



## **Vincent de Paul's Membership in a Secret Society The Company of the Blessed Sacrament**

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### **Abstract:**

St. Vincent de Paul, renowned for his emphasis on simplicity and transparency, paradoxically participated in the secretive Company of the Blessed Sacrament. This clandestine society, founded in 1629, comprised notable French Catholics committed to religious and social reform without episcopal oversight. Despite its secrecy, the society's significant influence gradually emerged post-1660. Key documents, such as the *Annales* by René de Voyer d'Argenson, detailed the group's activities and notable members, including Vincent de Paul. The Company, emphasizing Eucharistic devotion and spiritual growth, also engaged in substantial charitable works. It supported missions, aided war victims, and collaborated with the Vincentian Family. Vincent de Paul, a crucial member, facilitated the society's initiatives through his extensive network and influence. While the society faced political and ecclesiastical challenges, including opposition from Richelieu and Mazarin, it left a lasting impact on 17th-century French Catholicism through its discrete yet potent contributions to Church reform and social welfare.

San Vicente de Paúl, famoso por su énfasis en la sencillez y la transparencia, participó paradójicamente en la hermética Compañía del Santísimo Sacramento. Esta sociedad clandestina, fundada en 1629, estaba formada por notables católicos franceses comprometidos con la reforma religiosa y social sin supervisión episcopal. A pesar de su secretismo, la sociedad fue adquiriendo una gran influencia a partir de 1660. Documentos clave, como los *Annales* de René de Voyer d'Argenson, detallan las actividades del grupo y sus miembros más destacados, entre ellos Vicente de Paúl. La Compañía, que ponía el acento en la devoción eucarística y el crecimiento espiritual, también realizaba importantes obras de caridad. Apoyó misiones, ayudó a las víctimas de la guerra y colaboró con la Familia Vicenciana. Vicente de Paúl, un miembro crucial, facilitó las iniciativas de la sociedad a través de su extensa red e influencia. Aunque la sociedad se enfrentó a retos políticos y eclesiásticos, como la oposición de Richelieu y Mazarino, dejó un impacto duradero en el catolicismo francés del siglo XVII por sus discretas pero potentes contribuciones a la reforma de la Iglesia y al bienestar social.

Saint Vincent de Paul, réputé pour sa simplicité et sa transparence, a paradoxalement participé à la secrète Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement. Cette société clandestine, fondée en 1629, comprenait des catholiques français notables engagés dans la réforme religieuse et sociale sans supervision épiscopale. Malgré son caractère secret, l'influence significative de la société a progressivement émergé après 1660. Des documents clés, tels que les *Annales* de René de Voyer d'Argenson, décrivent en détail les activités du groupe et ses membres notables, dont Vincent de Paul. La Compagnie, qui mettait l'accent sur la dévotion eucharistique et la croissance spirituelle, s'est également engagée dans d'importantes œuvres caritatives. Elle soutenait les missions, aidait les victimes de la guerre et collaborait avec la famille vincentienne. Vincent de Paul, un membre essentiel, a facilité les initiatives de la Société grâce à son vaste réseau et à son influence. Bien que la société ait été confrontée à des défis politiques et ecclésiastiques, notamment à l'opposition de Richelieu et de Mazarin, elle a laissé un impact durable sur le catholicisme français du XVIIe siècle grâce à ses contributions discrètes mais puissantes à la réforme de l'Église et à l'aide sociale.



Keywords: Vincent de Paul, Company of the Blessed Sacrament, Secret Society, Company's Achievements.

It seems contradictory. St. Vincent continually emphasized simplicity. In a letter to his confrere François du Coudray, he called it “the virtue I love the most.”<sup>1</sup> In a conference to the Daughters of Charity, he stated: “God has given me such a high esteem of simplicity that I call it my Gospel.”<sup>2</sup> He explained that simplicity meant saying things as they are, without deception and without hiding things. *Yes* was to mean *yes*, and *no* was to mean *no*.<sup>3</sup> He often told his followers that “everyone loves simple, candid people.”<sup>4</sup> In the Vincentian Family, there were to be no hidden agendas.

But, along with many of his friends, Vincent belonged to a secret society called the Company of the Blessed Sacrament. Ironically, we now know much more about this society than most of Vincent's contemporaries did. What were its goals? Who belonged to it? What, concretely, did it accomplish? This article will examine those questions.

### Recent research

Most of Vincent's biographers have mentioned the Company of the Blessed Sacrament,<sup>5</sup> at least in passing, but, until recently, Vincent's involvement in the Company and its significant role in the renewal of the church during the final three decades of his life has received little attention.

Its members never spoke publicly about the Company, but after its dissolution in 1660, information about it surfaced little by little. In 1694, René de Voyer d'Argenson composed the *Annales de la Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement*. For two centuries, this lengthy document about the Company lay buried in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, hardly noticed. Then, in 1900, it was reprinted by Henri Beauchet-Filleau, a Benedictine monk.<sup>6</sup> Argenson had been a member of the Company. Thirty-four years after the Company was officially suppressed, he decided to compile the recollections of many of the surviving members. Apparently, he and they saw no need to keep their names secret

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<sup>1</sup> CCD:I:265. CCD refers to Vincent de Paul. *Correspondence, Conference, Documents* edited by Pierre Coste, translated into English by: Helen Marie Law, D.C. (Vol. 1), Marie Poole, D.C. (Vol. 1-13b), James King, C.M. (Vol. 1-2), Francis Germovnik, C.M. (Vol. 1-8, 13a-13b [Latin]), Esther Cavanagh, D.C. (Vol. 2), Ann Mary Dougherty, D.C. (Vol. 12); Evelyne Franc, D.C. (Vol. 13a-13b), Thomas Davitt, C.M. (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), Glennon E. Figge, C.M. (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), John G. Nugent, C.M. (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), Andrew Spellman, C.M. (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]); edited: Jacqueline Kilar, D.C. (Vol. 1-2), Marie Poole, D.C. (Vol. 2-13b), Julia Denton, D.C. [editor-in-chief] (Vol. 3-10, 13a-13b), Paule Freeburg, D.C. (Vol. 3), Mirian Hamway, D.C. (Vol. 3), Elinor Hartman, D.C. (Vol. 4-10, 13a-13b), Ellen Van Zandt, D.C. (Vol. 9-13b), Ann Mary Dougherty, D.C. (Vol. 11-12); annotated by: John W. Carven, C.M. (Vol. 1-13b); New City Press, Brooklyn and Hyde Park, 1985-2014. To this, one must add the numerous unpublished letters, conferences, and documents that Fr. John Rybolt has recently made available online at [Saint Vincent de Paul / Correspondence, Conferences, Documents \(English translation\) | Correspondence, Conferences, and Documents of St. Vincent de Paul | DePaul University](#)

<sup>2</sup> CCD:IX 476.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 5:37.

<sup>4</sup> CCD:XII:142.

<sup>5</sup> Pierre Coste, in his exhaustive biography of Vincent, offers abundant information about the Company. Strangely enough, it has gone largely unnoticed. Many members of the Vincentian Family today have hardly heard of the Company's existence. Cf. Pierre Coste, *The Life and Works of Saint Vincent de Paul*, translated by Joseph Leonard, C.M. (Newman Press: Westminster, Maryland, 1952), III, chapter LVIII.

<sup>6</sup> René de Voyer d'Argenson, *Annales de la Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement* (Marseille:1900, typographie & lithographie Saint-Léon, rue des Princes, 78).

any longer. It is striking how frequently Vincent de Paul and many of his friends appear in the *Annales*.<sup>7</sup>

In 1990, Alain Tallon published a detailed study of this elusive group.<sup>8</sup> In 2017, Dr. Alison Forrestal situated Vincent de Paul's life and work within the broader context of his time and built on Tallon's research. She highlighted many of the outstanding lay and religious leaders of the day and the role that the Company of the Blessed Sacrament played in the reform of the Church.<sup>9</sup>

At the same time, over the last several decades Fr. Bernard Koch, C.M., has been gathering significant amounts of material about the Company's members, hundreds of whose names we now know. We possess brief biographies of most of them.

### **The Company's birth, its structure, and its goals**

The Company was a secret society.<sup>10</sup> It brought together many notable seventeenth-century French Catholics and made a significant contribution in addressing the religious and social needs of the day. It was founded in 1629 at the Convent of the Capuchin friars on the rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré by Henri de Levis, Duc de Ventadour; Henri de Pichery, an officer in Louis XIII's household; Jacques Adhemar de Monteil de Grignan, a future bishop; and Philippe d'Angoumois, a Capuchin.

The members pursued their objectives collectively and were remarkably independent of episcopal oversight. A rule of secrecy bound them not to speak about the Company to those outside it and not to divulge the names of the individuals composing it. New members were elected by the board of directors. The Company printed nothing. The written Minutes of its meetings were guarded with the utmost caution. Besides the Parisian group to which Vincent de Paul belonged, there were numerous important branches outside the capital. About thirty of these groups were unknown even to the local bishops.

A board of nine members directed the Company. These included a superior, usually a layman, and a spiritual director who was a priest. They met weekly. The group was simultaneously a pious confraternity, a charitable society, and a rather militant association for the defense of the Catholic Church.

For years, the principal director was Gaston de Renty (1611-1649), a married man with five children who was one of the prominent figures of the century. He had close

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<sup>7</sup> Just to name a few of Vincent's friends who appear in the *Annales*, one might list:

- Charles de Condren
- Jean-Jacques Olier
- Hubert Carpentier
- François Renar (or Renard)
- Bertand Drouard
- Gaston Jean-Baptiste, Baron de Renty
- the Duke Liancourt
- Claude de Blampignon
- Louis de Chardenier,
- Hippolyte Féret
- Guillaume de Lamoignon
- Adrien Gambard
- Georges Frojer

<sup>8</sup> Alain Tallon, *La Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement, 1629-1667* (Paris, 1990).

<sup>9</sup> Alison Forrestal, *Vincent De Paul, the Lazarist Mission, and French Catholic Reform* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

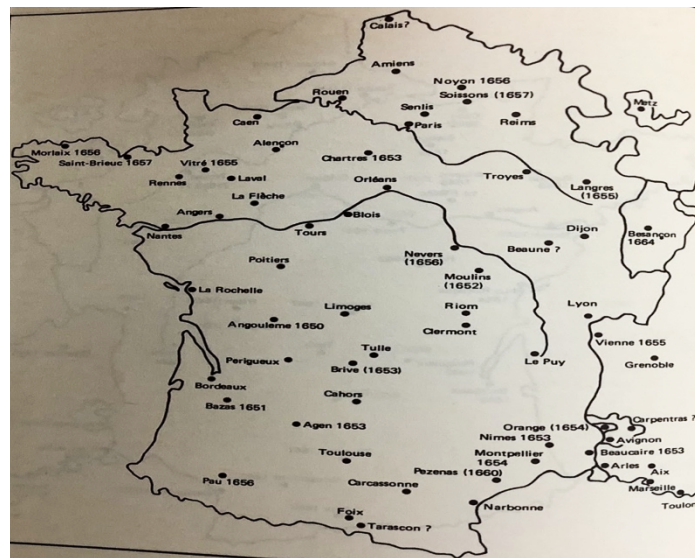
<sup>10</sup> In his biography of St. Vincent, José-María Román calls it a "semi-secret" society since a number of people knew of its existence. Cf. *San Vicente de Paúl. I: Biografía* (Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1981), 254.

contact with Vincent,<sup>11</sup> Jean-Jacques Olier, and others who were involved in giving missions in rural France and in revitalizing the formation of the clergy. While largely unknown today, he was hugely influential during his lifetime. Many regarded him as a saint. A century and a half after Renty's death, the English Protestant leader John Wesley held him up as an outstanding example of Trinitarian mysticism<sup>12</sup> and called him "one of the most glorious lights that God hath bestowed upon his church in our age."<sup>13</sup>

Though the Company was a secret one, King Louis XIII covertly encouraged it. But the Archbishop of Paris refused to give it his blessing, even though the king wrote him a personal letter in 1631 requesting him to do so. Guidi di Bagno, the papal nuncio, attended sessions of the group and maintained cordial relations with it between 1644 and 1656. Though its existence was never officially acknowledged by Rome, Pope Innocent X wrote to the Company in 1655 to thank it for its prayers during his sickness.

### The Company's membership

This all-male society attracted at least 450 clerical and lay members in Paris over the course of its existence; it attracted many others in the centers established throughout France. 501 of those we now know were lay and 405 were clerics. The lay members were predominantly men of social distinction, wealth, and political influence. By 1660, the Company had "chapters" in 64 towns and cities in France, with perhaps 4000 total members.<sup>14</sup>



Among those who joined it early were Père Suffren, a Jesuit and the confessor of both King Louis XIII and the Queen mother Marie de Médicis, as well as Charles de Condren, the second Superior General of the Oratory. While the Company's leadership was largely lay, influential priests and founders of communities like Vincent de Paul and Jean-Jacques Olier were important participants. At least 34 members were already, or soon became, bishops in France and in foreign missions. Among them were Jacques-

<sup>11</sup> Cf. CCD:V:53; VIII:500.

<sup>12</sup> John Wesley, *An Extract of the Life of Monsieur de Renty, a Late Nobleman of France* (London, 1778) 30.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>14</sup> The map below is taken from Tallon, *op. cit.*, 32.

Bénigne Bossuet, who eventually became the tutor of Louis XIV and the preacher at his court, Louis Abelly, the first biographer of Vincent de Paul, and Alain de Solminihac, Vincent's close collaborator. Pierre Lambert de la Motte and François Pallu, founders of the French Foreign Mission Society, were also members. They became bishops in Cochinchina.

Vincent joined it sometime before 1633 and remained a member until his death. The Company relied on him for his advice and his contacts. He was also the beneficiary of many of its charitable works. As was required, Vincent was silent about his membership in the Company. There is only one reference to it in his extant letters and talks. On Jan. 3, 1653, he referred explicitly to the Company in a letter to his trusted confrere and friend, Lambert aux Couteaux, the superior in Warsaw. He told Lambert, "The members of the Company of the Blessed Sacrament are doing wonders in this city (Paris)," <sup>15</sup> but his reference to the Company is understandable since Lambert had previously served as Vincent's assistant in Paris and had attended at least one of the Company's meetings.

Vincent knew the members personally and was a point of reference for many of them. He served as a link between the Company and the Ladies of Charity, as well as between the Company and the works of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity. He was an active participant on the royal Council of Conscience and, therefore, had a voice in decisions that interested members of the Company. Numerous members frequented Saint-Lazare, the Motherhouse of the Congregation of the Mission. Some of their meetings took place there.

Membership overlapped with that of the Tuesday Conferences, in which Vincent also played a key role and for which the house at Saint-Lazare was also a meeting place. Six members of the Tuesday Conferences served as Directors of the Company of the Blessed Sacrament, and nineteen others were ordinary members.

While the Company was an all-male society, many Ladies of Charity had relatives who were members: husbands, sons, and sons-in-law. At various stages in its relatively short history, the Company helped set up groups of Ladies of Charity.

### **The Company's Spirituality**

By no means was the Company a purely action-oriented association, with strong national and political interests. By and large, its members were devout Catholics who were eager to develop a deep spiritual life. They emphasized secrecy in imitation of Christ's hidden life and union among themselves based on the "communion of saints." They practiced fraternal correction. They sought to imitate the early Christian community described in the Acts of the Apostles and saw themselves as guided by the Holy Spirit, "the master of the deliberations of the Company." <sup>16</sup>

As the name of the Company indicates, they had a special focus on the Eucharist, emphasizing adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. They saw this as their way of implementing the Council of Trent's decrees about Eucharistic devotion and as a key piece in the Counter-Reformation's response to Protestantism. The seal of the Company showed a host in a monstrance with rays emanating from it, as from the sun (like the frontispiece for the Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission).

As did many other confraternities, the Company had lists of prescribed prayers that the members should say. These varied over the years, with changing circumstances. They often prayed for peace during those turbulent years when war raged, seemingly endlessly, in France.

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<sup>15</sup> CCD:IV:520.

<sup>16</sup> Tallon, *op. cit.*, 72.

They had devotion to the “states of Christ” or the mysteries of his life (using language like that found in the writings of Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac) and meditated on Christ’s birth, his hidden life, his silence, his active missionary ministry, his passion and death, his resurrection and ascension. The mystery of his passion and self-emptying (*anéantissement*) received the greatest attention.

Not unlike numerous contemporaries, many members of the Company had a pessimistic view of life in France and the world. To illustrate this pessimism, Tallon cites a letter from Vincent de Paul to François du Coudray: “Alas! Monsieur, the countryside is so vast! There are people by the thousands filling up hell. All the ecclesiastics, with all the religious, would not suffice to remedy this misfortune!”<sup>17</sup>

The members aspired to be “good angels” in a pagan world. Bossuet, whose gift for the eloquent phrase became renowned, stated that “God built Jerusalem in the midst of Babylon!”<sup>18</sup>

While critical of the hierarchy and at times of the papacy, the Company respected bishops and was loyal to decisions from Rome. While pessimistic in its views, as were the Jansenists, the Company staunchly opposed Jansenism. While abhorring much of what went on at the Court, the Company managed to survive all through Richelieu’s time as Prime Minister. In fact, the Cardinal shared some its ideals, though not others. As an astute politician, he knew how to navigate in murky waters. His favorite niece, the Duchess of Aiguillon, generously supported many of the Company’s initiatives and had warm relationships with numerous members, particularly with Vincent de Paul.

Some in the Company were surviving members of the “devout group,”<sup>19</sup> which had opposed Richelieu in the 1620s and early 1630s and which he had successfully tamed by oppressive means. He beheaded, for example, Louise de Marillac’s uncle Louis and arranged for Michel de Marillac, a second uncle (to whom Louise was very attached), to be convicted of treason; Michel died while in prison. But most members of the Company were careful to maintain a discreet silence about political matters of which they disapproved, so that they could pursue their religious and socio-political agenda.

The complex political-social-religious situation in the 17<sup>th</sup> century produced many ironies regarding the Company. While King Louis XIII and Richelieu knew of the Company and approved of its social agenda, the Archbishop of Paris refused to approve it within his diocese, despite a request from the King. Richelieu’s brother, the Archbishop of Lyon, also refused to give it formal approval.<sup>20</sup>

Most members of the Company despised Mazarin, Richelieu’s successor. The feeling was mutual, especially as the Company spread to all parts of France and attracted more politically active members. Mazarin bided his time until he felt that his power was secure. Then he moved against it. Some Church authorities supported Mazarin’s position, convinced that the existence of a powerful secret society, with so many lay members, was a threat to them.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> CCD:I:166.

<sup>18</sup> J. B. Bossuet, *Œuvres Oratoires, op. cit.*, I, 219.

<sup>19</sup> At a distance of four centuries, it is not easy to define the “devout group” (in French, *les dévots*) precisely. Roughly, they were a group of devout Catholics who pursued a domestic policy of strong opposition to the spread of Protestantism within France and a foreign policy that opposed alliance with the Habsburgs and the continued development of absolutism.

<sup>20</sup> Joseph Bergin, *The Politics of Religion in Early Modern France* (New Haven, Yale, 2014), 106.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.



## **The Company's achievements**

The Company had an enormous role in promoting many of the works of the Congregation of the Mission and Daughters of Charity, but its works went far beyond the Vincentian Family.

### *Ties with the Vincentian Family*

We know that in 1633 the Company approached Vincent asking for priests to finish a mission at the Quinze-Vingts hospital. In response to the appeals of the Company, Vincent also sent missionaries to La Chapelle, to the hospital and asylum known as “Les Petites Maisons,” to Brie-Comte-Robert, and elsewhere. In 1649, the Company helped finance the Congregation's missions in Férolles and Anthony. It also provided financial support for the foreign missions in Scotland and Ireland.

During the 1640s, the Company's support and that of the Ladies of Charity paved the way for the expansion of Congregation of the Mission in southern France. The house of the Congregation in Marseille, begun in 1643, became one of the most important centers for Vincentian works, with a focus on serving the galley prisoners and giving missions. The Company had a very active branch there. We know that its members visited prisoners both in Marseille and Paris. The Duchess of Aiguillon, who was very much involved in the affairs of the Company, was also quite active in Marseille. She had a great influence on the local bishop there, Jean-Baptist Gault, who was member of the Company. The Duchess, like the Company, had a particular interest in the gallery prisoners there, as well as in the slaves in North Africa.

One of the Company's greatest concerns was the sufferings of those whose lives and homes were devastated by the wars in Lorraine. A special meeting of the Company's leaders took place at Saint-Lazare to discuss the tragic situation caused by the war. The members channeled huge sums of money to help the displaced people and to resettle them. Gaston de Renty, whose wife was a Lady of Charity at the Hôtel Dieu in Paris, was particularly generous in that regard. The Ladies of Charity too raised enormous amounts of money which they channeled to the needy in Lorraine through Vincent and Brother Matthew Reynard.

The Company worked alongside the Ladies of Charity in publishing the *Relations* monthly between 1650 and 1655. These four-to-eight-page leaflets told the stories of members of the Vincentian Family who were working in the regions that were being devastated by war. The *Relations* raised very significant amounts of aid which Vincent and the Ladies channeled to the war zone. Members of the Company themselves contributed generously from their own resources.

To illustrate the collaboration between Vincent and the Company in helping impoverished noble families during the wars in Lorraine, Pierre Coste wrote: “In this work of assistance to the nobles of Lorraine who were refugees in Paris, the chief auxiliary of Saint Vincent was the Baron de Renty, an unparalleled Christian gentleman. It was a stroke of genius on the part of Saint Vincent to have the destitute nobility of Lorraine helped by their peers, without having recourse to the already overburdened Ladies of Charity. From the very first meeting, it was decided that they would establish the number and rank of the needy nobles of Lorraine who had taken refuge in Paris. M. de Renty undertook the investigation. The meetings were held at Saint-Lazare on the first Sunday of each month and continued until the end of the turmoil for about seven years, with unflagging zeal and success. There were usually seven or eight gentlemen present. They personally carried material assistance and words of comfort to the refugees. When more peaceful times allowed the nobles to return to their own lands, the society helped

them to pay for their journey with its alms and gave them money enough to subsist for a time.”<sup>22</sup>

It is estimated that, beginning in 1652, when Paris was flooded with refugees, the Company spent today’s equivalent of about \$3,000,000 USA dollars in charity each year.

#### *Other significant interests of the Company*

The members promoted initiatives to Christianize society by fostering religious observance and by fighting to eradicate prostitution, drunkenness, dueling, and blasphemy. The branch of the Company in Poitiers took the lead in combatting dueling, which was common in higher ranks of society; their campaign then spread to Paris.<sup>23</sup> Those judged guilty of blasphemy drew the ire of the Company throughout France. The Company also targeted merchants who sold meat during Lent, those who ran cabarets, and writers whose works the Company regarded as risqué or blasphemous or scandalous.

With help from the Ladies of Charity, particularly the Duchess of Aiguillon and Madame de Lamoignon, they were instrumental in reorganizing the controversial General Hospital in Paris, a work in which Vincent and the Daughters of Charity were involved. This project illustrates Vincent’s independence, since he declined entreaties from the Duchess to get the Congregation of the Mission to play a role.<sup>24</sup>

Members of the Company worked with many other 17<sup>th</sup>-century reformers to correct abuses among the clergy and in monasteries. They also focused on providing missions for rural parishes.

They had a special concern for the thousands of beggars on the streets of Paris and in reforms of the prisons in Paris, where conditions were miserable and where prostitution and sexual abuse were rampant.

While the Duchess of Aiguillon was not formally a member of this all-male group, she was a driving force in many of its activities. Sometimes they held their planning sessions in her home. With her assistance, the Company helped establish the Société des Missions Étrangères de Paris (MEP), which would eventually send missionaries to many parts of the world and which, through its sister seminary in Québec, would train diocesan clergymen for assignments throughout French America.

A dark side of the Company was its attitude toward Jews, Protestants, gypsies, and free thinkers. With various nuances in different circumstances, it sought to banish Jews. Gypsies were to be either converted or banished. Protestants were to be confined to the strictly limited places defined by the Edict of Nantes. Vincent de Paul was more irenic than many other members of the Company in his relationship with Protestants (and others), preferring to win people over by example rather than by controversy.<sup>25</sup> He cautioned his confreres about siding too quickly with Catholics against Protestants in legal disputes, saying “There is a great difference between being a Catholic and being an upright man.”<sup>26</sup>

The writers that the Company attacked were formidable opponents. They used their skills to attack back. Molière, in his popular play *Tartuffe*, lampooned “la cabale

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. I, chap. XXXV, p. 167; cf. also, Abbé Ulysse Maynard, *Saint Vincent de Paul* [3rd ed., 4 vols., Paris: Retaux-Bray, 1886], vol. IV, p. 128.).

<sup>23</sup> In the parish of Saint-Sulpice in Paris, seventeen persons lost their lives in duels within one week. Cf. Coste, *op. cit.*, III, 98.

<sup>24</sup> This is a long story that has been treated at length elsewhere. Cf. Coste, *op. cit.*, I, 232ff.

<sup>25</sup> CCD:II 442.

<sup>26</sup> CCD:II:494.



des dévots”<sup>27</sup> (*the cabal of the devout group*) and eventually won a victory for freedom of artistic expression.

### The Company’s demise

Mazarin was hostile toward the Company, especially because some of its members had been participants in a series of revolutions (called *the Fronde*) against the king and against his own influence at court. He regarded Vincent de Paul as his enemy<sup>28</sup> and had him removed from his influential position on the royal Council of Conscience in 1652.

When Queen Anne’s regency ended and Louis XIV came to power, Mazarin felt secure in moving against the Company. In 1660, he prohibited all secret meetings. That was a deathblow. But the Company survived clandestinely until 1667, when it disappeared.<sup>29</sup>

During the decades between its birth and death, relatively few people knew of the Company’s existence and even fewer knew who its members were. Now we know much about its extraordinary role in 17<sup>th</sup>-century France.

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. Raoul Allier, *La cabale des dévots, 1627-1666* (Toronto, 1902). Today, Allier’s harsh treatment of the Company as a real “cabal” that attempted to control minds stands in contrast to more sympathetic views of the Company’s social goals and accomplishments. Cf. Bergin, *op. cit.*, 110-111.

<sup>28</sup> CCD:XIIIb:151 and 154.

<sup>29</sup> By then, Mazarin was dead, but his successor, Colbert, continued to be hostile toward the Company.

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