. Della Torre mined the materials published by the Holy See that reported the testimonies of witnesses and the conclusions of the officials charged by the Sacred Congregation of Rites with gathering and arranging the materials. In addition, he included some details that have not stood the test of deeper investigation, but which have formed part of the "Vincent Legend." This expression describes the set of historically unproven assertions that still cling to the person of Vincent de Paul. Della Torre also linked together certain events in his narrative that were not joined in reality.

His summary of the four miracles approved for Vincent's beatification are important, inasmuch as they do not readily appear elsewhere with the same details.

The next work here is attributed to Gilbert Noiret, C.M. (1681-1746), an assistant to the Vincentian superior general in Paris. He published it in French: *Abrégé de la vie et des vertus du bienheureux Vincent de Paul, instituteur de la Congrégation de la Mission et des Filles de la Charité* [Summary of the life and virtues of the Blessed Vincent de Paul, founder of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity], Paris, 1729. Like Della Torre's work, this was also published to commemorate Vincent's beatification that year, and it largely followed Della Torre's work.³ For this reason, it has not been translated here.

A third work (III) is a short Latin edition, published by the Sacred Congregation of Rites: *Compendium Vitae, Virtutum, et Miraculorum necnon actorum in causa Canonizationis B. Vincentii a Paulo, Fundatoris Congregationis Missionis, et Societatis Puellarum de Charitate, utriusque Primi Superioris Generalis* [A Compendium of the Life, Virtues, Miracles, and the decisions for the Canonization of Blessed Vincent de Paul, Founder of the Congregation of the Mission and the Company of the Daughters of Charity, and the first superior general of both communities], Rome, 1737, 26 numbered pages. This work summarizes Vincent's life, virtues and miracles, as well as the general records of the process of his beatification. Because of its rarity, its Latin text has been translated here.

³ [Rousset,] pp. 193-194. The anonymous author, Rousset, also cites another edition, dated Paris, 1729, 235 pages. A third edition, Paris, 1733, 98 pages, was noted as "revised, corrected, and enlarged." A "new edition, considerably enlarged" was printed in French, in Rome, 1769, 236 pages.

(I)
The Life of the Venerable Servant of God

1. In his life, the Servant of God was unable to avoid the applause of men; and on his death, everyone proclaimed him a saint.
2. Moved by miracles and the fame of his virtues, the Most Eminent Archbishop of Paris was moved to draw up the Informative Process. The doubts were listed that are needed for the decision of this present work.
3. The Servant of God was born on 24 April 1567. – And when his boyhood ended, he pastured pigs, and was initiated to Orders as an adolescent.
4. To spend his time for further thinking about God, he left his homeland and his parents. He was taught theology in Zaragoza, and was ordained a priest.
5. While returning to Toulouse, he was taken captive among the unbelievers. – How he brought back to the bosom of the Church one who had abandoned the Catholic faith. – He went to Rome with the Prolegate of the Apostolic See.
6. At the same time, he was appointed by the king to a wealthy abbey, and he was chosen by the queen as royal almoner. – But he decided against both of these, and he undertook the care of souls.
7. He gave up the care of souls, and with the advice of his spiritual director, he undertook works of the Gondi family, by teaching their three sons.

The beginning and foundation of the Congregation of the Mission.

8. Following the conversion of a farmer who, for reasons of shame, had held back some sins in previous confessions, the charity of the Servant of God was kindled toward similar kinds of persons.
9. From this small beginning, Divine Providence lifted up in the Church the Congregation of the Mission. – The retreats of the Congregation of the Mission.
10. The Servant of God's first sermon of the mission, and its huge result, which fell on the first of the conversion of Saint Paul.
11. When several companions joined him, the Servant of God laid the first foundations of his Congregation.
12. The Congregation was confirmed by Urban VIII of happy memory. – In papal documents, the marvelous results which flowed from this pious institution are reported.

The quality of the founder of the Congregation of the Mission, of the Daughters of Charity, and other pious institutions.

13. The quality of the founder was important for the Holy See to lead to his beatification and canonization. – The quality in the Servant of God as the founder of the Mission.
14. It is proven that the Servant of God founded the institution of the Daughters of Charity. – The excellence of this institution testified by witnesses. – Likewise, through the letters of several bishops sent to our Most Holy Lord [the pope].
15. The Servant of God is the founder of the confraternity called after the noble ladies of charity.
16. The Servant of God is the founder of the hospital established for abandoned children.

17. The Servant of God is the founder of houses established in Paris for the elderly and infirm. – Also, he is the founder of another house destined for the galley [convicts]. – Reports of other foundations.

The heroicity of all the virtues of our Venerable Servant of God

18. The present doubt did not require a discussion of individual virtues.
19. The Servant of God as the leader of both men and women who work for perfection caused him to be held as a Saint.
20. The actions of the Servant of God are reported as flourishing in him as all the virtues.
21. In matters of Faith, he was most zealous against innovators, and he gave blind obedience to the Apostolic See. – His noteworthy love of God. – From the preaching of the Servant of God, the hearts of the faithful were drawn to love God. – The apostolic fortitude of the Servant of God. – The prudence, evangelical poverty and notable humility of the Servant of God.

The happy death of the Servant of God

22. The Servant of God lived a most holy life, and his most holy death is also presented.

The fame of holiness during his life

23. The aroma of the virtues of the Servant of God spread throughout the world.
24. As they did among the people, who called him Blessed Father Vincent.
25. As they did among bishops and archbishops.
26. As they did among the noble women of the kingdom, and the first men [of the kingdom].
27. As they did with the king and queen of France.
28. As they did with the Supreme Pontiff and the cardinals.
29. As they did with Saint Francis de Sales and the highly regarded Mme. de Chantal.

*The crowds at the funeral of the Servant of God,
and his reputation after his death*

30. Princes, noblemen and women, and all the clergy of Paris, including the apostolic nuncio attended the funeral of the Servant of God. – Buttons were moved from the body of the Servant of God, along with clothing and hair.
31. The clergy of Paris celebrated the Venerable Servant of God with a servant by the bishop of York.
32. The increase of his reputation for holiness grew among the king and the princes. – At the tomb of servant of God the leading men and those adorned with episcopal dignity bent their knees in veneration. – The faithful commended themselves to the intercession of the Servant of God by novenas of fasting.

His reputation for miracles

33. The will of God for the beatification of saints shows itself through miracles.
34. Various predictions by the Servant of God.

35. Two of his apparitions.
36. The miracle of the aroma coming from the heart of the Servant of God.
37. Healing of cancerous tumor.
38. Healing of hemorrhage.
39. Healing of a tumor in legs.
40. Healing of a vicious disease in the shins.
41. A similar healing in the shins with ulcers.
42. Healing from a wound badly carried out with bloodletting.
43. Healing from deafness.
44. Reports of other miracles.
45. It is shown that nothing was lacking to obtain the signature of the Commission in the Roman Ceremonial under Leo X, following the authority of Hostiensis.

Signed: Dominicus Maria Vaccarius

Reviewed: Ioannes Zuccherinius, coadjutor abbot of Andreas Pieri,
subpromoter of the Faith.

(II)

**A CHRONOLOGICAL LISTING
OF THE LIFE, VIRTUES, AND MIRACLES
OF BLESSED
VINCENT DE PAUL
FOUNDER
of the Congregation of the Mission,
and of the Servants of the Poor, called the
Daughters of Charity**

**Dedicated to His Holiness of Our Lord,
Pope
BENEDICT XIII.**

Rome, MDCCXXIX

[Published] by Antonio de' Rossi, on Strada del Seminario Romano,
near the Rotonda.

With the Permission of Superiors.

[a]

INTRODUCTION
[from a second edition, 1729]

Most Holy Father,

The servant of God, VINCENT DE PAUL, is presented before the throne of Your Holiness in this small volume, no longer with the title of Venerable but Blessed [b] as a new star placed by your pontifical hand in the firmament of the Church to shine there with new light. As his name [Vincent] was the same as that used by Your Holiness before rising to the See of Peter, it will thus still give contentment to Your Beatitude to see again in this historical introduction to the life of VINCENT the conformity of his zeal for clerical discipline and his most tender charity to the poor, with those similar virtues which, among others, so highly shine in Your Holiness. May you now, after beatifying the founder, deign to raise your Holy hand to bless [c] his disciples, both men and women, so that, being watchful in following the footsteps of their common founder, they may enter into that blessed reward which he himself, while still alive on this earth promised to those who faithfully keep the rules prescribed for them. They come with bended knee to kiss your holy feet, and humbly ask your blessing.

IMPRIMATUR

This will be seen by the Most Reverend Master of the Sacred Apostolic Palace.
Nunzio Baccari, bishop of Boiano, Vicegerent of Rome.

Obedying the orders of the Most Reverend Father, Fr. John Benedict Zuanelli, O.P., master of the Sacred Apostolic Palace, I reviewed the book entitled *A CHRONOLOGICAL LISTING OF THE LIFE, VIRTUES, AND MIRACLES OF BLESSED VINCENT DE PAUL FOUNDER of the Congregation of the Mission, etc.*, and I judge it worthy of publication. It should promote the sanctification of the faithful and it should greatly inflame with the zeal the Apostolic Ministers, so that unblemished, as the Servant of God was adorned with virtues of every kind, his heroic deeds and salutary advice might be read by all.

Dated Rome, in the house of the monastery of Saint Sylvester on the Quirinal, 7 August 1729.

Fr. Cajetan Maria Merati, Consultor of the Congregation of Sacred Rites.

APPROBATION

By order of the Most Reverend Fr. John Benedict Zuanelli, teacher of the Sacred Apostolic Palace, with my special pleasure, I went through the book entitled:

A CHRONOLOGICAL LISTING OF THE LIFE, VIRTUES, AND MIRACLES OF BLESSED VINCENT DE PAUL FOUNDER of the Congregation of the Mission, and of the Servants of the Poor, called the Daughters of Charity. I found nothing in it contrary to the Catholic Faith or to good morals. Also, I found nothing which did not correspond to the extraordinary holiness of the Apostolic Founder of the Congregation of the Mission. For this reason I believe it is worthy for his deeds to be looked at in a new light as heroic, at the summit of the virtues as regarding the Christian Faithful; by praising God in his Saints, they should have something to imitate, especially through the decreed solemn Beatification, to be raised on the candelabrum, and inscribed in the register of the Blessed, so that they may examine the merits of Vincent and request his common wishes.

From the monastery of St. Bernard in the City, 7 August 1729.

Fr. John Baptiste Florentini,
Consultor of the Sacred Congregations of the Index and Rites, etc.

IMPRIMATUR.

Fr. Joseph Benedict Zuanelli, O.P.

Master of the Sacred Palace

**A CHRONOLOGICAL LISTING
OF THE LIFE, VIRTUES, AND MIRACLES
OF BLESSED
VINCENT DE PAUL
FOUNDER
of the Congregation of the Mission,
and of the Servants of the Poor, called the
Daughters of Charity.**

1576

In the year of our Salvation, 1576, on 24 April, a Tuesday, B. VINCENT DE PAUL was born in the village of Ranquines, the parish of Pouy, of the diocese of Dax, under the metropolitan diocese of Auch. His parents were Guillaume de Paul, and Bertrande de Moras, enriched through the innocence of their habits, but poor in the goods of this world. Meanwhile, with the fruits of a small farm, cultivated [2] with their own hands and the help of their children they supported a proper life.

In the district of the said parish, there was found a famous chapel, already dedicated to the Virgin Mary, called Buglose. It became even more famous by a fortunate discovery that took place in 1721 [1621], that is, a miraculous statue of the Most Blessed Virgin, hidden by the piety of the faithful in a nearby marsh at the time when the Calvinists were furiously attacking sacred images. This venerable shrine is today managed by the priests of the Congregation of the Mission for the spiritual aid of the pilgrims who come there from various areas in France and Spain, and who are then brought to also visit the family home of the Blessed Servant of God, now changed into a chapel, and highly venerated by the surrounding people.

The said Guillaume and Bertrande gave birth to six children, two girls, Marie and Claudine, and four boys: Jean, Bernard, our Vincent, and Dominic. While Vincent was a child, he helped guard the [3] little flock he derived his most tender compassion that he then showed toward the poor. From his earliest years, he shared his bread with them, his clothing, his grain that he brought from the mill. Above all, he caused amazement with the generous alms of a half scudo that he gradually gathered through effort and industry; he then gave all of it to a beggar, without keeping the smallest part of this boyhood treasure. But such an act of excellent charity was accepted in heaven, and he could clearly gather from this singular choice what God does for his Servant for the great relief of suffering people.

1586

When Guillaume de Paul observed the beautiful character and good intelligence of Vincent, he preferred him to his other sons by providing for his education. He sent him to the city of Dax, placing him in the convent of the Franciscan Friars, where other young boys were housed to become educated in piety and studies. The application of Vincent to humane letters was such that in the space of four years, he became quite capable of being able to [4] teach two sons of an illustrious attorney, who introduced him into his household for that purpose. No less than the entire family was affected by Vincent's rare modesty, singular piety and mature prudence. At the same time, he was able to apply

himself to rhetoric and philosophy in the local school. Then he went to Spain, coming to Zaragoza, the capital city of the kingdom of Aragon, where it is said that he continued his studies and graduated with a degree.

1596-1600

But because the professors of that celebrated university were at that time in major disagreement about controversial details which were arising at the time and whose great altercations about opinions greatly displeased the meek Servant of God and were not separated from the disturbance of spirits, he returned to France. Nonetheless, he always maintained at that time and then afterwards his great veneration for those noteworthy theologians. So, at the end of 1596, on the feast day of the Ember Days, which was on 24 December, with the required dimissorial letters he received the clerical tonsure and was also promoted to minor [5] orders by the bishop of Tarbes in the collegiate church of Bidachen [Bidache] near Bayonne. He then went to Toulouse, and applied himself fervently to the study of theology under the famous professors of that famous university, without, however, separating the fervor of study from the fervor of devotion. Thus, to join himself more completely to God, and more strictly oblige himself to His service, he received in 1598 the first two Holy Orders, Subdiaconate, on 19 September, and Diaconate, on the following 19 December in the cathedral church of Tarbes. He had new dimissorial letters from Bishop Jean-Jacques de Sault, bishop of Dax, who then gave him in full form on 13 September 1599 the dimissorial for priesthood. However, the humble Servant of God did not want to ascend at that time. He was ordained only in the following Holy Year of 1600, on 23 September, by Bishop Francois de Bordeils [Bourdeilles], bishop of Perigueux, in the hamlet of Saint Julien of that diocese.

When and where the new priest then celebrated his first Mass has not come to our knowledge, but it is known [6] that he was very much hidden in his treasury of heavenly favors. We know that, because of his very vivid appreciation of the Most Holy Ministry, he chose a very remote place where he wanted only one assistant priest and a fervent cleric.

1601

He was not long raised to the priesthood that the reputation of his piety and teaching spread. In 1601, he was named, although absent, to the rich benefice of Tilhy [Tilh], in the district of the city of Dax. But his possession of it was challenged, and he did not want to enter into a lawsuit unpleasant to the Servant of the Lord, since he believed himself unable to support such a heavy burden as the care of souls. For this reason, he freely renounced it and continued to pursue his theological studies. But, so as not to burden his poor mother, then for two years a widow, he moved about the time of the usual vacations to Buzet, a noble chateau of the same diocese of Toulouse, on the banks of the Tarn, where he dedicated himself to teaching primary education to the young boys nearby and provide for his own support. [7]

1604

Attracted by the good aroma of such piety and sound teaching that came from the Servant of God, the nobles of Toulouse sent their young boys to the chateau, so that, under his discipline they might correctly learn the Christian life. But the prudent priest,

with the agreement of their relatives brought the students to Toulouse. There he was both teacher and student simultaneously, while he waited to cultivate others, he did not abandon his pursuit of his theological studies. And, so as not to shortchange any moment that was due it, or to the education of his students, or to his own advancement in studies, or to the exercise of piety, he stole a great part of his sleep, grew in self-denial, and dispensed with rest and recreation. In this way, in virtue of tireless effort, on 12 October 1604, he finally completed his seven-year course with public approval in that university, and a few days later, he received the bachelor's degree, and then the permission to teach publicly in that famous university the Master of the Sentences [Peter Lombard].

Thanks to these public testimonials of Vincent's studies discovered after his [8] death, there were many other proofs of his teaching which he often could not hide, even if he wished to, during the course of his life. It was clearly evident in the face of many lies and daring that the Jansenist innovators had wished to pass him off as a devout ignoramus. They interpreted his profound humility as a lack of knowledge. He also downplayed his own reputation, publicly calling himself a simple grammar-school student. But the judgment was quite different by those wise discerners of the truth. Among them was the Most Serene Prince de Condé, who did not hesitate to assert that he did not find in those years in France another priest to compare with Vincent, with his great teaching linked to an elevated piety and prudence. The very educated President de Lamoignon asserted the same, and so, finally, did the bishops of France who knew the Servant of God. They agreed in declaring that in the humble Vincent both his religious faith and knowledge were almost equally admirable.

1605

After Vincent had taught theology publicly [9] for some time in the famous university of Toulouse, he was summoned in 1605 to Bordeaux, but it is not known what exactly his business was. Perhaps he was to exercise his teaching there in place of another professor, or perhaps he was to consider accepting a diocese to which Henry IV was thinking of appointing him, following the suggestion of François de Valette, duke of Epernon and governor of Languedoc. Two grandnephews of Jean de Valette, the grand master of the Order of Jerusalem [of Malta], had been students of Vincent. When he became aware of this affair, he returned to Toulouse, where he discovered that a devout person had left him a small inheritance. This is a clear argument of the good opinion that people had of him. To collect his part of this inheritance, he was forced to go to the territory of Albi in the diocese of Castres, and then to Marseilles. There, through a friendly arrangement he received nine hundred livres tournois, boarded a ship to return to Toulouse, which was supposed on that same day to land in [10] Narbonne. But his time had come in which God wished to test his servant.

The ship was therefore sailing through a gulf of the Sea, called Lyon, when a wild storm blew up, and it was attacked by Moorish pirates. They slashed the captain into pieces, killed some others, and wounded almost everyone, among whom was our Vincent. They became the masters of the ship, and the sailors who did not perish in the attack were taken in chains to Tunis, a city not far from the ruins of ancient Carthage. There, they were stripped of their clothes, and Vincent, too, now in chains, was led through the public streets and brought back to the ship. He was at length sold to a fisherman, who quite quickly repented of his purchase of such a slave, since he was quite useless because of seasickness in the exercise of his profession.

The fisherman therefore sold Vincent to an aged Spagyric physician. He cared for him kindly, and in his great patience, he began to treat him with great humanity, but without allowing him [the physician] [11] to convert him to Islam with promises of liberty, wealth, and all the secrets of his very profitable art if he would as a result abandon the Christian faith. But God preserved Vincent from the seducer and granted him courage to conquer him in this very dangerous battle.

1606

When the Spagirite was called to the sultan's court, where he did not arrive since death surprised him en route, he left Vincent to one of his nephews, no less barbarous for religion; he, traditionally, very quickly sold him to a renegade from Nice in Provence, who had him work in the fields in an extremely hot and deserted place.

His renegade owner had three wives. One of them was Muslim by birth and by profession she served as an instrument of God's mercy to free her husband from apostasy and Vincent from slavery. She was quite curious to know about our way of life and often went to see the slave working in the field. She once ordered him to sing praises to his God, and he obeyed her promptly. And while remembering these words of the children of Israel, slaves in Babylon, *Quomodo cantabi-* [12] *mus Canticum Domini in Terra aliena* [How can we sing the sing of the Lord in a foreign land], he began with tears and sobs: *super Flumina Babylonis, etc.* [beside the rivers of Babylon] and then the *Salve Regina*, with other prayers. When the Muslim woman heard them she showed that she was very pleased. That evening she did not fail to tell her husband that he had done a great evil by abandoning his religion, which seemed very good to her, thanks to the exposition made by the slave concerning the greatness of God, and through other praises of Him sung in her presence. She was so pleased that she did not hope to enjoy anything greater in the paradise of her ancestors.

1607

At the strong reproach of his Muslim wife, which was nothing less than Balaam did at the miraculous voice of his donkey, her apostate husband opened his eyes and felt so moved that no later than the next day he said to Vincent that the only thing lacking to flee to France was a way to sail. Ten months then passed, and then only in June 1607 did the two of them board a very fragile skiff and successfully cross the Mediterranean, not without the special help of the Most [13] Holy Virgin, whom Vincent had frequently invoked for protection, and where he placed the firm hope of his liberation.

Thus, on the 28th of the same month of June, the fortunate sailors landed at Aiguemortes at the mouths of the Rhone and in a few days reached Avignon. Vincent presented the converted apostate to Bishop Pietro Montorio, the pontifical vice-legate, who publicly absolved him in the church of St. Peter. When the prelate observed on that occasion the piety, doctrine and prudence of the Servant of God, he wanted him in his household and at his table, and treated him with great courtesy. Since the three years of his vice-legacy were reaching their end, he brought him [Vincent] and the reconciled penitent with him to Rome. There, through a vow, he was obliged to become a religious among the Hospitallers of Saint John of God, commonly called the Fate ben Fratelli [the Do-some-good Brothers].

Vincent then went to Rome and, on entering the holy city, he experienced a devout feeling while walking on ground soaked with the copious blood of martyrs. He also mortified his innocent curiosity [14] to gaze at the ancient magnificence still proud of its past life. He turned instead to venerate the relics of the saints, frequently visiting, not without tears of the most tender devotion, various churches, catacombs, and every other sacred trace of our religion. Moreover, apart from the occasions of satisfying his devotion and other proper necessities, he kept him quite retired in the house of Bishop Montorio to attend to prayer and study.

1608

It cannot be affirmed correctly when exactly he spent time in Rome; but we do not this for certain, that it was toward the end of 1608. He was sent for some business of the highest importance to King Henry IV, not by Cardinal d'Ossat, who died in 1604, but earlier, or by the Supreme Pontiff, by the Duke of Nevers, or by the Ordinary, the marquis de Breve, if it were better not to mention names, but all would have a part in this important duty. In any case, it is certain that Vincent was in France in 1609, kindly received by the king, which could have become for him a broad street to the honors and [15] benefices of the kingdom. However, the humble lover of quiet left the court, to work on his study of canon law and obtain a degree of License in it. Then, with an example imitated by many, he consecrated himself entirely to the service of the sick poor at the nearby new Hospital of St. John of God, called Charity Hospital. In that period, the heroic virtue of our Blessed was tried by a doubly noble event.

At the court of Queen Marguerite [de Valois], already separated from business affairs and from the cares of the world, Vincent was her chaplain and counselor. A renowned doctor, a great theologian and preacher of one of the dioceses of the king, was likewise called to a similar duty as Vincent. The priest fell into idleness since he was separated from his usual occupations, and through idleness he fell into a very grave temptation against the faith, and from that temptation, he fell into a dangerous illness. Both were so forceful that the poor doctor was in the extreme danger of losing his life along with his faith. Every remedy was in vain when Vincent, to whom the sick man was recommended and was moved by his zeal and charity, offered himself as a victim to [16] God. He begged Him, if it pleased Him, that if this brother were freed, He would cause the temptation to fall on him [Vincent]. God accepted the sacrifice, and heard the prayer of his servant. He made great use of the temptation and as a reward for his rare charity received a singular gift of raising up people oppressed by similar tribulations. It might be said that this was the first of the miracles done by Vincent, who, to conquer this obtrusive illness of lack of faith, used a method to give up everything for the service and salvation of the poor, under whose guise the Son of God admitted that he had hidden.

The other event, which in those days gave great testimony of the charity and humility of Vincent, took place in this way. In the same room where was he staying that was a certain stranger, a native of Bordeaux and the judge of Sore. One morning he went out but did not remember to close a cabinet where he had placed 400 scudi in reserve. That same morning, a delivery boy from the pharmacy brought some medicine to Vincent who was a little indisposed. And while looking for a glass in the cabinet, he secretly carried [17] off the money. When the judge returned, he asked Vincent about it, but he had nothing to say. He cursed him, slandered him, and publicly accused him of theft. The

humble innocent did not blame others, but without blaming himself, always kept quiet and bore with the accusations. But God did not keep quiet or with it, since the thief, already guilty of other crimes, was jailed in Bordeaux, condemned to the lash. He admitted the theft of the money to the same judge who had returned to his home. He, in turn, blushing and sorry, begged pardon from the slandered Vincent. He likewise responded with joy at the repentance of his slanderer, and without the least reference to such grave slander he had hidden from the man for love of God.

1610-1611

The servant of God learned from this how dangerous it is for good priests to be living with laity, and he changed his residence. He went to live with M. de Berulle together with other exemplary priests who were living together. It was on 11 November 1611 that Berulle began in France the Congregation of the Oratory [of Jesus]. However, Vincent was never a member, since heaven destined him [18] to found a different one, according to the prediction of the said Father de Berulle, who later became a great Cardinal of the Holy Church. Through him, Vincent accepted in 1612 the parish of Clichy, then a little distant from the town of Saint Denis, near Paris.

1612

Once a pastor, he likewise became a model for his flock, feeding the sheep with the example of his life and his preaching of the Word of God. There, he promoted devotion and the Company of the Most Holy Rosary, restored from its foundations the half-ruined church, and, as a foretaste of future events, he gathered together in the parish the neighboring pastors for conferences on cases of conscience, of sacred rites, and the obligations and virtues of priests.

1613-1614

While Vincent had worked on such matters, by the persuasion and impulse of Father de Berulle, to whose wise direction he had given up everything, he left his parish in Clichy, but that one was better than the neighboring ones which were in a quite different condition, and which he had found them. He then entered the household of Emmanuel de [19] Gondi, general of the galleys of France, to serve as chaplain to him and to Madame Françoise Marguerite de Silly, his wife, a woman of singular virtue. At the same time he served as a teacher and director of their three sons. The first of them became duke and peer of France, the second died young, and the third became a cardinal of the Holy Church and archbishop of Paris.

After this entry into the most excellent household of the Gondis, which had originated in Florence, Divine Providence ordered the great canvas of the glorious successive undertakings of his servant. It was here that the Congregation of the Mission had its beginning, a mine of such abundant good for souls as will be seen in the course of this present work. Hence, we understand the dispositions of God that Vincent would not enjoy in his home territory the canonry legitimately assigned to him, and how he himself turned down the abbey of Saint Leonard de Chaumes in the diocese, originally of Saintes and now of La Rochelle, to which the king named him. Consequently, while he was currently busy in the Gondi household, he never [20] lost sight of devoting himself completely to the aid, the instruction and the salvation of the poor.

1615

It is not easy to report the great work that the servant of God did in that house. He was well organized, very circumspect in everything, modest, retiring, without ambition, daring or intrigue, but only studious in promoting in that household peace, charity, the fear of God, and innocent habits. For this reason, he would always serve as a good example for those clergy who served as chaplains or tutors in the houses of the grandees. Thus he was able to receive the affection not only of the subjects [on the Gondi properties] and the domestic workers, but also of the patrons, by leading the general and Madame his wife to greater perfection of life. But it could be determined how a dangerous illness assaulted him in 1615 due to his constant care for the good direction of this entire household. It was well believed that, to a large extent, it proceeded from his tireless fatigue, with which he worked at the very same time for the conversion and the salvation of the poor [21] galley convicts. The opinion was that the painful illness of his legs that he suffered for forty-five years, that is from this same year until 1660, the end of his life, had begun either from the wounds received in the time of his enslavement, or from the chains which were a clear proof of his substitution out of charity for a miserable condemned man, as some have reported.

1616-1617

No matter; from the infirmity of the body there remained still in him only a tiny lessening of strength of spirit, and this appeared to improve. Then, when he had received the permission of some bishops in whose dioceses were located the lands of the general and of Madame his wife, he would exercise priestly functions and help the needs of the pastors. This took place in 1616 with a great burst of charity and the complete satisfaction of the people. In this connection, Vincent was called to hear the confession of a gravely ill peasant in the parish of Gannes in the diocese of Amiens. He had commonly been regarded as a good man. He [Vincent] went there promptly, and as if penetrated by [22] the secret of that conscience, or so inspired by God, he exhorted him to make his general confession and quickly offered to hear it. The sick man agreed and was so penitent at the words of the zealous priest that in the presence of many, including Madame de Gondi herself, he clearly announced that without this general confession he would have been damned for having hidden many grave sins in previous confessions. The very pious woman was greatly moved by his being in a state of eternal damnation, but he was, in fact, living with a good reputation. Easily realizing that this could be the case of others who were living in sin, she begged Vincent to give a sermon in the church of Folleville, in the same diocese of Amiens, to exhort each one to this effective remedy by a general confession. He accepted this willingly, and faithfully fulfilled this task on 25 January 1617, consecrated to the conversion of Saint Paul. He spoke with such fervor and then of the usefulness of a general confession and the way to do it well, that everyone competed in crowds to present themselves to the servant of God. [23] He judged that he could not receive them without first instructing them better on the following days. This was the beginning of the first of all Vincent's missions. But since it was impossible for him to console such a large multitude, increased by people coming from nearby villages, some religious from the neighboring city were invited by Madame to dedicate their zeal to help Vincent, not only in this mission, but in several others given by him in his year. This was an abundant fruit on the lands subject to the house of Gondi. From these missions, there

arose in the thinking of the zealous Lady the stabilization of them on her lands with a perpetual endowment.

It was almost impossible for the opinion and veneration that Vincent enjoyed in the Gondi household to be any greater, especially by Madame. Under his direction she had found peace of conscience, and had approached a sublime level of true perfection, not even less than the opinion that the General had of the virtues of the blessed priest. The truly humble Servant [24] of God, however, did not support such honor and was thinking about fleeing it. In fact, with new advice from Father de Berulle, his director, in the month of July of the same year, 1617, he secretly hid out in Bresse, where there was the parish of Chatillion les Dombes, under the authority of the Chapter of Lyons. It had been abandoned for forty years by its own pastors because of its meager income, which hardly amounted to 100 livres tournois. Then, when Vincent entered into the direction of this parish on 1 August, the great good that he did in the space of only four months cannot be imagined. By God's special providence, he was lodged in the house of a young man tainted by heresy, and besides, he was so dissolute that the more troublesome children of the area had chosen him as the leader in their bad behavior. The zealous pastor took them on with great distress, and in the end he succeeded in converting them to the faith and piety, with singular profit for the entire family who were imbued by conversation with their new pastor about their feelings and holy customs. Similarly, the clergy were changed, whether they were simoniacs or drunkards, or [25] greedy or irreverence concerning the observance of the Sacred Canons, the rules of continence, of evangelical detachment, and of the dictates of the Faith. Also, vain and scandalous women, as well as undisciplined and dissolute men were turned back from worldly immoralities. And finally, various families infected with the errors of Calvin, unfortunately close by in Geneva, were reconciled with the Church.

But above all these conversions, that of Seigneur Balthasar de Rougement, baron of Chandé, a native of Savoy, is worth mentioning. He had spent time in the court of Piedmont in service of Henry IV, among the other corruptions of his life, and he obtained, thanks to the frequency of trials, the reputation as a famous dueler. Now, when he heard mentioned the name of the wonderful works of the new pastor of Chatillon, he was moved with curiosity, but principally by God's grace, to go at that time and hear Vincent's sermons. He conversed with him in a familiar manner, chose him as his director, and made a general confession [26] with the heartfelt compunction by which Saul became Paul, and not by any common goodness did he aspire under the guidance of our Blessed to a perfect life. He sold the barony of Rougement for one hundred thousand livres, distributed them to pious places and to the poor, and after an exemplary life, he died a holy death in Lyons clothed in the humble habit of a Capuchin.

Vincent was usefully occupied in the reform of that parish where, in addition, and with the approval of Cardinal de Marquemont, archbishop of Lyons, he founded the first Confraternity of women, under the title of Charity. The members were to watch over the parish and care for the sick poor. The entire Gondi household was very afflicted by having lost him and did not give up any means to find out where he had gone, working to obtain his return at any cost. The majordomo of the household then went to Chatillon with urgent letters from Henry, Cardinal de Retz, the general, from Madame, from the children, and other persons in authority. The majordomo made every effort to bring back the servant of God and everything would have been useless, had it not been [27] for the authority of his spiritual director. Vincent then distributed to the poor whatever furnishings he had, and

made an endowment for two perpetual Masses for the feasts of the two saints of his family name and first name, Vincent and Paul. He left Chatillon on 13 December, accompanied by the general mourning of those people, sorry to lose such a dear Father. He arrived in Paris on 23 December, and after a lengthy discussion with Father de Berulle, he returned to the Gondi household at the beginning of 1618. He then gathered other priests of talent and virtue and undertook the mission of Villepreux near Versailles, where at the urging of Madame de Gondi, and with the approval of the Cardinal bishop, founded the second confraternity of the Ladies of Charity.

1618

In this same year, our Blessed entered into a close friendship with Saint Francis de Sales. The majesty of his appearance, the modesty of his behavior, the kindness of his relationships, and the holiness of his habits was such that Vincent had to say that he recognized in that holy prelate a living image of Christ. No less minor was the [28] opinion and esteem that Francis had for him, affirming that he knew no other priest in Paris who was both as virtuous and prudent as Vincent. For this reason, this holy prelate did not hesitate in 1620 to confide to him the direction of the Venerable Mother de Chantal, Jeanne Françoise Fremiot, and the other nuns of the Visitation, recently established in Paris. The same nuns testified with what zeal, meekness and prudence the servant of God directed toward them for forty years. And even better, they testified how he had restored the same primitive spirit in the four monasteries under his care, and even in the others which those had propagated. And to know by evidence how vigilant he was to always keep away from these sanctuaries anything which might even a little be prejudicial to the purity of regular observance and sound doctrine, it suffices to know about the bitter quarrels and those of the great women of the time, to whom he forbade entry into the cloister, and to Jansenist directors, whom he always wanted to prohibit any communication, whether oral or written [29] with those brides of Christ. On a certain occasion, Vincent suffered greatly since the main monastery of Paris suffered the loss of fifty thousand livres, which had to be restored to a Lady at her departure, and she was ready to contribute three times that amount if she could stay, as well as her director suspect of [religious] novelties.

But Vincent's zeal was never idle after his return from Chatillon to Paris. He visited hospitals and prisons, where he gave missions for the poor. He also went to console those poor prisoners condemned to the galleys. Before being brought to the oars, they had been held in deep dark places, even caves, rather than prisons. They were loaded down with chains, trembled because of nudity, haggard from hunger, and abandoned by everyone. Moved with compassion for such great miseries, the blessed priest went down into those holes for the consolation and relief of those poor sufferers. He kissed their chains, purified their wounds, cleaned their filth, and administered sacraments to the soul and food to the body. When the general [of the galleys] informed the Most Christian King, Louis, [30] about these matters, he created a new office of grand chaplain of the galleys, with the title of Royal Almoner, and on 6 February 1619, he conferred on Vincent the broad jurisdiction over the other ordinary chaplains of the same galleys.

1620-1621

Therefore, the apostolic priest resumed his dear missions, and in 1620 he brought them in following years into the three dioceses of Beauvais, Soissons, and Sens. He was

happy to bring back to the church many heretics from the district of Montmirail, subject to Madame de Gondi, and as much as possible she would attend every pious undertaking of the servant of God. On 23 May 1621 he founded in the city of Joigny a confraternity of men for the service of the healthy poor, since it had already been established for service of the sick by the women.

These and many works of charity to their neighbor did not slow down or become distant from Vincent in his care and efforts for his own perfection. Thus he always sought new means and aids to advance. We find that on 26 February 1621, he obtained from the General of the Minims, letters of [31] participation in all the prayers and good works of that holy order. Thus he never missed exercises of piety and penance: the bloody discipline, the harsh hairshirt, heavy chains, a sparse diet, a brief sleep on straw: these were habitual for him during many years, and constantly practiced until the end of his life. The delicacy of his conscience was so great that if he found amid the flames of his burning zeal for missions to the poor even a spark of human fire, he chose to go to the city of Soissons to make a retreat there, and to beg God for his more special help for the greater purifying of his spirit. In addition, as much for the advice he received from Madame de Gondi as for the diligent examination he made of himself he found some sort of austerity in his behavior. And he found his character open to solitude, and was moved to a certain lack of sociability which was less proper to the spiritual use of the neighbor. He found that God had called him to this and he followed it with attention and was so composed that with the help of God's grace he became, [32] beginning them, and always afterward, the meekest and most agreeable of men known at that time.

1622

At the beginning of 1622, he visited the first monastery of the Visitation and began a journey to Marseilles. While passing through Macon, the ancient episcopal city on the river Saone, he found an extremely wicked multitude of poor folk. They were in the deepest ignorance of the things of God and were without discipline or religion. With bold freedom they disturbed and endangered the whole city. To remedy such a great disorder, which was judged irreparable, no one extended a hand to him. But it is not hard to believe that the zealous priest extended his own hand. He dealt with the bishop, with the magistrate and with that hostile crowd. Partly with threats and partly with promises they were finally dispersed, but with the expulsion of the most stubborn and the rapid help of the most docile. Finally, he looked also toward the future, and there he founded the Confraternity of Charity to aid the poor, and with other proper regulations. In the course of three weeks, housing, food and clothing were found for the needy, and a remedy was given to idleness and bad [33] habits, along with the arrogance of beggars. The thought of such provisioning, desired by many, and its good success, which others had thought to be impossible, they granted such applause to Vincent, but he fled by night to avoid the honors prepared for him by the Senate, naming him the liberator of the fatherland.

Once he arrived in Marseilles to exercise his office of chaplain general of the galleys, which he accepted not for the honor or for gain, but for the salvation of souls, he visited the group of the convicted. A great number of them were more enchained by the Demon than by human justice. He listened to them, sympathized with them, caressed them. He recognized their needs, whether of soul or body, and he provided them with abundant alms, and with them he administered the Word of God and the Holy Sacraments. Through such a change, not only were sinners given new life, but heretics were

reconciled, and Muslims were converted. Those galleys, which previously had been dens of vice became houses of virtue, where the holy name of God, unknown by many, and blasphemed by others [34] through the great zeal of Vincent and his sons, to whom he left with his spirit the weight of great responsibility, he was honored, venerated, and blessed.

But to promote this effort even more for the greater glory of God, he left the galleys in Marseilles, but without forgetting the afflicted rowers as previously. He returned to Paris, and found in Bourg Saint-Honoré a building near the church of St. Roch. And with the permission of the general, he brought up from those very dark prisons those condemned to the galley, and he had them moved under good guard to new and better housing. He had them living there and served them night and day with his own hands, taught the uneducated, aided the sick and dying, and even those suspected of plague.

1623

When details were arranged in this way, he sent for this work Antoine Portail, a priest of the diocese of Arles, who, under Vincent's spiritual direction, was following at the Sorbonne his course of theology. And in 1623, he went to Bordeaux to share with ten other galleys which were wintering against the Calvinist rebels in that [35] port, the same offices of charity as he had done to the others in the docks of Marseilles. When he finally received the permission of Cardinal de Sourdis, archbishop of that city, he chose twenty companions from various religious orders, and sent them out two by two to each galley. And he sought, whether here or there, whatever he found of the greatest urgency to appease the sinners, console the afflicted, and instruct infidels. One of these was a Turk by birth, who converted and followed him everywhere, honoring our Vincent as a father. Thanks to this, the general gave him back his freedom.

When this famous mission had finished, Vincent went, at the suggestion of friends, to see his relatives. He spoke to them seriously about the kingdom of God, celebrated Holy Mass in the chapel in Our Lady of Buglose, whose precious statue had been replaced there at that time. It has been said elsewhere that it was miraculously recovered. And in the parish church he renewed the promises made in his name at the baptism he received there. After nine or ten days, he took the road again to Paris, but not without [36] some growing feelings. In the act of leaving and separating from his relatives, whose poor condition he had previously thought to relieve, he suffered some tender emotions. For three whole months, he felt troubled by a strong temptation, but he, through constant prayers became free; he then always besought God to preserve his parents, whether living or dead, in their primitive condition of peasants, and he merited to be heard, while his nephews, even today, work in the fields, quite happy with their own condition. Vincent confessed ingenuously this human weakness together with open discussion to teach by his example how dangerous it was for people consecrated to God to turn back and revisit one's own parents.

When he returned to Paris, he visited the second monastery of the Visitation in the Bourg Saint-Jacques, and on that occasion a notable miracle took place. One of the nuns was instantaneously freed with a horrible and daily invasion by the Demon. Vincent ascribed the prodigy to the merits and [37] relics of Saint Francis de Sales, who had recently passed to the other life. But those devout nuns attributed it to the blessing given

by Vincent to the sick woman. Such visits, as everyone knew, did not normally finish without some miraculous event.

The direction of the said monasteries in no way diminished his ardent affection for missions. Thus, at the end of July 1623, he received a broad permission from Bishop d'Estampes, bishop of Chartres, to travel through his entire diocese with the help of other worthy ministers, zealous for the salvation of souls.

1624

Consequently, when the very religious Madame de Gondi observed the abundant fruit that was being gathered from such missions, she thought about stabilizing the endowment, already in her will, during her lifetime, for some priests who, under Vincent's care and direction would direct their work to rural missions. She shared her thinking with the general, her husband, and those of Jean-François de Gondi, his brother and first archbishop of Paris. When her proposal was approved, [38] lodging was likewise set up for the missionaries in the former school, called Bons Enfants, and vacant at the time through lack of entering students. Vincent was granted the superiorship on 1 March 1624, and in his name Antoine Portail, together with another priest, took possession of it on the following 6 March.

While the Blessed priest was involved at the same time both in the direction of the Gondi family, and in the pious exercise of the Holy Missions, Madame Marguerite [de Gondi], as a foretaste of her approaching death, thought through the necessary funding for the support of the workers, and gathered the sum of forty thousand livres, and with the general's approval, donated them to Vincent. The contract for it was signed on 17 April 1625, with the following headings.

- I. That having long experience of the teaching and good behavior of Vincent, the direction and superiority of those priests whom he would judge proper for the functions of the institution would fall to him, and he would call them to its ministry.
- II. That the said Vincent would have [39] to continue to live in the Gondi home to promote there the great good that he had begun to the spiritual growth of the family.
- III. That the priests of the new congregation would have to be dedicated entirely to missions in the lands, castles and other rural places, and would ordinarily avoid, without a special reason, the more important cities where there was no lack of Gospel workers.

1625-1626

As soon as the pious foundress could perceive the main results of this long-desired endowment, she fell ill while the general had gone to Provence, and she received the holy sacraments with sentiments of extraordinary piety in the presence of Vincent, her director, and she gave up her soul to God on 23 or 24 June of the same year, 1625. A woman of truly rare virtue, who through the goodness of her lifestyle, rejection of the world, and zeal for religion, she will long live in the memory of men as eternally in the presence of God.

The Blessed director finished his final duties to the distinguished deceased benefactress and went to Marseilles to [40] bring the sad news to the general. Afterward, he asked in correct fashion to move to his college to help form his nascent congregation. The sorrowing commander received the sad news from Vincent and finally agreed in view of the honor of God which he himself, uninvolved with the World, thought of consecrating himself in the Congregation of the Oratory. After a few years, he was received and became a priest, and lived with the reputation of great piety.

When Vincent left the Gondi household and moved to the aforesaid college, also during the Holy Year of 1625, the Supreme Pontiff in the Vatican was Urban VIII, and Louis XIII was ruling in France. Vincent then laid the foundations of his congregation. Concerning this year [1625], we judged it necessary refer to its beginnings, but we had to mention 1624, in which, on 24 April, the birthday of the Blessed founder, the endowment was approved by; also, in 1627, when the archbishop of Paris authorized the royal document [41] and gave full permission to plant the institution in every part of the kingdom. Then, finally, in 1632, Urban VIII, of holy memory, on 12 January, with apostolic authority, erected the congregation under the name “of the Mission.” Thus, following the tradition, we count its birth in the year 1625, especially since the reigning pontiff, Benedict XIII, in the recent Holy Year of 1725, regarded that year as the centennial of the birth of the congregation and honored with special favors and privileges the sons of the Blessed founder.

The first who were admitted to the Congregation were Antoine Portail, mentioned previously, then François [du] Coudray, Jean de la Salle, Jean Bécu, Antoine Lucas, [Jean-]Joseph Brunet, and Jean d’Horgny, almost all professors or students of the Sorbonne.

1627-1628

These seven companions, whom God made part of Vincent’s priestly spirit, were the seven columns prepared by Divine Wisdom to support the new edifice. Those men went about [42] to villages and hamlets, evangelizing the poor. They were also accompanied by other priests who spontaneously offered themselves to help in the sacred ministry and were sent out into various areas. These took place in 1627 with very abundant fruits in the main provinces of the kingdom. Vincent even reached Lyons, as is known from a letter from the Venerable Mother de Chantal.

The year 1628 opened gloriously in the history of France. In it the nobles besieged La Rochelle and crushed the head of the Calvinist hydra monster. The year would be no less memorable for the reform of the clergy inspired by the heavenly light in the heart of our Vincent. The bishops, with intimate sorrows, impeded by the constant disturbance of wars, had scarcely, since the time of the Council of Trent, found any favorable moment for the creation of seminaries, through the examination of the vocation of clerics longing to rise to Holy Orders. Without this foundation the entire great building of clerical discipline would be ruined. The servant of God had a long discussion about this with Bishop [43] Augustin Potier, the very vigilant bishop of Beauvais. The conclusion was the consent of both, that in the space of so many calamities, there was nothing better or possible that gathering all those to be promoted, either in the bishop’s palace or in another clerical residence, where for ten full days they would be isolated from the world, devoted to prayer and holy reading, and would come out instructed with the familiar basis for the

holiness of their state, joined with its obligations and normal functions. Besides, when their soul was cleansed through a good general confessions, they would get rid of the old man, and be clothed anew, and finally would weigh their own strengths in the scale of the sanctuary, and not risk being expelled for not being properly disposed nor called to the awesome priesthood.

Vincent therefore busied himself to form a method accommodated to this new kind of solitude for the ordinands. He set out exactly the hours of the day for meditations, conferences, sermons, spiritual reading, examinations of conscience, knowing and exercising the rubrics and sacred ceremonies of the Mass, both [44] private and solemn, of the breviary and the Roman Pontifical. In a word, the Servant of God gave laws so proper to test in the brief space of a few days those to be promoted to Holy Orders. The Supreme Pontiffs, with high praise for its author, approved this new method, as did the sacred pastors of the dioceses where it was introduced and preserved in nearly every part of the Catholic World.

But I do not think that Vincent had merely regulated this retreat speculatively, without putting it into practice. At the beginning of September he went to Beauvais, and while on the way, he found the occasion, and the opportunity, to convert three heretics. When he arrived, the place in the bishop's palace was open and around the tenth of the same month, he set to work, aided by two famous professors of the Sorbonne, of whom one was so touched by the sermons and the spirit of Vincent, that he made his general confession to him as did every ordinand. This was the first retreat, later established by Vincent in his main houses with an incredible level of success.

1629

Meanwhile, whether away or present [45] the Blessed founder did not omit carefully watching over the spiritual progress of his little congregation. In 1629, he began the novitiate, calling it the Internal Seminary, assigning its direction of Jean de la Salle, a priest of a truly ecclesiastical spirit. He arranged studies of philosophy, theology and controversy, and he appointed as prefect François [du] Coudray, a man of great learning. He prescribed that the vows should be made privately, and this should be done in the presence of one's confessor. He publicly renewed them [the vows] when the Holy See approved them.

In this same year, two great successes came from the fervent charity of Vincent for the city of Paris. He was the first to found, as he had done in Chatillon, the confraternity of Charity in the church of Holy Savior, and this was the first of all those which under his direction were then introduced for the support of the poor in almost all the parishes of that huge metropolis. The other success was that Madame Claude [Marguerite] de Gondi, widow of the Marechal de Maignelay. At the end of 1618, she founded a famous monastery [46] near the church of the [knights of] Malta to reform fallen women. The necessary directresses lacked the rule for this, and consequently they reminded Vincent that St. Francis de Sales, whose work in the same matter was supported by the pious foundress, had predicted that his nuns would one day be destined to this work, with the permission of the archbishop, and he appointed a superioress with three companions from the first monastery of the Visitation. The large community of 150 women was divided into three groups, called after Saint Lazare, Saint Martha, and Saint Magdalene. The first was made up of lay women locked up by the government until they

came to their senses; the second consisted of penitents, clothed in a pious habit; and the third were the professed, who were admitted after a lengthy testing under the rule of St. Augustine. Vincent often visited them all to help them, in proper measure, to penance, fervor, and perseverance; and he confirmed that all this was producing good order, good results, and directed toward every other need of this numerous community.

1630

Around this time (it was in 1629, or perhaps in the following year [47] 1630, Vincent opened the gates of his congregation, not only to the clergy, but also to the laity of every age, state and condition, anxious to spend some days with God in devout solitude concerning the great matter of their own salvation. These retreats were always of such help after their introduction by Saint Ignatius of Loyola, their most glorious author, there could be no better witness than universal experience. It would take far too much time to mention also the marvelous conversions done by God through these retreats in the houses of Blessed Vincent. There, he himself often lent his own room, as they do often today out of good will, and often his sons did the same to satisfy the multitude of the participants, who were helped with loving care in the spirit, and provided with food, and every other need without the least expense. Similarly, so as not to exceed the limits of a simple retreat, people of a high calling went about in silence, people who, under Vincent's direction, entered among the first to make the holy retreat, as well as the [50] most infected [with sin], and hence the most needy.

1632

At the beginning of 1632, the servant of God received from Him two major benefits, and two others that would serve his neighbor during the same year. Already at the end of 1630, Father Adrien Lebon, prior of Saint Lazare, offered Vincent that house with its adjoining lands, and all its income and with the high and low jurisdiction of that major priory located at the gates of Paris. When the man of God, highly startled at this most honorable proposal, he put himself on guard against the strong temptation of the Enemy. Father Lebon repeated the same offer to Vincent more than twenty times but all in vain. He still persisted in his refusal, fearing that this great acquisition might diminish the virtues of his confreres. But the very pious prior personally and through friends, moved the humble priest to think about the affair and recommend it in prayer to God, and also to listen to the advice of the wise. In particular, he relied on Duval, previously mentioned, his spiritual director, since in 1629 his [51] spiritual director, Cardinal de Berulle, had passed to a better life. It was truly admirable in this proposal that in two years, during which time a matter so important was kept hanging because of Vincent's perplexity. He never took a single step, nor ever even cast his eyes to look over that vast property. And when he began to conclude the case, and the contract was finally arranged through the advice of his friends, and mainly through the most authoritative and respectable support of the archbishop, who had the right of bestowing this benefice, the servant of God strongly protested about removing any element or omitting a clause of a certain condition that would have appeared irrelevant to others, such that little by little it might prejudice the rigorous silence introduced among his confreres by the Blessed founder. This seemed to Vincent to be of such importance and consequence that in order not to give free play to such a small matter, or to an uncertain relaxation, he showed himself very ready to sacrifice this great acquisition, by which, in the common opinion, would give to his nascent congregation a special luster and strength. From this, one can

conclude that [52] this was a dual important witness of the excellent virtue of the servant of God, both concerning his perfect detachment from temporal matters and his holy regard for common observance.

Vincent therefore on 8 January 1632 entered with the majority of his confreres the priory of Saint Lazare after the perpetual union of the said priority was granted by the authority of the Supreme Pontiffs Urban VIII, and Alexander VII. The Blessed founder established the novitiate there and the school for his students. Exercises for the ordinands were held here, and for all kinds of persons. Here his tireless charity provided separate places for beggars, and for the correction of the wayward. Here, finally, he placed his residence as a site for exercises of piety and penance, and we will see him finish his days in the embrace of the Lord, and in his glorious rest bring about important miracles for the faithful.

A few days after Vincent's entry into the priory of Saint Lazare, Urban VIII, with his bull of 12 January 1632, which begins *Salvatoris* [53] *nostri*, approved, as mentioned above, the institution of the servant of God entitled Congregation of the Mission. He honored it with special favors, and with each and every privilege granted and to be granted to other similar and dissimilar congregations. It named the Blessed founder as the perpetual superior general with the faculty of developing constitutions for eventual approval by the Holy See. He declared, besides, at the request of the same Vincent, that his Missioners would, as to the functions of their institution, be subject to the bishops, but as to discipline and governance, they would be subject to their superior general.

Meanwhile, while everything was going along peacefully and good progress was being made, a great storm broke out that would disturb their serenity. A Community of Regulars entered into a lawsuit against Vincent's possession of the priory. However, nothing could upset the meek priest, who simply recommended the matter to God. Thus resigned to whatever happened, which might be so grave as to provoke lengthy difficulties before entering that place, he did not [54] contest the case in any way. It should have been abandoned, except that he did not wish to set aside the care of those poor mental patients which just recently he had taken on with great love. But the prayer of the servant of God overcame the energy of the prosecuting attorney, and his congregation came out victorious and confirmed in its possession.

It was said above that Vincent had those condemned to the galleys transferred from one terrible place to a house rented for this purpose. Now, in this year [1632] he obtained for them and established them in a tower near the Saint Bernard Gate as a perpetual foundation for a royal hospital. He gave it the spiritual direction that he could not give in person because of his long distance from that place to some good priests, friends of his and closely allied with him by virtue. He confided their temporal care to the Daughters of Charity, as we will see later, founded in the following year. But first, another important work should be mentioned, undertaken by the tireless priest to restore priestly discipline.

1633

Since the beginning, and in the course of [55] his missions, he devoted himself to a very important function, which, in the above-mentioned bull of Pope Urban was listed among the principal works of the institution: to exhort and help pastors and other parish

priests to conduct themselves well in the obligations of their ministry. These ordinarily happened by gathering priests from nearby places [during missions] to propose to them the genuine way of catechizing, preaching, celebrating the Holy Mass, hearing confessions, and administering the other sacraments. For this reason, it was not without reason that the French clergy in their letters to Clement XI, of happy memory, recognized Vincent as the author of these very useful clerical conferences. But in 1633, there began in his house another style of spiritual conferences, not much different from those others which in the first centuries, as Cassian testified, and assembled them diligently. They were in wide usage and highly regarded by the monks of the East.

From this praiseworthy institution was born the occasion of the fervor of many young priests. They normally went frequently to Saint [56] Lazare to learn which methods were more proper to preserve the spirit of their recent ordination and the fruit to be gained from the retreats which they had made in that house and under Vincent's direction to prepare for Holy Orders. From the great profit which they were gaining from these private conversations dealing with which means would be better if they were held in common, one of them asked the Blessed director to please assemble them at determined times with him, but the servant of God, never accustomed to act on impulse, took his time to explore God's will, whether it was an individual's thought or common to several. It pleased them all, finally, as inspired by God, and they began to assemble each week at the house of the Mission, both old and young priests, to ponder in simple but devout and grave conversation, the obligations, dangers, and in particular the virtues proper to the priestly state.

Those who assiduously attend these conferences were not only doctors of the Sorbonne, canons, pastors, and a great number of other priests of Paris, but even mitred abbots, [57] bishops, and famous archbishops. They always insisted that they were anxious to hear, and thoughtful for having heard Vincent's words. This involved a large number of participants and they were anxious to found a work of such importance, that they resolved to establish it as a group under the name of Clergy Conference, with rules adapted to their need and to the state of persons of the church dwelling in their own homes. The requirements for being admitted were sound doctrine, good behavior, and always wearing clerical dress. The impediments were vain and dangerous conversations, attendance at the theater, and an idle life. Vincent divided among the participants with major and proportionate discretion the following offices: some to give missions in the cities, others to preach annual or Lenten sermons; others to be pastors of parishes. Some undertook the direction of monasteries and hospitals, and many still entered out of pastoral need into the service of the dioceses as vicars or theologians. Such meetings could be called a fertile seminary of gospel ministers. [58]

Their reputation reached the notice of Cardinal de Richelieu, and he wanted to hear from Vincent directly the occasion, beginning, substance, laws, progress, and finally the name and status of the members who, in the judgment of the servant of God would be suitable for the government of churches. And concerning that connection, he also wanted to hear from him about the more efficient means to restore priestly discipline, which had been quite disturbed by the wars, and to send out missions to Asia and America, and to halt the insolence of the innovators. In connection with such measures (through him he referred to whatever looked to the present proposal) the cardinal passed on to another life, and the Most Christian King, Louis XIII, sent to Vincent the very religious Fr. [Jacques] Dinet, of the Society of Jesus, his confessor, to look at the distinct character of the clergy

of this conference, judged by him [Vincent] as the most apt to fulfill the sees of vacant churches. The servant of God obeyed, but without saying anything so as not to prejudice his sincere contempt for honors, what the brethren of the pious gathering were saying. However, besides the founders and the first companions of the two dear communities, [59] that is, that of Saint Sulpice, and other of the Foreign Missions, there issued, while the Blessed priest was still living, more than twenty persons, among whom were bishops and archbishops, many commendatory abbots, prefects of Chapters, and rectors of churches, who then spread abroad the institute into various parts of the kingdom with new foundations joined to that of Paris, whose sons they equally were, and over a long period it was established in the house of Rome, while others were introduced successively in Italy.

We move now to another noteworthy foundation of common life, that of the Daughters of Charity founded by Vincent in this year, 1633. under the name of Servants of the Poor. The loving Father of the Poor had founded, beginning in 1617 in Chatillon, and then in other places, a Confraternity of women, that is, for charity to help the sick. It often happened that they were impeded, whether by care for their own family, or by the obedience due to their husbands, and they could not satisfy the demands of the pious ministry, since they could not accommodate themselves with similar safety to the servants and those employed by him who by [60] chance had little devotion, and so the poorest ones remained abandoned as a result and deprived of proper help. For this reason Vincent thought of founding a congregation completely destined [to them], and without delay he was able to undertake the pious exercise. This was composed of unmarried women, adults through age and virtue. They, after a five-year period of testing, besides the usual three vows, which they would renew year after year, they made a fourth, which was to serve night and day the sick poor, whether in hospitals or in their own hovels.

It cannot be sufficiently explained with what modesty and fervor those good women attended to the humble and difficult ministry in cities, towns and villages, in providing resources and medicines, making beds, sweeping houses, washing clothes, and providing for every other need. They did not restrict their charity only to aid bodies, but equally to console the afflicted, and to exhort the dying to make their passing in the best way. They had schools to instruct poor girls in the mysteries of the Holy Faith, [61] in the observance of the commandments of God, and in good creations, to read, to work, to manage houses, and to become good mothers of families; and finally, as Missioners do, the Blessed One, as their joint founder, also had their houses opened to women desirous of spending some days on retreats. From these, and similar offices of Martha, they did not separate the offices of the Magdalene: mental prayer, spiritual reading, repeated examinations of conscience, attendance at Holy Mass, and the continual presence of God: these were their daily obligations. They often approach the Holy Sacraments, and every year they make a retreat. They dress in rough cloth, they eat ordinary bread, they drink pure water, sleep only a little, and they are always ready for works of mercy. They are not nuns, but rather they imitate them in the most fervent ways in promoting chastity, in the practice of devotion, and in the exact observance of the rules received from Vincent. He was accustomed to say in this regard: for the Daughters of Charity, their veil should be modesty, silence their cloister, [62] the fear of God their grille, their cell the house of the poor, the monastery their hospital, their parish church their church, and their breviary the rosary of the Most Blessed Virgin.

About three hundred and forty houses have presently come to this congregation, of which thirty-four are in Paris, and others were spread around France, Savoy, Poland, and lower Germany, in which they serve more than 400,000 poor people. They spread such a good aroma that there is not a parish on the other side of the Alps that does not boast of having one in its district. But it would too difficult a matter to find so many young women who want to enter, or are capable of such a laborious vocation. Nevertheless, providence is not lacking to send them by day, even of bourgeois or noble birth, and to profess in the monasteries those with a proper dowry, who are requesting a meeting there with superioresses, or with good behavior, good health, and the will to tire themselves [in the ministry].

For the foundation of this institution, a powerful help was offered to Vincent by the venerable Louise de Marillac, a lady of qualified lineage, who in her young [63] age lost M. [Antoine] le Gras, her husband, a secretary of Queen Marie de' Medici. Louise made a vow of perpetual widowhood in 1625 and dedicated herself entirely under the direction of the servant of God to works of piety and aid for the sick poor.

It is necessary here to inform the reader not to confuse this widespread congregation of the Daughters with the Confraternity of those women, who under the same name of Charity were, as it was said [above] instituted by the servant of God in 1617 to visit and help the sick of every parish in which they are established; nor with another more qualified company, which under the name of the Ladies of Christy, was founded by him in the following year, 1634. The three institutions founded by Vincent under the name of charity, however, differ from each other, although they have the same purpose: I. Women of every status, called a confraternity of charity to aid the sick only in their parish; II. Young women wearing a habit and united in common life into a single body, called the Congregation of the Daughters of Charity, [64] Servants of Sick poor, both in hospitals and in their own homes; III. Ladies, under the name of Company whom we will mention briefly only in their own notice.

Among the hospitals of Paris, numerous and renowned among the many that exist in Europe are those called Notre Dame [Our Lady]; this foundation goes back to the time of Clovis II, about the year 660, and was repaired by the king Saint Louis [IX]. That great work had undergone significant deterioration over the years, and was finally reduced to such a miserable state with the multitude of the sick who for the most part lacked proper physical and spiritual remedies, even dying without the sacraments. When the pious Madame de Goussault, who rejected a second marriage, was given, under Vincent's guidance, broad faculties to aid beggars and made careful appeal to her director to turn his eyes, his heart, and his men to those abandoned poor. The zealous Vincent willingly did so, but he was cautious about placing his sickle in another man's harvest, and waiting some more for the clear [65] indication of God's will. He modestly excused himself from undertaking a task by which the most authoritative members of the clergy were uselessly applied, and even the senate, to whom the management of this pious place belonged.

But the pious lady was not put off by such rejection, and she held on firmly to a good result, provided that Vincent would offer a hand. She then had recourse to the archbishop of Paris to whom the ingenious charity of the servant of God was well known. He [the archbishop] gave him a precise command to establish as soon as possible the company of the ladies, with the special care, no less famous, than the infirmary of the foundlings. Vincent obeyed the instructions of his prelate, as he would to the voice of

God, without losing a moment, and he shared the thought with the main ladies, and in a very short time many others from the first families joined, even princesses. Neither did the two queens, of France and Poland, disdain becoming members.

Vincent gave very useful laws to this new and most noble company, and [66] to the needs being prudently handled. And because he did not take offence at charity being done to promote its exercise. He dealt with the directors and received full freedom to operate. He also dealt with the nuns, first destined to the service of these sick people. He helped them respectfully and financially, and in addition he exhorted the pious Ladies not to do anything without consulting [the Religious]. Then he wisely established the officials to be elected, and the meetings scheduled for specific times. He discretely divided the works to teach the ignorant, and to instruct the Ladies on how to make a good confession. He appointed others to present food, and others to provide more delicate refreshments, and to all he gave, both orally and in writing, opportune instructions.

The hospital changed its appearance, and Paris, astonished at seeing such noble women having put aside entertainment, gaming, or idleness, and spending their days in visits to these sick poor to watch over them and provide for their assistance. All the while, they appeared like humble staff serving them with their own hand, exhorting sinners to repentance, the afflicted to [67] patience, and the dying to confidence.

The Lord bestowed abundant blessing on Vincent's zeal and on that of those very religious women. In only the first year of their founding more than seven hundred Turks and heretics were converted to the faith, and the faithful in even great number were brought around to good behavior.

Nevertheless, Vincent did not restrict to that one hospital the charity of the Ladies who gave a hand to even more pressing issues. Scarcely had Provence in France experienced the generosity of copious alms than they did so themselves, and very often most abundantly, both in Africa and in America, whether to support the apostolic ministers to redeem the slaves, to support the newly-baptized, or to erect new churches for the propagation of the Gospel.

1635

Around the year 1635, Vincent brought into his College des Bons Enfants young clerical candidates, so that from their tender years they would be shown the right path to good discipline, study, and the practice of the Gospel ministry; these were [68] the first seminaries which France experienced for young boys destined for the service of the Church. But neither for this nor for anything else did Vincent set aside the course of his dear missions. Still in this year, he began missions, at the request of the bishop, in the rough hill country of the Cevennes, the principal nest of the Calvinists. They, in our time, made the Catholics suffer greatly, and they were ready, even eager, as he [Vincent] wrote to Jean [du] Coudray, to spill their blood and sacrifice their life for the salvation of their brethren. Likewise, he sent some of his confreres to the missions of the Auvergne, and Velay, at the same time when Blessed François Regis, S.J., was giving his missions with such fame and blessing for the diocese of the Vivarais, and Valence, without there ever being the least jealousy, since both their purpose and scope were identical.

1636

But in 1636, God gave to his servant another new and unknown kind of mission. At that time, in various parts of the kingdom, war had broken out. In each place the troops were insufficient, and new levies were ordered, and [69] for an assembly point, a Place d'Armes, the property of Saint Lazare was chosen, where everything was all military thunder. During all this disturbance, Vincent still kept a profound solitude. He did not give up a retreat for his confreres, who had to come from various areas for the usual functions of the institution. When everything had been improvised he received from the Court the pressing order to assign twenty of his confreres to the field, where already some new and veteran soldiers had composed the army. Vincent obediently went to the city of Senlis to quickly offer himself to the king in the pressing tasks at hand. He left with His Majesty one member of the congregation and quickly returned to Paris. He assembled those he had at hand, and ready for the need and with proper instructions, he led them to the field. There, in their freest days, while the troops were divided into various squadrons, they went about catechizing, preaching, hearing confessions, and administering the Most Holy Eucharist, and they constantly followed the army until it returned victoriously to quarters.

As caused by the usual and nearly inevitable military disturbances, [70] persons of every sort were chased from their houses: nuns and devout women fled to Paris in the greatest need. Vincent provided charity for them, and the company of the Ladies provided with such abundance in purpose that the holy virgins were assured, and the innocent young women in the monasteries and other pious places under their authority were all helped opportunely.

Among the refugee virgins just mentioned, four of them were chosen to establish, with Vincent's agreement, the community of women called "of the Cross," obliged by vow to the education of poor girls and to the salvation of other persons of that gender. It was a very useful institution, but when the first foundress died in 1650, they were reduced to only five sisters, and it seemed to be on the verge of total collapse, save for the help of the Servant of God. Against the common opinion, he could support them and still predict their progress. This was then proven by the success of the other establishments in various provinces of the kingdom.

Three other good servants of the Lord were moved by Vincent, and were brought in [71] during that year of 1636 to found a new community of women under the title of Saint Genevieve, not so much destined to the education of girls as to form good women teachers, and to receive every sort of women on retreats. This community was then joined to that community which today bears the name or their founder, Madame de Miramion, one of the main ladies of the company of Charity.

The activities and value of the Blessed priest did not stop here. Cardinal Rochefoucault made use of him to reform the Canons Regular of France, and Alain de Solminihac, the very holy bishop of Cahors, employed him to reestablish those [monks] called "of Chancelade," and used the famous Charles Fremont, founder of the strict observance of the Order of Grammont, to bring about his [Rochefoucault's] holy plan. Suffice it to say that as the bishop of Rhodes [Rodez] claimed, there was hardly any religious order to be found in France, ancient or modern, which did not prosper thanks to Vincent, with benefits to everyone, either with alms or advice, or the favor that he enjoyed with his Royal Majesty, and with the Grandees of the court and the kingdom.

1637

One noteworthy advantage, among others [72] was what he did for the most illustrious order of Saint John of Jerusalem, whose reform he undertook in France in 1637 with the approval of the Grand Master Lascaris, and with the help of Noël de Sillery, prior of Troyes in Champagne. Through the work of Vincent, he retired from the pomps and delights of the world and the court for the fervor of religious perfection. They visited together the churches of the grand priory of France and issued such good ordinances that if they had been faithfully fulfilled, it might have been said that the work was perfect, but it remained imperfect by the unprovided death of the same prior de Sillery. In 1640, after founding two houses for the Congregation of the Mission in the city of Troyes and in Annecy, he passed away to enjoy the reward of his conversion and piety.

1638

In the following year, 1638, the Blessed founder gave better form to the novitiate of his congregation, under the name mentioned elsewhere, of “internal seminary,” in which among forty young men of fine expectation accepted René Alméras, a royal counselor. He would be the immediate [73] successor in the generalate. He finished the year of his probation, yearning to continue it for a similar period, and he asked Vincent about it, and he granted his request. He stabilized it for the future and the Holy See approved that all those admitted should remain two full years in the [internal] seminary.

That same year was famous for the death of Jansen and the imprisonment of St. Cyran. The first died on 6 May, soon after his most famous book, called *Augustinus*, came to light in various areas, and from which the repugnant five propositions were extracted. Blessed Vincent quickly realized its poison, and he never gave up any means to have them condemned in Rome, and certainly detested in Paris and everywhere else where they might show up. This is proven from the bitter complaints of the same Jansenist authors, and from the copious documents presented in the trials and registered in the acts of Beatification [of St. Vincent].

Jean du Verger, commonly known as the abbé of St. Cyran, arrived in Paris with a reputation for doctrine, and he entered into a friendship with Cardinal de Berulle as well as with many men important for their behavior and education, and [74] other friends of Vincent. They were horrified at hearing certain propositions mentioned which smelled of not being of sound doctrine: *Sensit simul, et exhorruit* [he shuddered on hearing them], and he did whatever he could to reduce them to a correct understanding. He begged, he shouted, he warned, he corrected, but every study was in vain, and Vincent left him out of his friendship, and kept him always far from his confreres, and, where possible, from every other person.

Vincent had considered visiting the houses of his congregation during this year, but the archbishop held him back, since he saw the need of occupying him in a pressing visit to a certain famous monastery, and in various other issues of great importance. In that period Vincent sent to Rome on the business of his congregation Louis Breton [Lebreton], a Missioner of recognized learning and piety, who perfectly fulfilled his commissions. He was ordered by Vincent to scour the pastures of the fields of the Roman

countryside to bring spiritual help to the poor shepherds, and thus the gate of divine province was opened to the first Italian foundation in the Holy City.

1639

At the beginning of 1639, the [75] servant of God, moved by the flames of his charity, founded in the parish of St. Laurent two schools, the first to educate twenty boys, and the second for the same number of girls. Everything was provided them for free, and with such an example he started other similar schools, which were supported by charity. They were little by little founded in other parishes of this vast and populous city.

Because of the small amount of history, no one is unaware of the horrible calamities suffered just before the middle of the last century in the two duchies of Lorraine and Bar, but in the facts about Vincent one can read for this purpose so many singular and amazing things which hardly could be believed unless they were in public documents and proved by authentic testimonies. The famine and plague which are usually the joint companions of daily warfare reduced the entire country to such a sad state that it could not be recalled without horror. Concerning famine, this alone should suffice: that children were eaten, raped and killed; mothers ate their own children, and (which [76] has never been heard before), the children killed their mothers to as to relieve their hunger with their flesh; and as a complement of the divine punishment wolves from the nearby forests came out in troops to slash at children and women.

No one was thinking, or could remedy such a calamity, but it was thought about, and as a delegate of Divine Providence, our Vincent set his hand to it. At the end of 1635 he sent into those areas some zealous priests of his congregation to examine and explore the miseries of those provinces and report on them. They did not omit coming to their aid with all their strength, although the ability of his congregation was too disproportionate to the need, which would demand a king's ransom.

From these desolate regions more than two hundred endangered virgins went to Paris, as did many of the ordinary people, and in fact not a few from noble families. Others who joined them in order to preserve themselves from the fury of Cromwell and flee from England had taken refuge in France. The servant of God maintained the virgins staying with the [77] Daughters of Charity, and those young men who were in his own house of Saint Lazare. For the ordinary people, he had them assembled in a certain place, La Chapelle, near Paris, and he sent them frequent and abundant provisions. With his own confreres, he gave a good mission so that, along with restoration of the body he would join that of the soul. Finally, to help the nobles, a good number of Parisian knights went every month to his house of Saint Lazare, which they considered the best means to reach their goal. All were moved by the words and example of Vincent, and would contribute from their own resources no less than two hundred gold scudi at each meeting. The result was that after twenty years, many survived the servant of God, and almost fifty thousand gold scudi left those pious gatherings to aid the noble refugees.

To help those remaining in those desolate provinces, he sent there twelve of his priests who in only ten years distributed to the needy more than one million six hundred thousand livres, to say nothing of clothing, linens, and furnishings provided abundantly to churches. Not only were the [78] diocesan clergy preserved from the present danger through Vincent's charity, but also religious of every order, both men and women, who

shared the calamities of the people. All the nuns, who through the violence of hunger had to leave their cloister, and they were supported and preserved by the abundant alms sent by the servant of God. He had others sent in security to Paris, where they were placed and supported. And they founded the new congregation of Saint Benedict under the title of Perpetual Adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament.

It should not be omitted that the immense alms that were contributed and procured by Vincent for Lorraine were commended by God through prodigious events. It was said and also verified that the alms multiplied in the hands of the Missioners who distributed them. Likewise it was regarded as a miracle that Brother Matthew, a lay brother of the congregation, was able to make, while carrying money, more than fifty trips from Paris to Lorraine in the midst of armies, without suffering any disturbance from insidious soldiers who [79] normally robbed and sometimes also killed travelers.

The reputation for great piety of our Blessed priest spread everywhere, even to the most remote parts of the kingdom, and people of every condition had recourse to him, either to relieve their own needs, or to bear a greater responsibility in their affairs. Thus a notable senator, unjustly deprived of the office of an important ministry was, at the first sitting of the more conspicuous parlement, restored by Vincent's protection. The noble rich widow, Marie de Chavigny, went to Paris to consult him on her pious project of founding in America a monastery of Ursulines for the education of girls in Canada, where she, with Vincent's approval, moved in company with Sister Marie of the Incarnation, from the monastery of St. Ursula in Tours.

In 1639, the Blessed founder visited the houses of his congregation, leaving everywhere vestiges of piety, and he when he went through the city of Troyes, he instantly freed an afflicted nun from an inveterate and troublesome temptation; and while [80] he was considering going in the following year, 1640, to the house of Annecy in Savoy, he had dealt with graver affairs in Paris, and set his hand to the foundation of a hospital destined for those infants, who through the malice or misery of their parents were miserably exposed and abandoned. They numbered a hundred every year.

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