



## **Outline the Influences of the Spanish Spirituality on Vincentian Thought and Practice**

**Joseph Tuan Viet Cao, C.M.**

Holy Spirit Seminary, Bomana, Papua New Guinea

[josephcaovietuan@gmail.com](mailto:josephcaovietuan@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

This paper explores the profound influence of sixteenth-century Spanish spirituality on the development of Vincentian thought and practice. Spanish spirituality emerged as a deeply affective and Christocentric tradition rooted in a historical context shaped by religious reform, mysticism, and missionary expansion. It emphasized interior prayer, divine union, discernment, humility, and active charity, embodied in figures such as Teresa of Ávila, John of the Cross, John of Ávila, and Ignatius of Loyola. The study traces how these currents of Spanish spirituality were transmitted into seventeenth-century French Catholic reform movements, ultimately shaping the apostolic ethos of Saint Vincent de Paul and the Congregation of the Mission. By examining historical pathways and thematic continuities—such as attentiveness to Providence, the synthesis of contemplation and action, and the renewal of parish preaching—the paper demonstrates that Vincentian spirituality is not merely parallel to but deeply indebted to the mystical and pastoral legacy of Spanish spirituality. Far from being confined to cloisters or elite religious contexts, Spanish spirituality proved remarkably adaptable. It inspired a practical theology of mercy and mission that continues to inform Catholic pastoral life today.

Cet article explore l'influence profonde de la spiritualité espagnole du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle sur le développement de la pensée et de la pratique vincentiennes. La spiritualité espagnole est apparue comme une tradition profondément affective et christocentrique, enracinée dans un contexte historique marqué par la réforme religieuse, le mysticisme et l'expansion missionnaire. Elle mettait l'accent sur la prière intérieure, l'union divine, le discernement, l'humilité et la charité active, incarnées par des figures telles que Thérèse d'Ávila, Jean de la Croix, Jean d'Ávila et Ignace de Loyola. L'étude retrace la manière dont ces courants de spiritualité espagnole ont été transmis aux mouvements de réforme catholique français du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, façonnant finalement l'éthique apostolique de saint Vincent de Paul et de la Congrégation de la Mission. En examinant les chemins historiques et les continuités thématiques - telles que l'attention à la Providence, la synthèse de la contemplation et de l'action, et le renouveau de la prédication paroissiale - l'article démontre que la spiritualité vincentienne n'est pas seulement parallèle à l'héritage mystique et pastoral de la spiritualité espagnole, mais qu'elle lui est profondément redevable. Loin d'être confinée aux cloîtres ou aux contextes religieux élitistes, la spiritualité espagnole s'est révélée remarquablement adaptable. Elle a inspiré une théologie pratique de la miséricorde et de la mission qui continue d'influencer la vie pastorale catholique aujourd'hui.

Este artículo explora la profunda influencia de la espiritualidad española del siglo XVI en el desarrollo del pensamiento y la práctica vincentinos. La espiritualidad española surgió como una tradición profundamente afectiva y cristocéntrica, arraigada en un contexto histórico marcado por la reforma religiosa, el misticismo y la expansión misionera. Hacía hincapié en la oración interior, la unión divina, el discernimiento, la humildad y la caridad activa, encarnadas en figuras como Teresa de Ávila, Juan de la Cruz, Juan de Ávila e Ignacio de Loyola. El estudio traza cómo estas corrientes de espiritualidad española se transmitieron a los



movimientos de reforma católica franceses del siglo XVII, configurando en última instancia el espíritu apostólico de San Vicente de Paúl y la Congregación de la Misión. Al examinar las trayectorias históricas y las continuidades temáticas —como la atención a la Providencia, la síntesis de la contemplación y la acción, y la renovación de la predicación parroquial—, el artículo demuestra que la espiritualidad vicentina no es meramente paralela al legado místico y pastoral de la espiritualidad española, sino que le debe mucho. Lejos de limitarse a los claustros o a los contextos religiosos de élite, la espiritualidad española demostró ser notablemente adaptable. Inspiró una teología práctica de la misericordia y la misión que sigue influyendo en la vida pastoral católica actual.

Keywords: Spanish spirituality, Vincentian, Teresa of Ávila, John of the Cross

## I. Introduction

The sixteenth century in Spain witnessed a distinctive form of Catholic spirituality flourishing that combined deep interiority with apostolic energy and mystical theology with practical reform. Today known as Spanish spirituality, this tradition emerged in response to internal ecclesial needs and the wider upheavals of the Reformation.<sup>1</sup> Grounded in a profound Christocentrism, Spanish spirituality emphasized personal transformation through contemplative prayer, discernment of divine action, and humble obedience to Providence, often expressed through acts of concrete charity. It was not a formal "school" with a uniform system but rather a spiritual current shaped by towering figures such as Teresa of Ávila, John of the Cross, John of Ávila, and Ignatius of Loyola—each offering unique contributions to a shared vision of the Christian life.<sup>2</sup>

While originating in the Iberian Peninsula, the influence of Spanish spirituality did not remain confined to its native context. Through networks of religious orders, spiritual writings, and European reform movements, its principles found new life in the French Catholic revival of the seventeenth century. It was within this milieu that Saint Vincent de Paul (1581–1660) undertook his pastoral mission and charity service and formed the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity. Though not a mystic in the mold of Teresa or John of the Cross, Vincent internalized many of the core emphases of Spanish spirituality—particularly its trust in Providence, affective devotion to Christ, and insistence on inner disposition as the foundation for apostolic effectiveness.

This study argues that Vincentian spirituality cannot be fully understood apart from Spanish spirituality's theological and mystical inheritance. By examining the historical context, influential figures, transmission pathways, and thematic continuities between these traditions, this paper traces the spiritual lineage from sixteenth-century Spain to Vincentian France. In doing so, it reveals how contemplative roots bore apostolic fruit, giving rise to a spirituality that was at once deeply prayerful and vigorously engaged in the renewal of the Church and the care of the poor.<sup>3</sup>

## II. Spain in the Sixteenth Century

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<sup>1</sup> Charles J. Healey, *Christian Spirituality: An Introduction to the Heritage* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 245.

<sup>2</sup> Bernard McGinn, "The Genealogy of Mystical Traditions," in *The Oxford Handbook of Mystical Theology*, eds. Edward Howells and Mark A. McIntosh (NY: Oxford University Press, 2020), 80-84.

<sup>3</sup> Rowan Williams, *Teresa of Ávila* (London: Continuum, 2000), 12–13.

The emergence of Spanish spirituality in the sixteenth century was inseparable from Spain's broader religious, political, and cultural renewal. Following the Catholic Monarchs' consolidation of national unity and the completion of the Reconquista in 1492, Spain became a dominant European power and a self-consciously Catholic nation.<sup>4</sup> This intense religious identity was institutionalized through the Spanish Inquisition, which was established to enforce orthodoxy and secure confessional unity. Although often remembered for its repressive measures, the Inquisition also guaranteed theological clarity during widespread religious turmoil.<sup>5</sup>

Yet the renewal of sixteenth-century Spain was not limited to political consolidation or confessional policing. It gave rise to a remarkable spiritual and mystical flowering within the Catholic Church. This era saw a vibrant revival of evangelical zeal, interior reform, and contemplative depth, embodied by religious figures whose influence would transcend Spanish borders. This flowering was aided by ecclesiastical reforms spearheaded by clergy like Cardinal Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros, who established seminaries and emphasized pastoral integrity and spiritual formation.<sup>6</sup>

Spain's distinctive blend of affective piety, Christocentric devotion, and sacramental realism drew nourishment from its medieval roots and the contemporary demands of the Catholic Reformation. The Council of Trent (1545–1563) further intensified these emphases, aligning them with renewed calls for catechesis, moral reform, and ecclesial discipline.<sup>7</sup> Spanish mystics responded not with abstract speculation but with experiential theology rooted in lived encounters, emphasizing purification, spiritual discernment, and total abandonment of divine love.

Amid this climate, spiritual literature flourished. Works like Teresa of Ávila's *Interior Castle* and John of the Cross's *Dark Night of the Soul* exemplified Spanish spirituality's profound interior depth and poetic power. Meanwhile, figures such as John of Ávila and Ignatius of Loyola focused on apostolic preaching, missionary formation, and spiritual discernment, blending contemplation with action.<sup>8</sup> Their legacy would prove vital in shaping the direction of Catholic spirituality in the early modern world, particularly in France, where these ideas found new pastoral expression in the work of Vincent de Paul.

### III. The Influential Figures of the Spanish Spirituality

The richness of sixteenth-century Spanish spirituality is best exemplified through the lives and writings of its most influential figures. Though each approached the spiritual life from distinct theological and pastoral perspectives, they shaped a profoundly Christocentric and experiential spirituality that responded to personal longing and ecclesial need. Among them, Teresa of Ávila, John of the Cross, John of Ávila, and

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<sup>4</sup> Henry Kamen, *Golden Age Spain*, 2nd ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 5-9, 17–21.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph Pérez, *The Spanish Inquisition: A History*, trans. Janet Lloyd (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 90–100.

<sup>6</sup> Pierre Pourrat, *Christian Spirituality: Later Developments*, Part I: From the Renaissance to Jansenism, trans. W. H. Mitchell, vol. III, (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1927), 80.

<sup>7</sup> John W. O'Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 17-19.

<sup>8</sup> Pourrat, 80.

Ignatius of Loyola stand out as the primary architects of a reform-oriented, mystically rooted Catholic renewal.<sup>9</sup>

### **1. Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582)**

A reformer of the Carmelite Order and one of the Church's great mystical doctors, Teresa of Ávila combined practical leadership with visionary mysticism. Her reform of the Discalced Carmelites, pursued alongside Saint John of the Cross, aimed to recover the early monastic tradition's contemplative focus and evangelical poverty. In her seminal work, *The Interior Castle*, Teresa outlines the soul's journey inward toward union with God, traversing through successive "mansions" of spiritual purification, illumination, and divine intimacy.<sup>10</sup> Her spirituality was rooted in affective prayer, an abiding sense of God's indwelling, and a call to friendship with Christ, especially in His suffering.

Teresa's emphasis on mental prayer—an interior dialogue rather than recited forms—offered a democratization of the spiritual life, accessible even to laypersons. She was deeply influenced by earlier traditions but gave them renewed expression in a time of ecclesial suspicion toward unregulated mystical claims.<sup>11</sup> Her canonization and later designation as a Doctor of the Church signal her central place in Catholic mystical theology.

### **2. John of the Cross (1542–1591)**

Teresa's collaborator and spiritual complement, John of the Cross, brought a theological and poetic depth to the Spanish mystical tradition. His works—particularly *The Dark Night of the Soul* and *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*—explore the paradox of spiritual desolation as the path to divine union.<sup>12</sup> With the suffering of prison, John developed his theological vision that purification of the senses and the spirit is necessary to transcend the self and become entirely receptive to God's transformative grace.<sup>13</sup>

John's mysticism is marked by apophatic elements, emphasizing the *via negativa*—God as mystery and otherness. Yet this is not a rejection of God's presence in the world but an intensification of the soul's longing and surrender. His spiritual poetry is celebrated for its theological content and literary brilliance, placing him among Spain's greatest writers.<sup>14</sup>

### **3. John of Ávila (1499–1569)**

Often overshadowed by the more famous mystics, John of Ávila played a foundational role in shaping pastoral and theological reform in Spain. A prolific preacher, teacher, and spiritual director, he was deeply committed to clerical renewal and the

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<sup>9</sup> E. Allison Peers, *The Mystics of Spain* (London: Unwin Brothers Limited, 1951), 21-27.

<sup>10</sup> Williams, 2; Healey, 262.

<sup>11</sup> Peers, 80-90.

<sup>12</sup> John of the Cross, *The Dark Night*, Book I, chs. 1–3.

<sup>13</sup> Gerald Brenan, *St. John of the Cross: His Life and Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 26 - 38.

<sup>14</sup> Brenan, xii.

education of the laity.<sup>15</sup> His influence extended to Teresa of Ávila, Francis Borgia, and many others engaged in spiritual reform. Beatified in 1894 and named a Doctor of the Church in 2012, he is increasingly recognized for his integrative theology of grace, humility, and divine love.<sup>16</sup>

In his *Audi filia* and spiritual letters, Ávila developed a spirituality of docility to the Holy Spirit, characterized by affective union with Christ and an uncompromising call to evangelical poverty.<sup>17</sup> His writings profoundly influenced the Jesuits and later Vincentian models of the formation of clergy and the laity.

#### **4. Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556)**

Founder of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) and author of the *Spiritual Exercises*,<sup>18</sup> Ignatius of Loyola shaped one of the most enduring models of discernment and apostolic spirituality in the Catholic tradition. His conversion experience during convalescence led him to reimagine the spiritual life as one of militant service, guided by interior attentiveness to God’s presence in daily life.<sup>19</sup>

The *Spiritual Exercises* are both a manual for personal retreat and a method of vocational discernment. Ignatius emphasized consolation and desolation, interior movements that signal divine or diabolical influence.<sup>20</sup> His spirituality, though rooted in mystical experience, was directed toward mission, obedience, and the service of the Church—qualities that aligned closely with the post-Tridentine ethos and later inspired reformers like Vincent de Paul.

### **IV. Means of Influence: The Transmissio of the Spanish Spirituality into Vincentian Spirituality**

The rich current of sixteenth-century Spanish spirituality flowed far beyond the Iberian Peninsula, gradually shaping the spiritual ethos of neighboring France in the early seventeenth century. During this time, Saint Vincent de Paul emerged as a pivotal figure whose spirituality, while distinctly his own, was profoundly shaped by currents originating in the Spanish mystical tradition. This section examines how the spiritual insights of figures such as Teresa of Ávila, John of the Cross, and Ignatius of Loyola were transmitted to and reinterpreted by Vincent de Paul.

#### **1. Historical and Ecclesial Context**

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<sup>15</sup> Joan F. Gormley, *Introduction to the Life of John of Avila*, in *Audi, Filia*, by John of Ávila (New York: Paulist Press, 2006), x–xii.

<sup>16</sup> Benedict XVI, *Apostolic Letter Proclaiming Saint John of Avila, Diocesan Priest, a Doctor of the Universal Church* (October 7, 2012), no. 3, *Vatican*, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost\\_letters/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_apl\\_20121007\\_giovanni-avila.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_letters/documents/hf_ben-xvi_apl_20121007_giovanni-avila.html).

<sup>17</sup> John of Avila, *Audi, Filia*, trans. Joan Frances Gormley (NY: Paulist Press, 2006); Gormley, “Introduction,” 16–17.

<sup>18</sup> Terence O’Reilly, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola: Contexts, Sources, Reception* (Boston: Brill, 2021).

<sup>19</sup> Genelli, *Life of St. Ignatius of Loyola* (Frankfurt: Verlag, 2022), 9–10.

<sup>20</sup> Phillip Sheldrake, *A Brief History of Spirituality* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 101–103;

The Catholic Reformation, especially after the Council of Trent (1545–1563), saw an intensified focus on interior renewal, clerical reform, and the revitalization of pastoral ministry. With its golden age of mystical theology and reformers, Spain became a leading contributor to this ecclesial renewal. As French Catholicism sought to reform its clergy and renew popular piety, Spanish devotional models offered a compelling blueprint.<sup>21</sup> Vincent de Paul, born in 1581 and ordained by 1600, thus came of age precisely during this moment of transnational spiritual exchange.

## 2. *Vectors of Transmission*

Spanish spirituality reached France through multiple channels:

- Printed works and translations: The spiritual writings of Teresa of Ávila, John of the Cross, and John of Ávila were widely read in France. Translations of their works into French made their affective and contemplative insights accessible to clergy and laity alike.<sup>22</sup> These texts stressed mental prayer, detachment, humility, and mystical union with God.

- Clerical mobility and Jesuit mediation: Spanish-trained priests, along with the missionary presence of the Jesuits, who themselves bore the influence of Ignatius's Spanish roots, brought distinct spiritual practices into French seminaries and retreat houses. The *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius, with their structure of discernment and imaginative contemplation, served as a spiritual school that influenced many French reformers, including Vincent de Paul.<sup>23</sup>

- Personal networks: Vincent's contact with spiritual directors and confessors who had read or internalized Spanish spiritual texts likely contributed to his familiarity with their theology.<sup>24</sup> Vincent showed clear awareness of the mystical tradition but remained cautious of its excesses. The Vincentian approach was practical, sober, and mission-oriented: he integrated mystical insight only insofar as it served the goals of charity, formation, and ecclesial reform.<sup>25</sup>

## 3. *Core Traits of Spanish Spirituality*

Spanish mysticism in the sixteenth century emphasized interiority, affective prayer, the humanity of Christ, and union with God through suffering. Teresa of Ávila advanced a method of contemplative recollection, while John of the Cross offered a theology of purification and divine darkness, emphasizing the soul's total reliance on God. Ignatius of Loyola's *Exercises* introduced a dynamic structure of reflection, discernment, and apostolic availability.<sup>26</sup>

These authors presented spirituality as the privilege of monastics and a path of sanctity accessible to clergy and committed laypersons. Their affective intensity,

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<sup>21</sup> Healey, 277-278.

<sup>22</sup> Healey, 278; Peers, *The Mystics of Spain*, 191-194.

<sup>23</sup> John W. O'Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 165-170.

<sup>24</sup> O'Malley, *The First Jesuits*, 78-80; Healey, 251.

<sup>25</sup> André Dodín, *Vincent de Paul and Charity: A Contemporary Portrait of His Spirituality* (New York: New City Press, 1993), 67-72.

<sup>26</sup> Peers, *The Mystics of Spain*, 191-194.

theological depth, and practical wisdom rendered their insights adaptable to broader ecclesial reform movements.

#### **4. Vincentian Reception and Reformulation**

While absorbing many of these spiritual influences, Vincent de Paul tempered their mystical fervor with a pragmatic orientation. He was cautious of mystical excess, often warning against illusions in spiritual experience. Yet his spirituality bore unmistakable marks of affective devotion, inner attentiveness, and a Trinitarian sense of divine Providence—all key hallmarks of Spanish spiritual thought.

Vincent's incorporation of discernment, examination of conscience, and spiritual direction reflects a moderated Ignatian influence.<sup>27</sup> His spiritual retreats for clergy, influenced by Jesuit models, emphasized humility, self-knowledge, and pastoral renewal. The prayer he taught was personal and reflective, yet always oriented toward charity and ecclesial mission.<sup>28</sup>

In sum, Vincent de Paul inherited from the Spanish tradition a rich vocabulary of interior life—consolation, detachment, union with Christ—but recast it in a practical, communal, and service-oriented framework. In Vincent's hands, Spanish spirituality became not a mystical escape but a foundation for incarnational charity.

### **V. Thematic Influences of the Spanish Spirituality on Vincentian Spirituality**

The thematic resonance between Spanish spirituality and the Vincentian tradition is neither superficial nor accidental. While Vincent de Paul consciously avoided the speculative mysticism and emotional excesses sometimes associated with Spanish affective piety, his spiritual theology unmistakably reflects its central themes—interiority, affective union with Christ, discernment, and radical charity. A practical mysticism emerges: a deeply interior spirituality made manifest in action, community, and service.

#### **1. Interiority and Mental Prayer**

One of the most enduring themes of Spanish spirituality is its insistence on mental prayer (*oración mental*)—an intimate, interior dialogue with God rooted in recollection and affective devotion. Teresa of Ávila's *Interior Castle* maps the soul's inward journey through successive stages of prayer, recollection, and union.<sup>29</sup> John of the Cross, particularly in *The Dark Night*, emphasizes passive purification and detachment as the necessary preparation for divine intimacy.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> O'Malley, 165-170.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas McKenna, *Praying with Vincent de Paul* (DePaul University Vincentian Studies Institute, 2011), 33-34.

<sup>29</sup> Teresa of Ávila, *The Interior Castle*, First Mansion, chs. 1-2.

<sup>30</sup> John of the Cross, *The Dark Night*, book 1, chapter 1.

Vincent de Paul internalized this principle and taught his confreres that mental prayer was not reserved for the elite but was necessary for all apostolic ministry labor.<sup>31</sup> The Saint insisted that charity must spring from the interior union with Christ and be sustained by prayer. He said: “The apostolic life does not exclude contemplation, but encompasses it and profits by it to know better the eternal truths it must proclaim.”<sup>32</sup> Thus, Saint Vincent adapted the contemplative stillness of the Spanish mystics into a methodical, purpose-driven prayer life designed to sustain long-term service.<sup>33</sup>

## 2. *The Humanity of Christ*

Spanish spirituality, particularly in Teresa and John of Ávila, emphasizes the humanity of Christ as the locus of mystical encounter. This focus is expressed in vivid meditations on the suffering Jesus, the Incarnate Word, and the Eucharistic presence.<sup>34</sup> Ignatius’s *Spiritual Exercises* likewise encourage affective contemplation of Christ’s life, passion, and resurrection as a way of conforming the self to the person of Jesus.<sup>35</sup>

Vincent de Paul likewise placed Christ at the center of his spiritual life, urging his followers to “look at Jesus Christ” as the rule and model of all virtue.<sup>36</sup> His frequent exhortation to imitate Christ’s humility, patience, and charity aligns deeply with Spanish Christocentric devotion—yet Vincent always grounded this imitation in the concrete reality of service to the poor: “In serving persons who are poor, we serve Jesus Christ.”<sup>37</sup>

## 3. *Discernment and Providence*

Saint Ignatius of Loyola articulated one of the most sophisticated models of spiritual discernment in the Catholic tradition. In the *Spiritual Exercises*, he sets guidelines for distinguishing the divine from deceptive influences, grounded in attentive reflection on interior movements such as consolation, desolation, peace, and unrest.<sup>38</sup> This nuanced attentiveness to God’s presence in daily life’s affective and spiritual rhythms became foundational to post-Tridentine spiritual practice.

Thus, Ignatius of Loyola’s doctrine of discernment of spirits profoundly influenced Vincentian thought. Like Ignatius, Vincent called for attentiveness to interior movements—consolation, desolation, peace, agitation—as signs of divine initiative. But Vincent situated discernment in private prayer, communal mission, and historical

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<sup>31</sup> Louis Abelly, *The Life of the Venerable Servant of God Vincent de Paul*, trans. William Quinn, C.M., ed. John E. Rybolt, C.M. (New Rochelle, NY: New City Press, 1993), book 3, chap. 7, *Vincentians*, <https://vincentians.com/en/the-life-of-vincent-de-paul-abelly-book-iii-chapter-vii/>

<sup>32</sup> Vincent de Paul, *Correspondence, Conferences, Documents* (New City Press, New York, 1985-2012), vol. III, 344. Future reference to this thirteen-volume work will be noted with the letters CCD, followed by the volume number, and then the page number, for example, CCD III, 344.

<sup>33</sup> Dodín, 67-68.

<sup>34</sup> Teresa of Ávila, *The Interior Castle*, Mansions 5–7; *The Book of Her Life*, ch. 22; John of the Cross, *The Spiritual Canticle*, stanzas 1-5, 11–13.

<sup>35</sup> Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, §§101–109.

<sup>36</sup> CCD XII, 110; Robert P. Maloney, *The Way of Vincent de Paul: A Contemporary Spirituality in the Service of the Poor* (NY: New City Press, 1992), 19-36; Thomas Esselman, “Who Do You Say That I Am?” Christological Perspectives on Leadership in the Vincentian Tradition,” *Vincentian Heritage Journal* Vol. 19 Iss. 1 (Spring 1998), <https://via.library.depaul.edu/vhj/vol19/iss1/1>.

<sup>37</sup> CCD IX, 199.

<sup>38</sup> Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*, §§313–336.

circumstance. Moreover, he frequently referred to Providence as guiding his decisions step by step, like a mother guiding a child. Saint Vincent says, “To have confidence in Providence means that we must hope that God will take care of those who serve Him.”<sup>39</sup>

#### ***4. Charity and Apostolic Availability***

Perhaps the most transformative theme both traditions share is the integration of contemplation and action. Spanish spirituality, particularly in Ignatius, does not separate mystical union from mission but sees the latter as its fruit.<sup>40</sup> Teresa, too, speaks of the soul returning from the “interior castle” to serve the world.<sup>41</sup>

Vincent de Paul embodies this synthesis in his spirituality of charity: the true test of love for God, he taught, is love for the neighbor, especially the most abandoned. Thus, these services were not mere humanitarian efforts but expressions of a mystical theology of service.<sup>42</sup> This integration of contemplation and action makes Vincentian spirituality unique: it embodies a “mysticism of action,” in which prayer animates mission, and mission deepens prayer.

### **Conclusion**

The transmission of Spanish spirituality into the life and legacy of Saint Vincent de Paul illustrates a unique convergence of mystical interiority and apostolic pragmatism. Rooted in the theological flowering of sixteenth-century Spain, the spiritual currents that flowed through Teresa of Ávila, John of the Cross, John of Ávila, and Ignatius of Loyola offered a rich interior grammar—marked by affective devotion, discernment, and an intense focus on the humanity of Christ. These themes were not merely transplanted into French soil but were transfigured through the pastoral genius and charitable mission of Vincent de Paul.

Vincent did not replicate Spanish mysticism in its monastic or contemplative form. Rather, he domesticated it for the poor, drawing from it a spirituality capable of thriving in the streets, hospitals, rural parishes, and seminaries of post-Tridentine France. His spirituality bears the imprint of the Spanish school—recollected prayer, Trinitarian discernment, deep trust in Providence—but it is filtered through his unwavering commitment to incarnational charity and ecclesial reform. In this way, Vincentian spirituality emerges not as a pale reflection of its Spanish forebears but as a creative rearticulation that weds mystical intensity with apostolic realism.

Ultimately, this lineage reminds us that spiritual traditions do not transmit as fixed artifacts but as living rivers—capable of nourishing new lands, inspiring new works, and renewing the Church across cultural and historical boundaries. Spanish spirituality, refracted through Vincent de Paul, became a spirituality of action, where contemplation

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<sup>39</sup> CCD X, 403.

<sup>40</sup> O'Malley, *The First Jesuits*, 165-168.

<sup>41</sup> Teresa of Ávila, *Interior Castle*, Seventh Mansion.

<sup>42</sup> Vinícius Augusto Teixeira, C.M., “Saint Vincent de Paul: Mystic of Charity and of the Mission,” translated by Charles T. Plock, C.M., *We Are Vincentians*, January 2, 2017, <https://vincentians.com/en/saint-vincent-de-paul-mystic-charity-mission/>.

blossoms into compassionate service, and the divine union is sought in solitude and the faces of the poor.

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