

M Vincent
Re-Reads His Life

or

The Interior Man
As Seen By Himself

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Preliminary Notes

The Nature and Aim of this Little Book

1. The writings, letters and conferences of St Vincent, as well as various other documents, are extensive enough to furnish us with **HIS LIFE AS TOLD BY HIMSELF**, at least in so far as most areas of his life are concerned. Material written in the third person simply has to be reworked in the first person. That is the aim of this book. St Vincent said very little about himself in public, though he did reveal a little more in some letters and conversations. Accordingly some information will be drawn in summary form from his biographers and various archives. It will also be necessary at times to summarise and to link some details to highlight aspects of his development: these sections will not be distinguished in any way in the text.

As far as possible St Vincent's own words will be used. When referring to the recollections of someone else or to official documents in the third person, the text will be changed to the first person. Such quotations will appear in italics and will be indented on both sides – except for very short phrases which will remain as part of the text. Inverted commas will also be used to highlight such passages. In some rare cases a turn of phrase or word no longer in current use will be modernised. The typescript and presentation will distinguish editorial amendments from M Vincent's own words.

2. M Vincent's sayings and stories are not simply anecdotal. They do of course expand on his chronological details with stories about his achievements and those of his followers. They tell us much more as well, revealing much about the inner man, his humanity, his spiritual growth, his faith and his love of God. From the relatively small numbers of documents concerning his early life up to 1617 we can trace his slow spiritual development through a series of events influenced by God's grace. This is what this little book is about: not merely a summary of St Vincent's life but the story of his inner life. That's why the first person is used even in passages drawn from his biographer or other compilers
3. The fact that we have more information about M Vincent's youth

and early years than about his major works may cause concern. This is due to a deficit which had to be made good. In fact recent study and fresh analysis of some archive material and some familiar texts have supplemented and in some instances overturned some of the presuppositions about the early part of Vincent's life. On the other hand Vincent's main achievements are more fully described in several biographies, with the exception of some details and clarifications which will also be dealt with.

4. I have, for several reasons, chosen the conference of 19th December 1659 as the starting point for M Vincent to speak to us. While we possess his conference notes to the Daughters of Charity up to August 1660, as well as letters up to 17th September 1660 just ten days before his death, the notes of his last conference to the missionaries are more or less complete. He was seventy-eighth and a half years old at the time and he spoke to the missionaries about obedience, a topic which occasioned reference to the will of God and also a recollection from his youth.

Over Now To Vincent Himself...

Childhood And Family

On Friday evening of 19th December 1659 between 8 and 9 pm when some of the priests and brothers had expressed their thoughts, M Vincent took up the topic of the spiritual conference:

Our conference this evening, my brothers, is about obedience... The first motive for giving ourselves to God that he may give us this virtue of obedience is the example of the Son of God himself whose entire life was one of constant obedience... my brothers, God is a God of virtues; virtue must be rooted and grounded in the interior life... so that we are disposed to go where God would have us go... Wretch that I am most of my life has been disobedience! Alas, brothers to whom will you give obedience? To me... full of vice and sin... I was thinking recently how, as a boy, when my father brought me to town, I was often ashamed to acknowledge him as my father because he was poorly dressed and a bit lame. Wretch that I am! (1)

My father died three years later, in 1598, and in spite of the high regard and respect I had for him, I've never been able to ease this memory... Still, we loved each other, and my father's love has deeply influenced me. I like to think that our love of God is rooted in this childhood love, as I explained to the Daughters of Charity on Sunday 11th July 1649:

Imagine the delight God takes in a soul which desires to please Him and to offer Him all its plans... It is like a child who shows his father anything he receives. When someone gives the child something, the child runs off to his father: "Daddy, look what I have, look what someone gave me", I did that? The child's father takes inexpressible delight in his son's confidence in him, and in these tender gestures of love and trust. That's what God is like too, to an even greater degree. (2)

Yes, indeed, in my twilight years memories come streaming back, not all of them painful as you can see. Seventy-eight years... I never thought I'd live so long. On October 12th 1639 I wrote to my confrere Louis Lebreton who was then in Rome:

I can't go on forever. Next April I will begin my sixtieth year. (3)

It's now twenty years since I wrote that. So, if you wish to know the year of my birth, simply count back, to April 1581. I was born in the Landes District, just over a league from Dax, in the village of Pouy.

What can I say of my family?

As for myself, I am the son of a farmer who looked after pigs and cows. (4) I lived in the countryside until I was fifteen years old. (5)

The staple diet in our area is a grain called millet which is cooked in a pot, and placed in one big dish from which everyone takes their share at meal times. After that they go back to work. (6)

I tended my parents' herds mostly on the flood-free fields on the banks of the Ardour. These are known as "les barthes" and this is one of the rights of landowners. I did the same work for my grandparents when I would visit them near Orthevielle. We were a very close family and I loved and admired my brothers, Bernard, Dominic (also called Menian and Gayon), and John who died young... as well as my two sisters who were both called Marie: (7)

The womenfolk of the district are very straightforward... there is no deceit or obstinacy in them... They live and eat simply and sensibly, mostly bread and soup even though their work is endless and harsh... Where would you find people to match their great trust in God? (8)

Naturally I loved my mother dearly. She became a widow in 1598 and I so much wanted to look after her needs from then on. I promised her as much in a letter from Paris, dated 17th February 1610:

I am annoyed at not being able to look after you as I should because I have to delay here to secure the advancement that is necessary. I do hope however, with God's help, to be able to secure the necessary means to retire early and spend the rest of my days with you. (9)

But God arranged things differently so that bit by bit I gave myself to the poor, so much so that I would be very slow to use resources meant for them for the benefit of my family. It wasn't that I became hard-hearted.

On one occasion in 1624, having visited my family on the way back from a mission to the galley slaves in Bordeaux,

I was so upset at leaving my family, that I cried the whole way back (10)

However, I didn't abandon them. Although I never used the patrimony of the poor for my family, I did help Providence to find benefactors to help them. I will come back to this later. Still, getting others to help one's family is not the same as being with them, and I felt this very deeply. Just two years ago, 15th November 1657, while encouraging the Daughters of Charity to contribute to the needs of their Congregation which is their mother, I couldn't help adding this:

When I see a priest who has taken his mother to live with him and care for him, and care for her, I tell him; (11) Sir, how lucky you are to be able to repay your mother's care for you by the way you are looking after her! (12)

I have spoken much about my childhood and family. That's what happens when you grow old. It is however important for our spiritual welfare to do so. I told the Daughters of Charity as much on 11th November 1657:

Dear sisters, let us remember our origins and we will have much cause to praise God. (13)

Vincent de Paul's family

It appears M Vincent never said anything else publicly about himself, in particular about his youth and family. However some small details appear from time to time in his letters to St Louise and various confreres. There are also some other verbal details, noted for example by his friend Charles Maignart de Bernieres:

M Vincent was of noble stock from Languedoc, but long since impoverished. (14)

His parents were small farmers who were nonetheless landowners.

- His father's people, the Depauls (even the nobility seldom separated the "de" from their name) were "Capcazaliers" (from "capo casa", head of the household); they had certain rights. They owned herds of oxen but no horses.
- Canon Etienne de Paul may have been his father's brother. He was named as prior of Paymartet in 1577 and since the abbey

was plundered by Protestants in 1569, it was he who set about its restoration (cf register of Properties of the Diocese of Dax, Archives of Landes Region, Archives of Hospital de Dax.)

- Vincent's maternal grandfather was a "cavier", a corruption of "chevalier", "knight" ("cabier", from cabeller; nothing to do with vault or cellar). A knight was the lowest degree of nobility, the title belonging to a place and its owner, but not to the family itself. Grandfather Moras owned the "caverie" of Peyrous, close to his own home Moras, two km from Orthevielle, his parish. Doubtless Vincent prayed in the Church there. On the grandfather's death uncle James became knight, and it was at Peyrous that Vincent himself was made an honorary knight.
- Vincent's other uncle John was a lawyer and king's procurator at the Council of Dax.

We can see how Vincent's family roots prepared him for his future tasks: the ability to organise and to manage property, an interest in law and its workings, and an ease with the nobility.

NOTES

1. Coste XII, 425-426; 429; 431-432. Dodin, 848; 852; 854
2. Coste IX, 365. Comb 243
3. Coste I, 593
4. Coste IV, 215, 21st June 1651. Sometimes Vincent includes sheep, without ever implying that these flocks belonged to anyone else. A small farmer whose life at this time was simple and harsh, although the owner of some fields and small herds.
5. Coste IX, 81 and 84, to the Daughters of Charity, 25th January 1643. Comb 54 and 56.
6. Coste IX, 84, same conference. Comb 56.
7. A gift to his brothers and sisters, 4th September 1626, Coste XIII, 62-63, and last will, 7th September 1630. *Annales*, vol 101, 1936, p705.
8. Coste IX, 81, 83, 88, 25th January 1643. Combe 55, 56, 59.
9. Coste I, 18.
10. Coste XII, 219, 2nd May 1659 Dodin 637.
11. Coste I, 90-91, 1st September 1630 and note 2 IV, 321, 16 February 1652. CF I, 491, 20th July 1638 and note 1; IV, 535, 1st January 1653; V, 567, perhaps March 1656; Abelly 111, 292.
12. Coste X, 360. Comb, 703.
13. Coste X, 342. Comb, 692.
14. The Archives of Chateau de la Riviere-Bourdet, quoted by Oscar de Poli, "Researching St Vincent de Paul's Family", Paris-Brussels 1879, p21, followed by a study p29-43 and 50. P Coste refutes his thesis without explanation as he did not have much regard for Charles Maignart.

Student And Priest

In 1592, my father arranged for me to begin studies, in the hope that one day I might get some ecclesiastical benefice, perhaps the income from an abbey or a good parish, and so help my family out, just as my uncle had done, as Prior of Poymartet. (1) He sent me as a boarder to the Grey Friars in Dax for sixty pounds a year. Shortly after that, M de Comet, a lawyer in the Tribunal Council of Dax, took me in to teach his children, while continuing my studies. One of his sisters, Catherine, was married to a brother-in-law of my maternal uncle John de Moras, who was also a lawyer and king's procurator in the Tribunal.(2) It was M de Comet who thought I had the abilities to be a priest, and who directed me along that path. Having completed four years in the College at Dax, on 20th December 1596, the Bishop of Tarbes conferred me with tonsure and the four minor orders. This took place at Bidache, because the See at Dax was vacant at the time. I was only fifteen and a half years old at the time. The bishop was Salvat d'Iharse (or Diharse) who was Commendatory Abbot at Arthous, near Orthevielle. This abbey was connected with the Counts of Gramont, a family of the highest nobility.

In 1597 I went to study philosophy and theology which was paid for by my father who sold a yoke of oxen. I stayed in the Jesuit College and studied at the University of Saragossa. While there I witnessed the very austere lifestyle led by the Carmelites, and much later I used to quote their example to the Daughters of Charity. After some months in Saragossa I transferred to the University of Toulouse from where I could visit my father more easily. He had drawn up his last will and testament on 7th February 1598 and died later that year.

On 19th September 1598 Bishop Salvat d'Iharse ordained me sub-deacon at Tarbes. The Council of Trent had decreed that in order to be ordained candidates should have received a letter of appointment. Mine was to the parish of Tilh, a fair sized village in the fertile Chalosse region. It was current practice at the time that an assistant while awaiting ordination should be in ministry.

The following December 19th Bishop Salvat d'Iharse ordained me as a deacon at Tarbes. (3) One year later, Monday 13th September 1599, even though a bishop had then been chosen for Dax, I received a dispensation to be ordained a priest by a bishop of my choice. The new bishop of Dax was James Dusault and had been permitted to stay on for a year in Bordeaux to complete the reorganisation of the Chapter at Saint-Seurin because he was their Dean. I would be only nineteen when I was ordained! This ran counter to the new Church laws which required candidates for Priestly Ordination to be at least twenty-four years old.

The dimissorial letter I received uses the phrase: “*being the lawful age.*” It was given by Canon William de Massiot, Vicar General of Dax. Did I mislead him by not acknowledging my real age? Did he let me through because the decrees of the Council of Trent had not yet taken effect throughout France? Similar cases were occurring elsewhere as various Nuncios complained about to Rome. Richelieu himself was ordained a Bishop at the age of twenty-two, and this did not prevent him becoming a cardinal.

In January 1600, Mgr Dusault took possession of Dax, so I could now be ordained. However, he immediately set to work reforming the diocese. He convened a synod, and drew up very strict directives on 18th April 1600. The Canons of the Chapter, who had ruled the diocese for many years in the absence of the bishop, would not accept the new bishop’s directives. They accused the bishop of abusing his authority, refused to cooperate and so rendered all ceremonies impossible. The bishop imposed sanctions. The canons appealed. The bishop responded... the whole thing could take ages, and I was loathe to delay for years (the whole process went on in fact for almost four years!) Bishop Salvat d’Ihase wasn’t too worked up about such reforms, but I could no longer count on him, so I looked for another bishop, with the help of my relations. In this way, on Saturday 23rd 1600, I was ordained a priest by the Bishop of Perigueux, in Chateau-l’Eveque, near Perigueux, at the time of a general ordination. I shall add that the Bishop of Perigueux’s house had been destroyed by Protestants, and that the Cathedral, St Stephen’s, was half in ruins. Chateau-l’Eveque was not therefore a private residence but the bishop’s residence, and the little church there was the only usable Cathedral in the diocese.(4)

I had not completed my studies, but I had arrived! You may recall that the idea of becoming a priest was not my own. I had however stuck to my goal in good faith, but my objectives were human ones. I didn’t really understand what it means to be a priest...

If I had known then, when I had the boldness to do so, what I now know, I would have preferred to till the ground than to enter into such an awesome state in life. The older I become the more I feel this way because I realise each day how far I am from perfection which I should have obtained. (5)

That very year someone else laid claim to the parish of Tilh, having recourse even to Rome. Since my new bishop had directed in April 1600 that priests must reside in their parishes, I decided against this because I still had to complete my studies in Toulouse. This was the first setback to my pursuit of income.

NOTES

1. Abelly I,8
2. Abelly I, 9-10 and registers of catholicity, quoted by M Charles Blanc, "*M Vincent's Family Line*", in "*Tricentenary of the Death of St Vincent*" Société de Borda, Dax, 1960, pp118 and 122, and Archives of the Hospital of Dax, lodged in Department Archives of Les Landes in Mont de Marsan, "Register of the Charitable Institutions of Pymartet, etc."
3. Abelly I, 10-12; Collet I, 9-14. The parish of Tilh is about twenty km south-west of Dax, on the road to Orthez. Abelly says this appointment took place in 1600 after Vincent's ordination. However the text he quotes also mentions that the Episcopal see was still vacant which was not the case in 1600. All the relevant documents note the phrase "*named to an appointment*" as required by the Council of Trent from the moment of the sub-diaconate. The ordination letters are in Coste XIII, 1-6.
4. Coste XIII, 6-7.
5. Coste V, 568, around 1656, to the Canon of St Martin's, Dax.

In Rome

I was fairly religious, and as it was a Holy Year I made a pilgrimage to Rome. Pope Clement VIII impressed me so profoundly that I often spoke about him throughout my life, as for example on 17th October last. (1) Rome too impressed me greatly, there where is the visible head of the Church Militant, there where lie the bones of St Peter and St Paul, and so many other martyrs and holy people... This thought moved me so deeply that I was often brought to tears in spite of all my many sins. (2)

NOTES

1. Coste XII, 347-348. Dodin 768. CF XI, 352, September 1656; 80, 60,s. Dodin. Dodin 316 and 960; IX, 316-317, 30th May 1647; 468, 25th December 1648; X, 365, 18th November 1657; 593, 17th November 1658 Comb 212, 309, 707, 856.
2. Coste I, 114-115, 20th July 1631, to François du Coudray who had just arrived in Rome to negotiate approval of the congregation.

Return to Toulouse

Now I had to complete my studies in Toulouse while continuing to run a small boarding school which had been entrusted to me before my ordination. On October 12th, I received my baccalaureate in theology and a licence to teach Pierre Lombard's "Second Book of Maxims". I have never spoken of it but I kept all my notes. The second book deals with Creation, sin, grace and freedom. Little did I know that these would become the burning issues of the last twenty years with a movement called Jansenism. Janssen, Bishop of Ypres, wrote the "*Augustinus*", a collection of sayings of Augustine on the thorny issue of grace and human freedom.

I had now completed three four year periods of study: four in Dax College from 1592-1596; four more from 1597-1600, and four from 1601-1604. At this time University students were still called "scholars." In Toulouse the "high spirits of scholars" were in fact "student disturbances". Later in life I liked to refer to myself as a "fourth grade scholar". (1) In the new university trimester I began my career as a University professor as a tutor, teaching under the guidance of a senior lecturer. After two years I could progress to a doctorate and the title of Master. I had other plans as well, helped by my ability to make connections and my knowledge of law and litigation. In the spring of 1605 I left Bordeaux on some business which I kept very secret and which was also somewhat arrogant. But what a succession of events it gave rise to!

I discovered, on my return from Bordeaux, (2) a legacy in my favour from a kind old lady from Toulouse. The legacy consisted of some furniture and some land which the Tribunal at Castres (3) had judged in her favour to the value of some three or four hundred ecus which was owed to her by a scoundrel of a bad merchant. (4) With a view to recovering some of the legacy I sold up what I owned on the advice of some friends of mine. I needed the money also to pay off some debts that I had accrued and for the outlay that would be necessary to pursue this matter that I am reticent to speak of. (5) On my arrival I discovered that the rascal had left the district on foot of a lawsuit which the good woman had taken against him over the same debt. I heard he was living it up in Marseilles. My attorney advised me to pursue him to Marseille where upon his arrest I might recover two or three hundred ecus (In truth the situation required some action). As I hadn't enough money to pursue my plan, I sold the horse which I had hired in Toulouse with the intention of repaying the money on my return (6) – that is of course if my misfortune had not advanced as quickly as my dishonour in leaving

my affairs so confused. Of course this would not have happened if God had blessed my plans as I had hoped he would. I set out with this advice, caught my man in Marseilles, had him arrested (7) and collected three hundred ecus which he gladly handed over. (8) I was about to set out to return over land when a gentleman with whom I had stayed persuaded me to travel with him as far as Narbonne because the weather was favourable. This is what I did, hoping to arrive earlier and to save money or, as turned out, never to get there and to lose everything.

The wind was favourable enough to bring us that very day the fifty leagues to Narbonne if God had not allowed three Turkish vessels (9) to attack us. They were scouring the coast off the Gulf of Lyons to capture boats coming from Beaucaire (10) where one of the finest fairs in Christendom was held. They charged so fiercely that two or three of our crew were killed, all the rest wounded, including myself, with an arrow wound which will serve as an alarm clock for me for the rest of my life. We had to submit to these criminals who were like tigers and immediately hacked our captain to pieces in revenge for the loss of one of their leaders as well as four or five of their slaves which our people killed. They inflicted many wounds on us, put us in chains and proceeded to rob us of all we had. Having taken all their possessions they released those who had surrendered without resistance. Then, loaded with booty they headed for the Barbary (11) coast after seven or eight days.

I was brought to Tunis as a slave of Muslims in August 1605, and I had four different owners over this period. The last of these was a renegade from Nice who was a tenant on the estate belonging to the Sultan of Constantinople. He was what's termed a "temat" (an Arab word which I wrote phonetically as "t'omet"). Later I used the word "macerie" like all Europeans in North Africa. In the end I escaped with him. Being a Muslim he was able to discreetly source a small boat, an "esquif" (12) in June 1607. We landed at Aigues-Mortes, well away from danger, and from there we went to Avignon, a city of the Papal States where the renegade was reconciled, and I made the acquaintance of the Nuncio who was about to end his stay and return to Rome.

Let us draw some lessons from these events. I was constantly in pursuit of some income (13), but always frustrated, always in debt. My hopes were constantly deflated but I never gave up. I was constantly drawn to new plans, and failure forced me to postpone repayment of my debts, in spite of my good intentions. I knew that through a notary I could request a postponement in paying, by explaining the reasons for so doing. It is called a request to delay payment. As I was abroad, Avignon being a pontifical territory, I had to make this request in writing through my lawyer, M de Comet. I sent a copy of the same letter to a notary, M d'Arneudin, and also one to my mother, dated 24th July 1607.

(14) My letter had a second purpose: I had linked up with the Nuncio who had finished his term and was returning to Rome where

he promised me the means to find an honourable retirement by finding for me a good benefice in France. (15)

I was to follow the Nuncio to Rome, but in order to attain my goal I needed a true copy of my letters of ordination and my diploma as a bachelor of theology. I asked M de Comet to send them to me in Rome and promised to settle my long standing debts! Though preoccupied with these monetary plans, I still held on to my faith and piety... human nature certainly is complex. The letter to M de Comet reveals some aspects of my faith: Divine Providence which at that time I called 'Fortune', mindful of my Latin studies, the Blessed Virgin, and even the "Molinist" idea of the link between divine Grace and our freedom when I spoke of the death of M de Comet's brother which I could perhaps have prevented if I had known then the cures I had learned in Barbary.

At the end of October 1607, instead of going to Toulouse to resume my studies, I found myself back again in Rome among Mgr Montorio's set. This too slowed up my return to Dax and the settling of my debts. I had by now received a copy of my ordination certificate and my diplomas but still lacked the bishop's certificate. I wrote to M de Comet again on 28th February 1608 both to get this document and to renew my request for a delay on paying my debts. At this time I also wrote to the lieutenant general of the Tribunal in Dax, M de Lalande, asking him to forward the letter to the King's Procurator. While in Rome I pursued some study, joining up with my new patron and his friends as he delighted in explaining some strange new developments. These interesting novelties were accepted as part of the humanistic spirit of the times. Happily things have changed since then, and I feel embarrassed to have wasted time with such childish ideas and to have drawn Cardinals and the Pope into them. I have already burned the copy which M de Comet's nephew sent me last year, though I have not received the original which I had asked for. How I would love to get a hold of it and burn it (16) ...imagine that it could one day be published, much to my shame.

I was quite sensitive to the plight of those who were suffering hardship as I had come up against it myself. I knew the Hospital of Charity very well. It was run by the St John of God Brothers, and it inspired me to refer to it, 24th November 1617, in the rule of the first Conference of Charity which I set up in Chatillon-les-Dombes. (17) So many poor people in Rome at that time were being looked after through the good offices of Fr Camillus de Lellis who was still alive. His Religious, whom he had named "Servants of the sick poor" looked after the Holy Spirit

Hospital and cared for the sick in their homes. He used to refer to the sick poor as “*our lords and masters.*”

He used to say to his brothers: “*prayer which breaks the arm of charity serves no purpose*” and “*it is a counsel of perfection to serve the poor, and to leave God to find God in this way.*”

I used often quote these sayings later on. I later called the Ladies of Charity, and then the Daughters of Charity “*Servants of the sick poor.*” (18)

There were also in Rome since the fourteenth century several confraternities of lay-people, members of the Third Order of St Francis, and these tended the poor and sick in hospital and at home. As well as his religious, Fr Camillus also set up a confraternity of lay-people.

I must confess that I have never mentioned St Camillus since then. Two years ago I couldn’t even remember the name of the Camillians when I was referring to them when addressing the Daughters of Charity on 11th November 1657:

There is a congregation whose name I cannot recall, but they call the poor ‘our lords and masters’, and they are right to do so. (20)

If it had been the Hospital of Charity of the St John of God Brothers, you’d imagine I would remember. However, I haven’t spoken of them either since 1617, and yet I had dealings with them in Paris over a three or four year period.

NOTES

1. Abelly I, 12-13; 111, 83, 199, 204, and Coste XII, 135, 21st February 1659 and 293, 5th August 1659. On the disturbances, CF M.V. I, 35-37.
2. It is thought that the Duke d’Epernon summoned the saint to offer him an episcopal see. CF Collet vol 1 p15.
3. Tribunals set up by the Peace Treaty of 1576 dons the parliaments in Paris and Toulouse. They met in Castres to rule on matters concerning the religious reformers, Catholics and Protestants being represented equally.
4. “*Merchants*” not “*wicked*” as understood by Coste.
5. Could this refer to the offer of an episcopal see from the Duke d’Epernon, as told to Abelly by the Canon of St Martin in Dax?
6. Vincent was taking a huge risk as the owner of the horse could issue a writ to be repaid or take him to court. Either way, it is an admission of theft.
7. “*had him arrested*”: the law supported the claim of a creditor over his debtor. Being arrested was not a punishment but simply a way of ensuring that the debtor turned up. It seems unlikely in this particular case because

of the time span involved. One could not be constrained or arrested without judicial proceedings which took time. Given his knowledge of legal matters and his keenness in this matter, Vincent could have achieved this but the time constraints implied in his letter suggest that it would not have been possible. It is more likely that he threatened legal proceedings through a solicitor's letter, and in this way brought about a compromise as was the norm in this kind of situation.

8. Gladly (from '*content*') and not counting (from '*comptant*') as Coste rightly corrected. It is a technical term pertaining to legal matters, implying that a matter has been successfully dealt with and no further process of law will be required.
9. These were small vessels with a deck, very like the galley ships. They were rigged with just one sail and had between eight and sixteen benches with an oarsman at each with the use of both broad and narrow oars.
10. Beaucaire was the main market for produce from the East. The fair started on 22nd July every year and attracted a great number of vessels from Marseille, Cette, Aigues-Mortes and elsewhere. On their way home these vessels travelled in convoys or were escorted by galleys to protect them from attack. Pirates from the East or the Barbary Coast waited for them to pass by, lying in wait along the coast, not far from the mouth of the Rhone.
11. Coste I, 1-4, 27th July 1607, addressed to M de Comet, lawyer in Dax. This letter had a lengthy history. Its authenticity was questioned by Redier (1927) and Grandchamp (1928). These historians denied the truth of Vincent's captivity, basing their theory simply on the fact that the story seemed unlikely. Neither of them adverted to the specific aim of both letters, nor to the fact that they're addressed to a lawyer, a police chief, the king's procurator. Furthermore, they ignore the fact that both letters are not only signed but formally so by Vincent as is proper to formal letters. Vincent never formally signed letters like this but one would not take liberties with such influential people who would expect everything to be in order. A similar fate befell Fr Gracian, known also as Jerome of the Mother of God, a Carmelite who was a friend of Teresa of Avila and first Provincial of the reformed Carmelites. After his expulsion from the Order by Fr Doria he was captured at sea by pirates in 1593 and brought to Tunis where he endured terrible suffering. The cross was branded onto the soles of his feet with red hot pokers and he was almost burned alive twice. After seventeen months he was ransomed and reached Rome in the summer of 1595. Pope Clement VIII received him and reinstated him. CF *Carmelite Studies*, p270-271; Henry Peltier, *The History of Carmel*, Seuil, 1958, p148-149; *Dictionary of Spirituality*, VIII, 921-922. Could M Vincent have known this story? Probably not in 1607; but he could have learned it later through his contacts with Bérulle and Duval who with Gallemont were superiors of the Carmelites. One of these, Anne of St Barthelemy, remained in contact with Gracian. Such happenings were not uncommon and became the stuff of legends: in the fifteenth century Alan de la Roche, in his life of St Dominic, in describing the revelation about the Rosary, portrays the saint captured at sea off the coast of St James of Compostella. The saint

- goes on to convert the Saracen crew through the Rosary CF J. Guiraud: St Dominic, “*The Saints*”, Paris, 1934. p12, 210.
12. Coste I, 10, 14th July 1607, addressed to M de Comet. The word “*esquif*” in Spanish refers to a life-boat on a bigger vessel. It was a boat with oars, more sturdy than a small craft, and could boast a sail. It could therefore refer to a fairly strong boat, and there is no reason to doubt that there was only the two of them. One of those who refute Vincent’s captivity maintains that Vincent simply borrowed the captivity story from Cervantes in “*Don Quixote*”. Apart from the fact that this book was published in Spanish and in French after Vincent’s letter, and the fact that the two stories have little in common, Cervantes’ story being based in Algiers and on land, the word “*esquif*” never appears in Cervantes.
 13. Coste I, 1-2, 24th July 1607, and p18, 17th February 1620, addressed to his mother.
 14. Coste I, 12-13, 24th July 1607. CF Claude-Joseph de Ferriere, “*La Science Parfaite des Notaires*”, Paris 1682, in the last edition of 1733, Book VIII, Ch 6, Vol 2, p53.
 15. Coste I, 11, 24th July 1607, and p15, 28th February 1608.
 16. CF Coste VIII, 271; Collet I, 22.
 17. Coste XIII, 423. The town became Chatillon-sur-Chalaronne at the Revolution.
 18. Cicatelli: *Life of Fr Camillus*, Polycopiee, Pères Camillians, 1983. p27, 147. A Armanda, *An Unusual Coincidence: St Vincent de Paul in Rome and the relevant conferences of St Vincent de Paul*, Mission and Charity Review, no 10, April 1963, pp224-226.
 19. Pierre Alain, *St Camillus of Lellis*, Alsatia 1946, p62, 127. The same text appeared in 1982 using the name Guy de Bellaing, without reference to the earlier publication.
 20. Coste X; 332; Comb. 686.

In Paris

A year later, at the end of 1608, I arrived in Paris with my official documentation but no other assurance about my future. I often recall the fine promises of the Romans as I said to my confreres:

They distrust people in a hurry... and because they know that we French are always in a hurry they leave us waiting longest. (1)

There was no shortage of people from the Landes Region in Paris, and I was able to find lodgings in the Faubourg Saint Germain with a fellow countryman, Bertrand Du Lou, a judge from Sore (about twenty leagues north of Pouy). He was connected to a noble family called Plaisir, from Yvelines, a village to the west of Versailles and Villepreux near Marly-le-Roi. This family had a fine residence in Paris. (2)

I was fortunate to get to know some fine priests, especially M Pierre de Bérulle who was from a very different social background to mine, being connected to several important families. He was the king's Honorary Almsgiver. Maybe he showed some interest in my situation. He was working on the reform of the clergy and of the Church, and he had just brought some Reformed Carmelites of St Teresa to France. He guided me in my spiritual growth and in reading material. Since my time in Saragossa, I possessed

Los Libros de la Madre Teresa de Jesus, in tratado de su Vida otro del Camino de Perfeccion, otro llamado Castillo espiritual o Las Moradas, of Mother Teresa of Jesus (from Avila) in publication by Evora, 1583. There were other spiritual books in Spanish and in Italian, and these have all been brought here to St Lazare. (3)

My troubles however were not yet over! I got sick and the chemist's assistant who came with my medication stole my fellow country-man's purse, unknown to me. The purse contained four hundred ecus. When he came home and discovered the theft, naturally my host accused me. He threw me out, and even had me defamed in the parish. He complained also to M de Bérulle. I asked myself:

How are you to defend yourself? You are accused of something which is false. Ah well, I resolved, turning to God, I must put up with it patiently. (4)

All I could do was pack up and be gone... Six months later, the real culprit was arrested for another theft and admitted the whole story. My fellow country-man made up with me, but I had already found alternative accommodation in the “*rue de Seine*”, in a house where a picture of St Nicholas was displayed.

NOTES

1. Coste 11, 235, 17th March 1642; CF 263 and 313, 20th June and 21st November 1642.
2. Abelly I, 21, recollections of Canon of St Martin at Dax. He wrote “in the same room” from which was construed “a very simple room.” The person in question is the nobleman, Bertrand du Lou, a connection of the De Plaisir Family, CF Laurent Descourbes,
 Two inhabitants of the Landes Region in Paris at the beginning of the Seventeenth Century, M Vincent and Bertrand du Lou,
 (this text cites the minutes of the Parish council in Sore, from 1599 to 1618, without any specific reference) in “Fourth Century of the birth of St Vincent de Paul,” Society de Borda, Dax, 1982. It’s hard to see how this noble personage could be in simple rent accommodation; it is more likely that they were staying in the residence of the family itself.
3. “*Library Catalogue of St-Lazare, Vol 1, Ms 4169, kept in the Mazarine Library. M Joseph Guichard CM made these notes.*”
4. Abelly I, 21-23, Coste XI, 337, Dodin 300 9th June 1656. These two stories have the same source, but the texts differ too much Abelly simply to have touched up the story. They could have been narrated by M Vincent on different occasions, as was the case with the setting up of the first Confraternity of Charity at Chatillon. These accounts were given a year apart from each other CF Coste IX, 208 and 243. It is noteworthy that both accounts use only “my companion” without detailing the kind of lodgings.
5. Coste XIII, 13, 17th may 1610.

Queen Marguerite's Palace

As it happened, my new lodgings were “*near to the palace of Queen Marguerite,*” (1) the notorious Queen Marguerite whose marriage to Henry IV had been annulled, but who managed to hold on to a palace where she had a vast court. I only had to cross the street to encounter her household. I quickly became friends with her secretary, M Dufresne. I am grateful to him, and to my own bishop, Jean-Jacques Dusault, chief almsgiver of Queen Marguerite. The Queen was anxious to atone for the excesses of her own life by charitable works, and she enlisted me among her distributors of alms. (2)

From time to time I met the youthful Genevieve Bouquet at the palace. She too was assisting the poor, and would later become Sr Augustine, at the Hotel-Dieu in Paris. As superior, she reformed the Sisters and in 1634 the two of us made an agreement with the Ladies of Charity to visit the sick of the Hotel-Dieu under the guidance of Genevieve Fayet. This latter was the widow of Antoine Goussault, President of the Chamber of Commerce. Not for the first time did I see how Divine Providence set the scene for future undertakings through people I got to know.

I also came across the St John of God brothers in the St Germain des Près area. Four of them had been brought from Florence by Queen Marie de Medicis in 1601 to set up a hospital. They were still setting this up in a building in Rue des Saints-Pères, and were glad of any help I could give them for the sick by way of donations. (3)

By 1610 my future was beginning to unfold. I hadn't planned to stay in Paris and now a solution was on the way. On February 17 I sent my mother the letter I had already mentioned:

I hope that God will soon afford me the means to an honourable retirement so that I can spend the rest of my days with you. (4)

During this same year, on May 14th, Henry IV was assassinated by a monk who had been outraged, along with many Catholics, by Henry's alliance with Protestant countries to fight against Catholic countries, in particular Spain. Henry IV had also done much for the poor. He set up and gave subventions to hospitals. His death was a tragedy for France. Things began to look up for me however. On 17th May, an unexpected event took place. The Archbishop of Aix, king's advisor in the council of state, signed over to me the Benefice of the Cistercian monastery of St Leonard-de-Chaumes, in the diocese of Saintes. As a result, I would receive

all the benefits and revenues of this monastery with arrears. (5)

A condition of this benefice was that I was to give the Archbishop of Aix “*a benefice of three thousand six hundred pounds every year*” and

to see to the rebuilding of the monastery chapel, presently in ruins, and the establishment of two Cistercian monks in the monastery. (6)

Was I naïve to accept such conditions? Not only did I receive nothing, but I was assailed by several claimants and usurpers. I was due to take possession of the property on October 16th on foot of a bull from Rome received through my bishop, JJ Dusault. As it was not possible to reside at the monastery, I gave power of attorney to Pierre Gaigneur, on 28th October, so that he could represent and defend my cause. This turned out not to be a wise decision because on 3rd February 1611 another claimant to the title of prior, one Andre de la Serre, brought me before the tribunal in La Rochelle. Now La Rochelle was in Protestant hands. On May 28th, the Archbishop of Aix took a case against me. I was dragged into a whole litany of court cases, and quickly learned how to defend myself, while being condemned by people more powerful than I. (7) In any case, the means to look after my family were not forthcoming. I had to stay in Paris, travelling from time to time to La Rochelle where, among other things, I made the acquaintance of a very good priest, a zealous teacher of the faith, Jacques Gasteaud. He gladly gave me the loan of money when needed. Gasteaud was, like myself a disciple of Fr Bérulle, and would later establish the Oratory of La Rochelle. Later on I will refer to La Rochelle as an example in a sermon of teaching the faith.

Meanwhile the man who stole the money from the judge from Sore with whom I was lodging came to his senses some hundred leagues from here and wrote to ask for forgiveness.(9)

The judge himself, Bertrand Du Lou, wrote to me to ask for pardon also.

A Crisis of Faith;

There was a theologian at the Court of Queen Marguerite. He didn't have a significant post but was troubled with serious doubts about faith.

Being troubled in this way, the theologian confided in me...

Such was the depth of his struggle that I advised him, as often as need be, to point or face towards Rome, or towards a church, determining that by this gesture he believed all that the church teaches. (10)

In spite of various efforts, neither his nor my prayers produced fruit. Things got so bad that by 1611 or so I feared he would die in this condition...

I turned myself over to God in prayer asking him to deliver this poor man from the danger he was in, and offering to take on his doubt myself to the extent that the Lord would have me bear them. God delivered the priest entirely from his temptation, brought him peace of mind and enlightened his faith once more... At the same time however God allowed me to undergo a similar temptation which really troubled my mind from then.

Through prayer and self-denial I was able to accept all this with patience. I held on to two practices:

Firstly I wrote out the creed on a piece of paper which I then carried inside my clothes next to my heart... I then made an agreement with the Lord that every time I put my hand to this paper next to my heart I was renouncing the temptation... Secondly... I determined to act against the temptation by doing something in faith to honour and serve Jesus Christ... and so I began to visit and comfort the poor and sick. (11)

I will return to this subject.

During the same year, 1611, I went to see M de Bérulle more often, and finished off my spirituality studies. As I mentioned earlier, I already had the Life and Works of Teresa of Avila since their publication in Spanish. These works began to appear in French in 1601. (12) St Teresa taught me to centre my life on the humanity of Jesus, and directed me, like Francis de Sales, to a certain freedom and flexibility in the spiritual life. I have referred to this throughout my life, and have on numerous occasions explained it. I had also brought with me other spiritual works in Spanish, Italian and French, such as Scupoli's *Spiritual Combat* and some Jesuit works. I also purchased new books. All of these are in the community library in St Lazare. (13) Thanks to Fr de Bérulle, I was introduced to *The Rule of Perfection* by the Capuchin Benet of Canfield

which had recently been published at the end of 1608. The principal idea which I took from this work was that perfection is to be found in seeking, discerning and following God's will. To do this one must renounce oneself and all self-will. I never actually bought this book so it is not in our library, and I never referred to Benet of Canfield. (14)

I greatly valued Bishop Francis de Sales' *Introduction to the Devout Life* which had been published at the beginning of 1609, and which I did buy. (15) This book is one of the first to explain that holiness is not just for religious but for laypeople too, indeed for every state in life. In fact, de Sales maintains that laypeople can attain the height of religious perfection: continual union with God in a spirit of obedience, chastity and poverty through listening to the word of God. He recommends a promise that can be renewed, and which is not unlike religious vows. (16) I was very impressed by this, as well as by his guidelines for prayer. I had the pleasure of meeting him later and became his friend. I revisit his writings often and strongly recommend them and quote them. (17)

NOTES

1. Coste XIII, 14, 20th October 1611
2. Abelly I, 21; Collet I, 31.
3. Collet I, 26; *Monsieur Vincent*, Coste I, 68 The money given to this hospital which the decree of 20th October 1611 refers to in Coste XIII, 14-19 was not a gift as some biographers claim. It was in fact compensation due for a ship that had foundered in 1594 during a battle with the Spaniards. The Minister of Finance, who knew Vincent, donated this money through a number of intermediaries on condition that it not be held back for too long. While Vincent became the owner of this money it was for a specific purpose, not for himself. Careful reading of the text, particularly the very technical use of language bears out that the money was "transmitted" and not "given". Nowadays it would refer more or less to the washing of silver.
4. 4 Coste I, 18.
5. Coste XIII, 8-13, 17th May 1610, contract of handover.
6. 1941-1942, p260, lease of 14th May 1610, and National Archives, Central Records of Paris Lawyers. The original has "twelve hundred pounds", but the archbishop crossed out the word "twelve" and wrote in the margin "three thousand six hundred" that is three times more. The official signatures of the Archbishop, Vincent and the lawyers also appear in the margin. *The Annals* overlook this change written in the margin. After the July 1607 letter which was sent to the notary as well as to M de Comet, this is the first legal document known to have been drawn up by M Vincent. It is likely, however, that others exist long before this one, but these have not survived or have not yet been discovered.
7. Coste XIII, 38 *Annales* 1941-1942, pp. 262-265; and other sections in

the Archives of Charente-Maritime, sections B and 3E, and the National Archives, General Record.

8. CF an acknowledgement of gratitude to Jacques Gasteaud, Coste XIII, 19, the 7th December 1612. The talk on religious instruction is in Coste XIII, 25-30. Through his association with Bérulle from early 1611 Jacques Gasteaud joined the Oratory which was established on 11th November 1611. He undertook to set it up at La Rochelle on 3rd January 1612; in February he became Vicar in charge and parish priest of St-Jean. On 7th January 1614 he was superior of the Oratory of La Rochelle, then in other towns as well. CF *Bérulle's Letters*, by R Dagens, I, 124, 148, 184, 192; also 227, 293 note 2, 188 and 189, 48 note 3, and 111, 373 in note form. According to A Dodin, the good "parish priest of La Rochelle" whom M Vincent speaks of to the missionaries on 23rd May 1659 (Coste XII, 256, Dodin 674) is Jacques Gasteaud. CF

"St Vincent de Paul Catechist, on Religious Instruction according to M Vincent de Paul" in *Catechese*, and "St Vincent de Paul's Conference on Religious Instruction. An historical and literary approach", *Catechese*, October 1960, p58. He was parish priest in the town, in La Rochelle. As regards these words of St Vincent, they are presented in oral style from the notes taken by Brother Ducourneau, and not M Vincent's exact words. We should not take the phrase "*in La Rochelle*" literally and the identification seems unlikely. On the other hand, M Vincent said that he visited the Fathers of Christian Doctrine in Toulouse, which refers to Bérulle's Oratory. It is possible that he did visit these priests in Toulouse because Bérulle was associated with the Congregation of Christian Doctrine of Cesar de Bus and of Romillion. Most of these, followers of Romillion, linked up with the Oratory and moved away from Cesar de Bus. It remains to be seen if this is the same Congregation as in Toulouse. The identification of the two is not clear, but possible. We must admire Vincent's loyalty to his friends however.
9. Coste XI, 337; Dodin 300, 9th June 1650, which says "six months later"; Abelly I, 23, says "six years" and Collet I notes "M de Saint-Martin's document for a ten year period". On balance, we should lean towards the texts of the repetitions of prayer which were written down as Vincent spoke, and not M. de Saint-Martin whom the biographers favour, but who was writing from memory much later.
10. Abelly 111, 116-117; Coste XI, 32-4; Dodin 896-898.
11. Abelly I, 117-118, quoting a third party whom I transmit in the first person. M Vincent, while telling his confreres about the theologian's crisis of faith (Coste XI, 32-4; Dodin 896-898), did not add this solution to the difficulty.
12. CF A Dodin, *Francis de Sales, Vincent de Paul, Friends*, OEIL, 1984 p88, note 90.
13. This library was sacked along with the Archives on 13th July 1789. Surviving texts are in various Paris libraries, and the catalogues are in the Mazarin Library; the first of these catalogues what M Vincent owned. CF typewritten sections, CM Archives, Paris. During the Beatification Process, a Parisian bookshop owner gave evidence that Vincent bought lots of books

- from him (an unpublished collection, partly in Italian, partly in Latin) in the Archives of the Motherhouse in Paris; I haven't been able to locate the original French text).
14. This book doesn't appear in the catalogue of the St Lazare library, and the copy from Troyes in the Municipal Library belongs to the Oratory and not the Congregation of the Mission (CF Jean Orcibal, *Benet of Canfield, The Rule of Perfection*, P.U.F. 1982, Introduction p19). We must therefore reassess M Dodin's note on the conference of 7th March 1659 on '*Conformity to the will of God*' in his publication, Dodin p567: "Influenced by the 'Rule of Perfection', etc" and in "M Vincent de Paul's teaching source," *Mensis Vincentinus, Vincentiana*, Rome 1984, p551. M Dodin, who had discovered the copy from Troyes, concluded that it belonged to the Vincentians which is not the case, nor did it appear in St Lazare. If Vincent was influenced by it, it can only be by way of a distant recollection.
 15. First catalogue of St Lazare, Mazarin Library; typewritten extracts, in the Archive of the CM in Paris. See Dodin, "*What M Vincent read,*" (reading material from Francis de Sales), *Annals* vol 106-107, 1941-1942, pp 239-248, vol 110-111, 1945-1946, pp447-464 and vol 112-113, pp479-497; *Francis de Sales, Vincent de Paul, Friends*, p40, 68, 94 and note 205; "The source of M Vincent de Paul's teaching", *Mensis Vincentianus, Vincentiana* 1984, p544-555.
 16. See *Introduction to the Devout Life*, in the Annecy publication vol 111, 1893 Part 3, chs 11-16, pp172-194, Part 5, ch 1, p339-340
 17. Coste XIV (General Appendix), to *Francis de Sales* p222.

Influences

I want to try to explain a little about how I saw things. You may have noticed how since early on in life I have experienced much more failure than success in my plans... I must acknowledge that I mingled St Paul's notion of the unfathomable ways of Providence with the popular notions of pagan writers about the whims of fortune. I spoke of this to M de Comet, on 24th July 1607:

If fortune had not conspired to make me more envied than imitated, alas, it was only so that I should be an example of its uncertainty and inconstancy, showing how grace becomes disgrace and happiness unhappiness! (1)

In 1610, when writing to my mother on 17th February, I had hoped God would bless my efforts, but deep down I felt that fortune was unpredictable. Advising her to encourage my brother to send one of my nephews to study I added:

My setbacks, coupled with the little help I have been to the family, may make him unwilling to do this; but he should remember that present misfortune often presupposes future happiness. (2)

In other words, while trusting in God, I tended to interpret events simply and philosophically like the Greek and Roman sages of my college days. On the other hand, by 1611, I began to sense that this long line of disappointments might be a sign from God speaking to me through them. The way I reacted to the false accusation from a fellow countryman was a start... My sessions with M de Bérulle and others, as well as my ongoing studies, little by little helped me to see things through the eyes of faith and trust in God. It would take me some time to integrate all this into my personality before I could really begin to live it fully... a lot of time and much divine grace! In the meantime as I continued to visit and help the poor I found myself thinking less about my crisis of faith and thinking more about what Jesus said:

Whatever you did to the least of these, you did to me.

A day would come when I would really try to see things as God would see them, and when I would speak thus to others... for example I used a clear image quite recently when speaking to the Daughters of Charity

on 23rd July 1656:

We are like a piece of rock that might be sculpted into a statue of Our Lady, St John or some other Saint. How should the sculptor set about his aim? He has to take a hammer and chisel and remove all superfluous matter. In so doing he uses such force that he seems to be destroying the rock... God does something similar with us. (3)

And of course God never stopped doing so with me!

I used also to visit the priests M de Bérulle gathered around him. These included Adrian Bourdoise who was only 27 (I was 30), Andre Duval, aged 47, who was a professor in the Sorbonne and superior, along with Bérulle, of the Carmelites in France. There was also François Bourgoing who, though four years younger than I, was already parish priest of Clichy. (4) Through these men I not only deepened my spiritual discernment but I also broadened my apostolic outlook. I really needed to take on the role of a pastor. M de Bérulle was about to set up the Association of the Priests of the Oratory inspired by the example of Philip Neri in Rome. (5) François Bourgoing was one of the five people involved in this project and, as he needed to be replaced in Clichy, my name was mentioned.

NOTES

1. Coste I, 1-2. This identification of luck and Providence was made explicit by Richelieu in his "Political Testament" written probably during the years 1634-1640, CF publication of Françoise Hildesheimer, History Society of France, Champion Bookshop, Paris, 1995, p70.
2. Coste I, 19.
3. Coste X, 182-183; Comb 588.
4. Coste, *Monsieur Vincent*, I, 73.
5. Bérulle, *Letters*, published by Dagens I, 129.

Parish Priest!

On 13th October 1611, François Bourgoing resigned his parish in favour of me: at last I was a parish priest! And yet, deep down, I was in no great hurry to begin my ministry. I still wanted to overcome the problems I was having with my monastery of St Leonard de Chaumes. I also wanted to spend some time in the nearby community of the Oratory, because Fr de Bérulle intended to welcome priests who did not fully belong to the Congregation but who wanted to deepen their spirituality for a fixed period of time. (1) My involvement with the St John of God brothers was also dear to me: this was evidenced when, just a week later, on 20th October 1611, I transferred to them fifteen thousand pounds which I had received the previous day. In the legal document you will see all the titles I had!

We the undersigned Pierre de Briquet and Denis Turgis, the King's notaries in his Paris law-court... M Vincent de Paul, honorary abbot of the monastery of St Leonard, Aumis in the diocese of Saintes, advisor and almsgiver of Queen Marguerite, at present in Paris, living... in Rue de Seine... out of the devotion and affection he has for the St John Baptist Hospital of the Order of Blessed John of God... and to increase the means of the prior and religious of the hospital in their care of the poor and sick, has given the sum of fifteen thousand pounds. This money to be used for the care of those who come daily in search of help, for their sustenance and care, and also to help pay for ongoing development of the building programme. The donor acknowledges that this money belongs to him, having been received from M Jean de la Thane through his lawyers Choguillot and Tulloue, on the 19th of this month and year. (2)

The deed also explains that this money arose, by way of two intermediaries, out of compensation from the King to the owners of a ship that was destroyed by the Spaniards in 1594! The terms of this deed were clear to me as I was familiar with legal jargon: what I received "in ownership" was not for me; rather it was "*a transfer*" for a specific purpose, and there was no way I could allow my family to benefit from this money. Those who benefitted from it did so through many good works and with a clear conscience.

On 11th November 1611, M de Bérulle, M Bourgoing and four other priests took up residence in a new house at the French Oratory.

I visited them regularly, even staying for some months, much to my benefit. At a later date when drawing up the Rules of my Congregation I took several points from their rule of life and their practices, as well as from the weekly Conferences with Bérulle. (3) The year 1612 brought serious trouble to the Kingdom of France. The Princes rose up against the Queen Regent, Marie de Medicis, and her closest allies, particularly Concini. As for me, I didn't take up my job as parish priest of Clichy until 2nd May 1612, and even then I held on to my room at Rue de Seine and continued to visit the Oratory. (4) This was my first time back among the ordinary country people since I was 15. I was now 31. At last I discovered the simple joy of being a priest among the people:

The people were so good and attentive that when I told them to make their confessions on the first Sundays of the month, they did so willingly. Everyday I witnessed the progress these souls made. I was so happy and so consoled by all of this that I used often tell myself: "My God how fortunate to have such good people!" Moreover I used to say: "I don't believe the Pope is as happy as a parish priest among such good people. (5)

Human nature, however, is complicated. We don't suddenly convert, nor is conversion ever total... We can have all sorts of deep and spiritual notions but they don't always express themselves in our actions. In some situations we can do all kinds of apostolic works while remaining very earthly in others. That was how I was. As parish priest of Clichy I loved my people, and yet I held on to my lodgings in Rue de Seine and continued to accrue debts especially in my efforts to sort out the St Leonard de Chaumes situation, near La Rochelle. Jacques Gasteaud helped me out here. Look at this legal document dated December 1612:

M Vincent de Paul, priest and abbot of the monastery of St Leonard, who lives at Rue de Seine, Paris, acknowledges to M Jacques Gasteaud, theologian living in La Rochelle, the debt of three hundred and twenty pounds.(6)

I remained in Clichy for sixteen months, teaching the children, helping the poor and sick, encouraging people to celebrate the sacraments, and setting up a Rosary Confraternity. I initiated the restoration of the Church which was not completed until 1630. (7) I also set out to establish a clerical school for twelve young people, one of whom, Antoine Portail (8), who was born in 1590 in Beaucaire, had come to Paris to study. We maintained contact after I left Clichy. Portail was ordained priest in

1622 and became my first and faithful associate in the missions. Once again Providence was preparing well in advance. I should also note that the young nobleman Alexander Hennequin from Clichy who was two years younger than I, and had lost his father at the age of six, had as tutors his cousin Hennequin de Vincey and another cousin through marriage, Louise de Marillac, who was born in 1591 and who visited Clichy for the purpose of family gatherings. Little did I know that she would become a close helper and Foundress of the Daughters of Charity.

I believed that God's grace had begun to change me even though I still had some human and earthly values. I had learned patience in the face of adversity, trust in the ways of Providence and a sincere search for spiritual development. I also had a leaning towards the poor and sick as well as experience in pastoral ministry. M de Bérulle, who had become my spiritual director, thought that I should widen my experience. At this time it was not an ecclesiastical benefice that presented itself, but something better still: a good position in one of the most noble French families.

NOTES

1. Abelly I, 24; Collet I, 36 note u. On the possibility of short stays at the Oratory: Bérulle, letters, published by Dagens I, 118-119, CF Yves Krumenacker, *The French school of Spirituality*, Cerf, 1998, p139 (who seems to restrict the third group of clerics in formation, whereas Bérulle wrote: "people who are connected in a straightforward way... who wish to be formed in the traditions and rules of ecclesiastical life" and then states that they must be Priests).
2. Coste XIII, 14-15. Jean de la Thane also appears on 14th May 1610 (*Annals of the CM*, Vol 106-107, 1941-1942, p260-262) and 17th May 1610 (Coste XIII, p11).
3. Bérulle began with some organisational matters and some practical suggestions, in his 'Weekly Conferences' from 1611-1615. Elements of these turn up in St Vincent (vols I and II of his *Complete Works*, Cerf 1995).
4. Coste XIII, 17-18. His lodgings in Rue de Seine are named in some subsequent documents.
5. Coste IX, 646, 27th July 53; Comb 426.
6. Coste XIII, 19. CF the earlier note on Jaques Gasteaud.
7. Abelly I, 25-27; Collet I, 36-39. For religious instruction (teaching) CF Dodin "St Vincent de Paul, Teacher" in *Catechese*, October 1960 p58. For the church, Abelly I, 26 says the church was poor; Collet I, 38 adds that it was "*Falling into ruin*", which is untrue.
8. Coste, *Monsieur Vincent* I, 75, quoting the notebooks of Brother Robineau, published by A Dodin, "M Vincent as described by his Secretary", OEIL, 1991, p34.

Teacher

My long pursuit of success reached its goal in the latter half of 1613. I received

the position of teacher of the children of Philippe-Emmanuel de Gondi, Count of Joigny and General of the Galleys of France. (1)

Pierre, the eldest, was eleven, the second son, Henri, was two or three, and the youngest, Jean-François-Paul, had just been born. Originally from Florence about a century previously, the de Gondi family were Lords of a large section of the Royal lands, while the Archbishopric of Paris was practically theirs, being passed from uncle to nephew. M de Gondi was however deeply in debt because, even though deeply religious and upright, he maintained a huge retinue. The General's wife had increased the family estates with Folleville among others. She was extremely pious and anxious to progress in virtue, to the point of being scrupulous. (2) For my own part:

I took it as a maxim to see the General in God and God in him and to obey him accordingly; to compare his wife to Our Lady, to come before them only when summoned, or for some pressing matter. (3)

I went to live with them, and travelled around with them to their various residences and castles, in Paris, Joigny, Montmirail, Villepreux, Folleville, etc. (4)

At the same time I held on to the monastery of Saint-Leonard (5) and the parish of Clichy for which I arranged cover through a curate who ran the parish while I visited when possible. In this way Claude Gilbert whom I baptised on 9th October 1623 became a priest and curate at Clichy, before later being parish priest of Montmartre. I held on to the position of Parish Priest of Clichy until 1626. (6)

NOTES

1. Abelly I, 27.
2. Coste, *Monsieur Vincent* I, 80-82.
3. Coste I, 354, 29th September 1636.
4. Coste, *Monsieur Vincent* 80, 81, 83. Joigny is south of Sens; Montmirail, in Champagne is South of Epernay; Villepreux is north-west of Versailles; and Folleville is south-west of Amiens.
5. Coste XIII, 37 and Coste, *Monsieur Vincent* I, 76-78, 83.
6. Abelly I, 26-27. Coste, *Monsieur Vincent* I, 77. On 22nd September 1623 he set up a Confraternity of Charity in Clichy.

Deliverance from My Crisis of Faith

Throughout these years I kept contact with a number of people including the theologian who had the crisis of faith which God had transferred to me. This raw experience lasted for three or four years, throughout 1611, 1612, 1613 if my memory serves me correctly.

It did nothing for my temperament which was inclined to be dour and gloomy (1) while being prone to fits of temper. The General's wife was anxious about this:

fearing that I was unhappy in their home... I prayed and asked God to transform this dry off-putting temperament of mine and to make me kind and gentle. By the Grace of God, and some effort on my part to control my agitation, I became less morose. (2)

It took years of effort however, and I would always have to struggle to become more gentle.

In my room in the de Gondi household I lived "like a Carthusian" but when we were in the towns and villages, I visited the poor and sick to preach and teach. I heard confessions also, and people confided more readily in a priest who didn't live among them. (3)

One day, around the year 1614, I formulated a strong and lasting resolution to honour Jesus Christ more fully and to follow him more perfectly than before by devoting my life to the service of the poor. No sooner had I formulated this resolution in my mind than by an intervention of divine grace all the temptations of the devil in my spirit disappeared. My heart felt free and my soul was so full of light that I seemed to understand all the truths of the faith clearly. (4)

That experience changed my life, my spirituality and my actions. I have always thereafter believed that we should honour and serve Jesus Christ in the Eucharist and in the poor where he is equally present since the suffering members of his Mystical Body are bound to him in His Passion.

At this same time, from 1613 onwards, the priests of the Oratory began to give Missions in the countryside. M de Bérulle had set it as one of their aims, and they also had "*a special concern for the formation of priests.*" (5)

I, meantime, was still in search of benefices, and thanks to M de Gondi, I became PP of Gamaches en Vexin, on 28th February 1614,

through the offices of the Vicar General of Rouen. Madame de Gondi asked me to take on her spiritual direction with all her worries and scruples. I tried to help her overcome these as best I could. As regards matters of state, they remained troubled: Louis XIII declared himself ready for office at the age of 14, on 27th October 1614. He wanted to shake off his mother's patronage and so more wars ensued... and these have only now come to an end with the treaties of Westphalia (1648) and the Pyrenees (7th November 1659).

My spiritual life developed steadily. I grew in reverence for the Holy Eucharist especially, I meditated a lot on the life of the Most Holy Trinity and the work of the Three Divine Persons for our salvation, especially through the Incarnation of the eternal Son of God in the womb of the Blessed Virgin. These were truths I preached. (7)

On 27th May 1615 I obtained another ecclesiastical benefice, in the Chapter of the Canons of Ecouis, in Normandy, north of Andelys. The General of the Galleys was patron of this chapter along with another nobleman. As the Canon treasurer had died, I obtained this position. I was represented by a proxy at the installation, and thereafter also, except for 16th September when I presented myself to take the promise to fulfil my duties while asking that I be allowed to have a substitute.

On Wednesday 16th September 1615 the Chapter met, and I attended in person to take the oath of fidelity. I took the oath and signed the roster of duties that were involved. I then requested permission to fulfil these duties by way of a substitute and this was granted. We exchanged the sign of peace and I invited everyone to dinner on the next day, the date of the Church's dedication, in celebration of my appointment, according to custom.

And I never set foot there again, while accepting the stipend which is part of the honorarium due to Canons. Seven months later, on 20th April 1616, the other patron intervened with the Chapter asking that I be compelled to take up my post along with two others who were also absent: I received a warning, the General obtained for me a reprieve which was read out to the Chapter on 25th May. I don't remember how much longer I held on to this benefice. (8) On 29th October 1616, I finally relinquished the monastery of Saint-Leonard-de-Chaumes in favour of François de Lanson, a priest and king's advisor and almsgiver, who was prior at St-Etienne d'Ars in the Ile de Re. He lived in Paris in the Rue des Cordeliers.

NOTES

1. Abelly III, 117; Collet I, 99.
2. Abelly III, 177-178.
3. Abelly I, 28.
4. Abelly III, 118-119; Collet I, 34. This strong and lasting resolution would become the fourth vow which Vincent formulated for his missionaries and for the Daughters of Charity: the vow of stability for all of one's life to serve the poor.
5. Bérulle, *Letters*, published by Dagens, I, 163-165.
6. Gamaches-en-Vexin is situated between Les Andelys and Gisors, 10km west of Ecouis and southwest of Rouen.
7. Two sermons on Holy Communion have survived from this period, written by St Vincent. In both he speaks of the Trinity and the Incarnation: Coste XIII, 30-37. Examples from later periods have not, unfortunately, survived. They may have survived the sacking of St-Lazare on 13th July 1789 or were lost when Vincent himself asked that a collection of sample talks be compiled from his and those of other missionaries.
8. Coste XIII, 19-24.
9. Coste XIII, 37-39.

Folleville

As my pastoral zeal grew I engaged with the workers on the de Gondi estates. The owners were charged with the spiritual welfare of their workers, something M de Gondi was very conscious of. On taking possession of the Joigny estate in early April 1616 on the death of his uncle the Bishop of Paris, the General commanded me to teach the catechism so that

the young people might be as well formed in their faith as he knew them to be in letters and arms. (1)

Since then I have always insisted on the importance of religious instruction of children and adults both formally and informally. I also took up the practice of encouraging parishioners to make a general confession of all past sins, confessed, overlooked, or previously unmentioned through fear... Bishop Francis de Sales advised this practice in his *“Introduction to the Devout Life.”* (2)

Since several types of sins were reserved to the Bishop, I had the practice, when working in any of the de Gondi territories, of asking for the required faculties from the local bishop. As a result I still had my faculties from the Vicar General of Sens because he replied by return of courier. (3)

Even though she was pained by my absence because of her scruples, Madame de Gondi encouraged me in this work because she loved her tenants. Bishop de Sales’ other great work *A Treatise on the love of God* was published at the beginning of August 1616. I read and reflected on it between 1616 and 1620, (4) and highly recommended it along with his other work. I was at the same time taken up with the legal cases *“against various detractors and claimants of my monastery”* (5) of St-Leonard-de-Chaumes which still failed to bring in any revenue. Was it time to choose? On the 20th October 1616, I found a new claimant, more powerful than I perhaps, and I surrendered to him all my claims on this monastery: M François de Lanson, priest, adviser and king’s almsgiver. (6)

During the winter of 1616-1617 we were in Picardy, in the castle of Folleville (7) on Madame de Gondi’s estate south-east of Amiens. As was my practice, as well as teaching the children and attending to my prayer life and study, I was concerned for the tenants on her estate. Sometime around 20th January 1617 I was asked to go to Gannes about two leagues away,

to hear the confession of a poor man who was seriously ill, a man who was one of the most respected in his village. It turned out however that he had sins which he had never dared confess, and this he acknowledged late to Madame herself: “Madame, I was damned had I not made a general confession because of serious sins which I hadn’t dared to confess.”

This man died shortly afterwards and my lady, realising the necessity of general confessions, requested me to preach next day on this topic “*in the Church of Folleville*”. I did so, and God so blessed the work that all the people made a general confession. (8)

But the crowd was so big that being overwhelmed with only one other priest to help me, Madame sent for the Jesuits in Amiens to come and assist us. She wrote to the Rector who came in person, but being unable to stay long, he sent Fr Fourche who helped us with preaching and confessions. (9)

We moved on to the neighbouring villages of the estate and continued our work. God blessed us and great crowds came. It was the Feast of the Conversion of St Paul, the 25th January, and we had given the first mission talk which God hadn’t allowed to happen by coincidence.

I must emphasise the importance of the penitent reporting this to Madame de Gondi. Her role in all of this is most important. I had often heard serious sins never before confessed and was used to dealing with similar situations so that I didn’t pay any particular attention to this event. It was only much later, looking back on my life, that I understood its meaning. I couldn’t speak of these experiences because of the sacramental seal which requires utmost secrecy. Now, however, as the man had confided in Madame de Gondi and that she had spoken of it I was at liberty to speak of the serious spiritual condition in the countryside using this example. I must also acknowledge Madame’s role as lady of the estate: as with M de Gondi the previous year in Joigny, she permitted me to preach general confession in her estates – she had already granted that permission but now in a more solemn fashion. She was anxious about the salvation of her tenants and encouraged me, even if it did nothing to lessen her own scruples. (10) Moreover, such was the demand that I could not continue alone.

That was the other achievement due to Madame de Gondi’s intervention: I realised that I should not conduct missions alone, but with a group of priests. I’ve never forgotten that lesson, never again ministered alone, but always in community. Later on I pulled things together around

the feast of the Conversion of St Paul, after the Congregation of the Mission was founded. I told my confreres that this was the start, not of my missionary life since I was going around the villages since 1614, helping the priests, preaching and hearing confessions: this date marked the start of the mission through community. And so, from February 1617, my time was spent evangelising the villages in the estates of Madame de Gondi, while continuing to oversee the education of her children which was still my primary responsibility.

The Oratorians continued giving “missions in the towns of the diocese wherever the bishop sent them for periods of two or three weeks in each place.” M de Bérulle wrote to Hugues Quare about these between February and September of 1617. (11) My predecessor in Clichy, the Oratorian François Bourgoing, had travelled with Bishop de Marquemont in May and June 1614 on his pastoral visits in the diocese of Lyons, particularly to Chatillon-les-Dombes (5th-7th May). This was the foremost parish of the district having been conquered by Henry IV from Savoy in 1595 and rejoined to France by the Treaty of Lyons in 1600. Fr Bourgoing had conducted a mission there in 1616. The Archbishop of Lyons, Mgr de Marquemont, wishing to reform the Church, wanted to establish the Oratory in Lyons but was opposed by the Canons. On 18th October 1616 the bishop wrote to Fr de Bérulle asking him to establish the Oratory in Chatillon to help evangelise the district and to send Fr Bourgoing if possible as superior, “or someone of his stature”. (12)

Eventually on 3rd December the contract setting up the Oratory in Lyon was signed, with Fr Bence as superior. In January 1617, Fr Bourgoing was still in Lyons, but Bérulle sent him to set up a foundation in Rouen. On 7th January the Archbishop gave way to the claims of a diocesan priest, Lourdelot, whose claim to Chatillon was supported by Rome. The bishop held fast his own designs however and obtained for this difficult position that of a canon at Saint-Pauls in Lyons on 30th March, in return for which he surrendered his position as PP of Chatillon (13) and Bérulle set about getting someone suitable. Meanwhile there was increasing unrest in Paris. The hostility between the young king Louis XIII and his mother Marie de Medicis led to her being exiled to Blois. Concini, her ally, was finally arrested, but while trying to defend himself, he was killed on 24th April 1617. Richelieu was able to engineer a clever reversal of loyalties so that having been earlier dismissed, he regained favour with the young Louis XIII.

NOTES

1. Coste XIII, 25-30. The mention of the Count's entry into his town and of the motive for this sermon is in the manuscript, but Vincent blocked it. Coste did not include it, even in note form; the date of death of the uncle gives us the date of the sermon.
2. St Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, Publication by Princeps, Annecy. Ch 6
3. Coste I, 20.
4. CF Dodin, *Francis de Sales, Vincent de Paul, Friends* OEIL, P28
5. Coste XIII, 38.
6. Coste XIII, 37-39.
7. Abelly, I, 32.
8. Coste XII, 78; Dodin 420.
9. Coste XI, 4-5; Dodin 863.
10. CF Coste I, 22.
11. Bérulle, *Letters* 1, 235-236. Clearly M Vincent did not know Bérulle's letters! But he did visit often and so could have known about the activities of the Oratory. For want of any other documentation, Bérulle's letters are our best source of information.
12. Copy in the department Archives of Rhone, Lyons, History section. The original seems to have disappeared. Chatillon-les-Dombes was renamed Chatillon-sur-Charlaronne at the Revolution. In the seventeenth century Buenens was the parish, to the south-east of Chatillon. A few houses remain, but no trace of the church. Did Bourgoing set up the Confraternity of the Holy Rosary in Chatillon as a source of piety? It was not in existence in 1614 before the pastoral visit, though three legal inventories describe the rich ornamentation of the chapel. It was established at the end of 1614 or the start of 1615.
13. The Archives of the Rhone, Lyons had no knowledge of Bishop Marquemont's correspondence with Bérulle. Coste XIII, 45-47 gives an erroneous version of Vincent's nomination to Chatillon, and his motives, with exception of Bérulle's intervention.

Chatillon

From 1617 onwards, I wanted to be fully engaged in missions because it was too difficult to combine the roles of teacher, almsgiver for Madame de Gondi and pastor. Fr Bérulle offered me the parish of Buenens and Chatillon which I accepted, so that he put in motion the process of my appointment with Mgr de Marquemont, Archbishop and Count of Lyons. I said nothing of this to M or Mme de Gondi for fear they might intervene with Bérulle to prevent this plan which I held to firmly. I left Paris in July 1617 on the pretext of a short trip, (1) and my appointment was signed on Saturday 29th July in Lyons, by the Vicar General, as the bishop was away. On Tuesday the 1st August I was solemnly installed in the Church in Buenens, then in the Church in Chatillon (2) exactly five years and three months after Clichy (where I was still PP!). I was welcomed by the curates and the priests of a Society founded in 1478 by Mgr Charles de Bourbon, Archbishop of Lyons. This was some sort of Chapter of priests whose duties were to pray the Office in common and offer Masses established by families for their deceased members. They also administered the sacraments, and in the course of his pastoral visit in 1614, the Archbishop acknowledged their fidelity to praying the Office in common in the Church. I was able therefore to continue my ministry with a team of priests. I referred to this much later, on 13th February 1646, with the Daughters of Charity: it was “*a chapter of which I was the prior.*” (3)

The presbytery had unfortunately been rented out in 1615 by Jean Seraud – the previous PP – to Louis Gavend, a surgeon, for six years. However, my legal expertise helped me to have the agreement nullified so that I was able to reoccupy the house on 11th November, feast of St Martin. The tenant was of course reimbursed on condition of having the roof repaired. While waiting I lodged with Jean Beynier, sub-prior of the Confraternity of the Holy Rosary. (4) I then wrote to M de Gondi to tell him that I did not intend to return, and explained that I had none of the gifts required for a teacher in such a noble family. (5) I then set myself to work with great energy, helped by the curate and the Society priests. We carried out our ministry, and visited the sick and poor. When the curate, Guillaume Souvageon, withdrew I quickly replaced him with a priest from the diocese of Langres, Louis Girard, who was a great help to me.

On August 20th 1617:

One Sunday as I was vesting for Mass I received word that in an isolated house about a quarter league away everyone was ill and there was no one to look after them. This moved

me deeply so that I spoke about them in my homily, and God touched the hearts of the congregation to move them with compassion for these poor afflicted people. After lunch people gathered at the house of one good lady to see what help could be got. (7)

After evening prayer a parishioner and myself set out to visit the house. En route we met some women going ahead of us and others returning from the house – there was in fact a whole procession of people. On my arrival I visited the sick and then went to get for them the Blessed Sacrament from the Chapter to which I was prior, since there was no parish Church there. Having heard their confessions and given them Holy Communion, I considered how best to help them. I suggested to all those who had come to help to organise themselves so that they could take turns cooking each day not just for these people but for others who might need help in future. And so the first Confraternity of Charity was set up here. (8)

Eight women came together at once. Then I drew up a short rule which I put to them on 23rd August. (9) I began at this time to learn the local dialect to be better able to communicate with these people. (10) Meanwhile M de Gondi had conveyed my decision to his wife who, on receiving his letter on 24th September, wrote to me at length immediately imploring me to come back. I had to reply because she got M de Bérulle to intervene. I said I would go to Paris to reflect on the matter. (11)

I revised the rule for the Confraternity of Charity in a more detailed manner. I drew on my recollection of the rules of the Camillians and St John of God Brothers, as well as the rules of some older foundations. I was influenced also by my own experience and of course by dialogue with the Ladies themselves, a practice I would also employ in such matters. It took me three months from 24th August to 23rd November. I presented the finished rule (12) to the Confraternity on 24th November.

The said Confraternity will be known as the Confraternity of Charity after the Hospital of Charity in Rome; its members will be known as the Servant of the Poor or of Charity (13)

The rule addresses the spiritual life as well as the works of charity. It was customary in all Confraternities to link Christian living with works of charity. In this rule I emphasised a personal spiritual life based on humility, simplicity and charity with the aim of corporal and spiritual

service of the poor. I advised them to read each day a chapter of *The Introduction to the Devout Life*. (14)

The difference between this and other confraternities was that this was about the spiritual development of each of its members, not a particular devotion or a specific social category or group or guild of workers. This confraternity brought together all those women who wished to be involved – whether of noble standing or not – to serve the poor without distinction. (15) Another difference was that the running of the confraternity was a matter entirely for the ladies themselves. The procurator would have a voice like any of the members and need not necessarily be a priest. The parish priest too only had a voice “*like any of the servants of the poor.*” (16)

That was the main achievement of my time in Chatillon. There were not many Protestants there, no more than in the rest of this part of Bresse which had belonged to the Duchy of Savoy before its military conquest by Henry IV. This involved fierce fighting between 1585 and 1601 when the Treaty of Lyons annexed the region into France. Chatillon with its extensive vineyards had been taken by surprise during a period of truce; neither side envisaged the loss of this wealthy resource. Savoy had escaped the wars of religion, showing tolerance towards the Protestants while not favouring them. They were mostly located in Pont-de-Veyle, near Maçon. They had come from France when Maçon and that whole district were in Catholic hands. The Catholics there did not accept them just as they had not accepted the Catholics when they held power. In Chatillon there were about two dozen Protestant families out of about 1200 and relations with the Catholics were peaceful. Jean Beynier the Catholic sub-prior of the Confraternity of Our Lady of the Rosary (with whom I had lodged) who became procurator of the Confraternity of Charity, had a sister married to a Protestant, Jacques Garron. He was an elder in their ‘church’ though not a zealous participant in their meetings in Pont-de-Veyle. One of his sons who was eleven, Jean Garron, asked me to receive him into the Catholic Church. Much later, in 1656, he wrote to me. (17) I have never before spoken of this conversation.

In the course of my life I have spoken often of the wonderful conversion of the Count de Rougemont, a notorious swordsman, who completely renounced his sword and duelling, becoming a generous benefactor of the poor, and finally a Capuchin.

As I mentioned before, I knew a nobleman from Bresse, M de Rougemont, who had been a downright showman; he was a man of means who turned up at duels between quarrelling noblemen and who challenged others who disagreed with him to a duel. He told me all about it, including numerous

people he defeated, wounded or even killed. In the end God touched him so deeply that he took it to heart and recognising the dreadful state of his soul, resolved to change his life. Since his conversion, he went so far as to ask the Bishop of Lyons for permission to have the Blessed Sacrament in his private chapel so that he could reverence the Lord and deepen his piety which became well known throughout the land. I went to visit him once at his home, and he described to me his devotion, especially his detachment from worldly things.

“I am convinced”, he told me

“that if I have no worldly attachments I will be attached to God alone who is my only desire. I reflected on my friendship with other nobles, relatives, neighbours to see if any hold me back from God. I reflect too on my self-love, my possessions, pride, business, enjoyment to see if any are holding me back. And when I do notice something that holds me back from God, I pray, I cut it out, I break the link with it. These are my spiritual exercises.”

He told me the following in particular which I have always remembered. One day while travelling and mediating, he was examining himself to see if there was anything he still clung to instead of God. He ran his mind over his activities, possessions, friendships, his reputation, achievements, pleasures and so on. Finally his gaze rested on his sword. He thought to himself:

“Why do you still carry this? How could I do without it? This dear sword which has served me so well and while, after God, has preserved me from so many dangers! If I was attacked to this day I would be lost without it. But it could also happen that there would be an argument where you would be unable to control with your sword, and would offend God once more. What will I do, oh God? Am I so attached to something that brought me shame and sin? I find that this sword brings me only shame, I will no longer be so cowardly as to carry it.”

There and then, being close to a big rock, he got down off his horse, took the sword and began to strike it off the stone. He finally broke it and went away leaving it in pieces. He told me that this act of detachment,

breaking the iron chain that enslaved him, gave him such freedom that even though it went against his natural inclination, he never again felt attached to any finite thing. He was completely attached to God from then on. (18)

I had promised M de Gondi that I would go to Paris to consult with Fr de Bérulle. I left Chatillon in December, arrived in Paris on 23rd and went at once to speak to M de Bérulle. (19) He judged it best to return to the de Gondi family since the Parish of Chatillon was in good care of the priests who had worked with me, and the Confraternity which had grown strong and for which Louis Girard had set up a record of their accounts. (20) The following day, Christmas Eve 1617, I returned to the de Gondi household. M and Mme now knew my plans and duly released me from my duty as a teacher. Their estates provided me with a vast canvass for my work and we at once drew up a plan of evangelisation. On the 31st January 1618 I resigned as parish priest of Chatillon to devote myself entirely with joy and determination, to the work of missions. (21)

NOTES

1. Abelly I, Collet I, 54. We see that the biographers were wrong to say that Vincent wanted to get away to escape Mme de Gondi's scruples. He was called away to give missions in the district of Chatillon – he did not want to escape as some claimed forty-seven years later.
2. This is noted in Register 8, 1G 87, folios 319 v-320 r of the Archives of Rhone, Lyons.
3. Mgr de Marquemont approved the Statutes of the Society of Priests at Chatillon including the rules for the recitation and singing of the Office and the celebration of Mass. CF Coste IX, 243.
4. A copy of the legal document (19th August 1617) returning the Presbytery is in the possession of the Daughters of Charity in Chatillon. All the records of the lawyer have disappeared. Charles Demia's report (1665 Coste XIII, 45-54), followed by the second edition of Abelly 1667, then by Collet – all are completely wrong on these and other details. The original documents from 1614 to 1617 contradict them. Far from being a Protestant, as people told Charles Demia in 1664, Jean Beynier was sub-prior of the Rosary Confraternity. Not only was the Church not in a state of ruin, but it had been restored over many years after the French conquest, and the dates of restoration can still be seen over the arches of the two chapels on either side of the choir. Furthermore the society priests were not drunkards living with concubines as people described to Charles Demia. If such had been the case, Mgr de Marquemont would have lacerated them in the report of his Pastoral Visitation of 1614 as he did in other situations where the case required it.
5. Abelly I; Collet I, 54-55; Coste I, 21-22.

6. Abelly I; Collet I, 61. I have not located Louis Girard's appointment papers. These existed for parish priests only. Baptismal records are however signed by Girard from 15th August onwards, no longer by Souvageon.
7. Coste IX, 243-244; Comb 164.
8. Coste IX, 209; Comb 142.
9. Coste XIV, 125. The document which details this first foundation was discovered in 1839 in the town hall in Chatillon. It is in St Vincent's handwriting. As it was not available during the preparation of vol XIII, Pierre Coste included it in vol XIV. The text is as follows:

"Jesus, Mary In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

On this twenty-third day of August 1617, the above named ladies have formed a charitable association to help the poor and sick. They resolve that one of them in turn each day will care for those they have ascertained to be in need of their assistance. To this end they propose two actions: to assist body and soul; the body through food and medical care, and the soul by helping the dying to die well and those who survive to live a good life. As the mother of God is to be called upon in matters of great importance so that everything may redound to the glory of Jesus Christ, the ladies take Mary as the patron and protector of their work. They beseech her to take special care and call also on Sts Martin and Andrew, true examples of charity, patrons of Chatillon. The work will begin tomorrow, with God's help, on the feast of St Bartholomew, according to the goals they have established. First day – lady of the castle; next Mlle de Brie; Mme Philiberte of Mr Hugonieres; Benoite, daughter of Mr Ennemond Prost; Mme Denise Beynier wife of Mr Claude Bouchour; one of the daughters of Mme Perra; Mme Colette; and finally Mlle de la Chassaigne. After all these the lady Chatelaine starts off again and so on, each in turn. If someone is unable for some good reason to fulfil her duties on the day assigned, she should alert, on the previous day, the person who is next in line so that she can replace her in caring for the poor that day. The person who stands in will have discharged her duty for the following day according to the order of the rule. It will be important to ask the Lord everyday to maintain the will to carry on and to bless the work of their hands and minds to fulfil the work. Without doubt, the Lord will bless the work since it is he who Himself assures us that those who help the poor will, on the fearful day of judgement, hear his sweet and gentle invitation:

"Come, blessed of my Father and take possession of the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world."

On the other hand however, those who have done nothing will be sent away from Him with these hard and frightful words:

"Accursed, go away from me, to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels."

To God our Judge, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

10. Coste XIII, 51; as in Demia's account, but here there is no evidence to refute this. On the contrary, throughout his life M Vincent put great store by the knowledge of languages CF XII, 26-28; Dodin 439-441; Coste XII, 66; Dodin 481, November 1656.
11. Abelly I, Collet I, 54-55; also Coste I, 23-24.
12. Coste XIII, 423-437, with some reading errors.
13. Coste XIII, 423.
14. Coste XIII, 435.
15. Coste, *Monsieur Vincent* 1, 123 to the Confraternity in Joigny, 9th September 1618, where out of 38 women, 20 could not write their name. Coste XIII, 445.
16. Coste XIII, 424-426; 426, 430-431.
17. Coste III, 29. Contrary to what was told 47 years later and printed in several books, all of the Beyniers were Catholics. All of them were baptised Catholic, none of them appear in the records of Protestants except Jean, once, on the occasion of bringing the child of a Protestant for baptism. The Catholic records are in the Archives in Chatillon, the Protestant ones are in the Archives of Pont-de-Veyle in the Departmental Archives in Bourg-en-Bresse
18. Coste XII, 231-233, 15th May 1659 a talk to missionaries. Also Coste X, 175; XI, 114, Dodin 649-651; Comb 583; Dodin 52; Abelly I, 50-51 recounts M Vincent's talk more or less fully, but then paraphrases him saying exactly the opposite; it was the Count de Rougemont who was drawn by Vincent's reputation and converted by him!
 It is best to follow Vincent's own account which is in keeping with the legal documents of Rougemont before 1617, especially concerning the religious at Macon where he had a house.
19. Coste I, 23-24.
20. Abelly I, 45. The opening of a book of accounts of receipts and expenditure, on 15th December 1617 written at the front and back of the notebook, is in the handwriting of Louis Girard, and not M Vincent. Doubtless however, Vincent was still in Chatillon since it would not take him eight days to reach Paris on horseback or by coach.
21. Girard was appointed PP of Chatillon and took up the position on 18th July 1618 (Coste XIII, 54). The Archives show that he was an excellent PP. In 1638 he had a vault prepared for himself, his successors, and the Society of Priests; M Jauffred was able to visit the tombstone in 1845. Later, the parish priest, Fr Ravoux did not have it replaced when new tiles were put in (note in the archives of the Daughters of Charity, Chatillon).

“Given Over Completely to God”

1618: An important page is turned... After a lengthy preparation I had found confirmation of my path:

given to God, following Jesus Christ, for the service of the poor. (1)

This move towards giving to God which I resolved in 1615 or 1616, coincided with the disappearance of my temptations against faith which had troubled me for three or four years... Now, thanks to the reassurance these events brought me, to the encouragement of Mme de Gondi and the generosity of the Ladies of Charity, I began to see more clearly the direction of my Christian and apostolic life:

The poor are being lost for want of knowledge of the truths necessary for salvation and confession. (2)

The purpose of our vocation is the salvation of the poor country people. This was the mission of Jesus Christ... his aim was to work for the poor... everything else is secondary. Our Lord is to be found in the poor. In serving the poor we serve Jesus Christ. (3)

From my experience in Folleville and Chatillon I retained one objective with two expressions: to save souls and bring relief to the body, always by specific means. Firstly it's important to have a period of renewal in a parish with a call to general confession. Next comes action on several fronts: with other priests and laypeople. Evangelisation involves integrating faith and prayer into everyday life, work and charitable action. Finally I stressed the importance of living in God and with God, because in the last analysis it is God who is at work. As you are aware, my conversion did not take place quickly. My long preparation had prepared me for action: I had a strong spiritual foundation which divine grace obtained through prayer and meditation strengthened further. I also learned self-abandonment since to be a true missionary we must

...empty ourselves of self to be clothed in Jesus Christ.” (4)

Indeed I had by now the doctrinal foundation for my life and action. These I developed as follows:

- Prayer and action are one. I knew the Carthusian Order, the only one not needing reform. They combined prayer with apostolic action

through the publication of books. I was very drawn to their motto: "*Carthusians at home, apostles abroad.*" (5)

- The Trinity is the bond of communication between the three persons, and we should mirror this community in our way of living. (6)
- As members of the Mystical Body of Christ through baptism (7) we must be the Body of Christ. It follows that we

should reveal the goodness of God to the poor and suffering. (8)

I understood also the importance of a solid human basis for my work. This meant using my gifts: an ease with people, my legal expertise which I used to help my family first of all. I could use this skill to help the poor as well. I even began to see the hand of Providence in my pursuit of benefices, in that I understood the meaning of money. Without money, the poor have nothing and nothing can be done for them. Money is their life and to serve them we must be able to live without asking them for anything; and yet it is necessary to be able to provide with resources and help. Henceforth I will continue to look for income, not to please my family but to help the poor. Money,

the possessions of the community are the possessions of God and of the poor. (9)

Therefore

we must have some resources and make good use of them to provide for all necessities. (10)

NOTES

1. Coste IX, 26; 534; X, 124; Comb 17; 352; 550.
2. Coste I, 115, 1631, to François du Coudray.
3. Coste XI, 133, 135. Dodin 73, 75. Coste X, 610 IX, 252.
4. Coste XI, 343. Dodin 307. CF Coste XI, 2, 312 XII, 107-108. Dodin 860, 269, 524.
5. Abelly?? Coste.
6. Coste XIII, 31, 34-35 CF 198, 260.
7. Coste XII, 271 Dodin 690.
8. Coste X, 332; Comb 686.
9. Coste XI, 30 CF Coste X, 316-317; XIII, 695.
10. Coste XII, 143 Dodin 559.

Missionary

Seven long years would elapse in the same activity as the three preceding: giving missions only on the estates of the de Gondi, although in a very different manner. Completely devoted to these missions to the poor country people, I had by now my own personal style. I collaborated not only with other priests as has been the long established practice of the Dominicans, Franciscans, Capuchins, Jesuits and Oratorians, but also with laypeople. The mission would establish a Confraternity of Charity which would carry on the service of the poor long after the departure of the missionaries. A Confraternity was established on 23rd February 1618 (1) at Villepreux, an estate of M de Gondi near Versailles. After Villepreux came Joigny, another estate south of Sens which M de Gondi had inherited from his uncle the Archbishop of Paris who had died in 1616. A little to the North West is Villecien and the Castle of Fey, the estate of Isabelle Hennequin. I had come to know her and her brother Anthony since we met when they visited their cousin Alexander in Clichy. They were embroiled in litigation over property with the de Gondis. I don't dare claim any role in reconciling the two parties that summer. (2) Other estates which followed included Montmirail in Champagne, then Folleville, Paillart, Serevilliers near Amiens, belonging to Mme de Gondi. Through time we moved on to other places. Mme de Gondi herself took part in the missions, drawing the ladies to the service of the poor. Her hand appeared everywhere in the documents establishing the Confraternities as she worked in every place the family spent time. (3)

In the course of these missions, I met Huguenots, as the Protestants were called. In Montmirail in 1620 for example, one of them objected that the Catholic Church could not be the one True Church because the priests abandoned the poor to go to live in the towns. The following year in Marchais, a neighbouring village, seeing how well the poor country people and the children were progressing, he returned to the Catholic Church. This reinforced my decision to go to the poor country people. (4) But M de Gondi was General of the Galleys, and I had never expected to turn my energies to the conditions of the galley slaves and to try to help them. On the 8th February however I was appointed by the king as Almsgiver General of the Galleys. (5)

But let me go back a little. In November 1618, Bishop Francis de Sales, the bishop of Geneva – based in Annecy while dealing with the Calvinists – had arrived in Paris while I was conducting a mission in Montmirail. (6) Returning to Paris at the end of December 1618, I finally met him, and before long we were meeting often to engage in very deep discussions.

I felt very honoured indeed to be his friend. He gladly welcomed all kinds of people and was able to adapt easily to everyone... His kindness and gentleness embraced all who were privileged to know him, of whom I was one.

Much later, recalling him I often said:

How good you are Lord, how good you are, since there is so much goodness in Bishop Francis de Sales, your creature! (7)

On April 6th 1619, Mother Jeanne-François Fremiot came to Paris with some nuns of the Visitation Order to found there a convent with Bishop de Sales. It was on 1st May and Bishop de Sales introduced the parish priest of St Jacques de la Boucherie, a man called Charles de la Saussaye (8) as first Superior of the Visitation Order. Francis de Sales left Paris on 13th September 1619, never to return, though he and I maintained contact until his death in 1622. (9) Charles de la Saussaye died in December 1621, and with the agreement of Francis de Sales, Mother de Chantal proposed me as superior of the Paris Convent at the beginning of 1622. Mother de Chantal returned to Annecy on 22nd February 1622 but I stayed in contact with her until her death on 13th December 1641.

Meantime I continued the missions in the countryside, and became busy too with the galley slaves, especially in Marseilles. In September 1621, on my way back from Marseilles, I think, I went to Maçon and stayed with the Oratorians. There had been in Maçon since 1610 an organisation for helping the poor called "Alms", set up by Canon Chandon, dean of the Chapter. As generous to the people as the organisation was, the winter drew even more stragglers and beggars from far and near so that the numbers were overwhelming and very demanding... it was a far cry from the organisation which characterised my Confraternities. I took the opportunity to speak to them and to propose some order and discipline. They made light of me at first but later the Council on one hand and then the Chapter on the other discussed my suggestions, and finally on 17th September adopted them. The structure I proposed was not regarded as parallel to the Alms but an improvement, as accepted by Canon Chandon. It became the "*Confraternity of the Alms*" differing from my Confraternities in that it looked after not just the sick but all the poor, and was under the auspices of the local council. What a fine example Canon Chandon was of someone who far from seeing me as a rival, gladly accepted collaboration. The following week, he himself visited the poor districts, discovering there the miserable state of young

women engaged in prostitution and at risk of all kinds of diseases. I was able to return to Paris at the end of the month. (10)

It was becoming more and more difficult to find priests who would work with me in giving missions. I needed to ensure continuity, and the ideal would be to entrust missions to a congregation. There were the Jesuits and the Oratorians and others but, forewarned of the idea, they declined. The solution that finally presented was to found an association of priests... M and Mme de Gondi had been thinking about it... the idea was going round in my mind... but it was really the will of God?

I made a retreat at Soissons, asking for the grace to be free of this hastiness, and my prayer was answered!!!

Seeing therefore that I did not seek my own satisfaction but only God's will as revealed through the idea of my noble protectors, it now seemed good to me to accept their suggestion of setting up a house for a small community of priests. They would have to live however... and so the problem of income rose again. At the end of 1623, I received from Rome my appointment as prior of Grosse Sauve, south of Langres. In order to take possession without having to go in person, I obtained permission on 7th February 1624 for a man from Langres to go as my substitute. (12) Will I ever emerge from my difficulties? Apparently, on 22nd June 1623, the Bishop of Langres had united the priory with the Oratorian community in Langres. He had introduced the Oratorians into the diocese in 1616. Neither Rome nor I were aware of this. It seemed best for me to withdraw, though I still ran the risk of being in a delicate situation with M de Bérulle, should he find out... even if there already was a procedure in hand between the bishop and the Chapter.(13) Fortunately, during this period, the de Gondis had set out to find a house for us, and three weeks later on 1st March 1624, I was appointed director of the former College des Bons Enfants, an old building which was in a very poor condition. (14)

In 1624 the galleys were still in Bordeaux so that the vessels, equipment and slaves quarters could all be repaired after a campaign against the Protestants at La Rochelle in the Autumn of 1622. I was due there for a mission to the galley slaves. I signed for Antoine Portail as my substitute to take possession of the property. I had known him since Clichy. (15) So I set out for Bordeaux, conducting the mission as usual with some other priests and religious, Jesuits in particular. (16)

I had allowed myself to be persuaded to visit my homeplace and family... I was so sad leaving my parents that I cried the whole way back. These tears gave way to the thought

of helping them and improving their state by giving them this or that. My soft heart wanted to give them what I had and even what I didn't have. I spent three months in this fierce desire to help my brothers and sisters... I prayed God to deliver me from this temptation... and even though they were then and still are in dire need, God gave me to commend them all to his Providence. (17)

I did not abandon them completely: while being careful not to use the patrimony of the poor for them, I helped Providence by finding for them some benefactors such as Canon Jean de Fonteneil from Bordeaux, Charles du Fresne, secretary to Queen Marguerite and then to M de Gondi, the Canon de Saint-Martin from Dax, the Marquis de Poyanne, Governor of Dax... on one occasion I even asked for help from Mme de Maignelay, sister of M de Gondi, for a nephew who had come to see me in Paris and had no means of getting home. (18)

At the end of this year 1624, or perhaps the beginning of 1625, a young widow, Louise de Marillac – Mademoiselle Legras – came to me for spiritual direction and to discuss the problems she had with the education of her son. (19) (“Madame” at this time was a title reserved to the wives of lords). She was a very religious person who had long been caring for the poor. She had met Francis de Sales and his friend Bishop Camus.

A year after receiving the College des Bons Enfants, April 17th 1625, M and Mme de Gondi concretised our dream. They ensured that the mission would continue by setting up a bourse, not of 16,000 pounds as Madame had at first suggested, but of 45,000 pounds in the name of our “*religious association of priests.*” (20)

We now needed members. At that time there was only M Antoine Portail. Of poor health and exhausted by her devotion to the mission over the previous eight years, Madame de Gondi died two months later on 23rd June 1625. (21) I will never forget her role, and that of her husband, in the origins of the missions to the poor. She truly is “*our foundress.*” (22)

On Monday 20th October 1625, I received a sum of money by legal writ. (23) The contract of foundation asserted that I should remain in the de Gondi household, but M de Gondi understood that I must be on hand to form the group of missionaries and so I took up residence in the Bons-Enfants towards the end of November 1625. For his part, M de Gondi had given himself more and more to God and entered the Oratory the following April 6th 1626 to become a priest. In the Bons-Enfants, along with Antoine Portail, we took on a good priest offering him 50 ecus a year and

we set out, all three, to preach missions from village to village. As we set out we would give the keys to a neighbour, or would ask them to stay in the house at night. I had only one sermon which I preached from a thousand different angles, namely the fear of God. And God so blessed our work that other good priests asked to join us. (25)

Of all who came, only three agreed to stay in community with us one year later.

Meanwhile political developments followed their course. The bishop of Luçon, Richelieu, had entered the political arena in 1615 through the offices of the Queen Mother. He became Cardinal on 5th September 1622 and managed to make himself indispensable to the young Louis XIII. He became a king's counsellor just four months later on 13th August. He it was who would drive French politics, and I did not yet know how much dealings I would have with him. A year after our contract of formation, our community was taking shape. On 4th September 1626, by an Act of Association three missionaries – the loyal Antoine Portail and two priests from the diocese of Amiens:

François du Coudray and Jean de la Salle who stayed with me agreed to live together in the manner of a Congregation, Company or Confraternity, and to work for the salvation of the poor country people. (26)

As I could not forget the poverty of my brothers and sisters, on this same day 4th September, in the presence of the same lawyers of the Chatelet in Paris (Saulnier and Charles), I left to them my own belongings, "*such paternal belongings as were my inheritance.*" (27)

It was in the same spirit of this year that I resigned as parish priest of Clichy in favour of Jean Souillard in return for 100 pounds rent.

NOTES

1. CF Coste XIII.
2. CF Coste XIII for the Gondi references.
3. CF Coste XIII.
4. CF Coste XI, 34-37. Dodin 898-902.
5. CF Coste XIII, 55-56.
6. Coste I, *Monsieur Vincent*, 157-158.
7. Coste XIII, 67-68, 72, 78-79. Coste gave it in Latin only.
8. Coste I, *Monsieur Vincent*, 159-160.

9. Coste I, *Monsieur Vincent*, 159-163.
10. Coste XIII.
11. Coste II, 247.
12. Coste I, *Monsieur Vincent*, 171-172.
13. *Annales de la Congregation* No 106-107, 1941-42 p265-268.
14. Abelly I, Collet I, 113. Coste, Monsieur Vincent I, 173. Some work had already been done, but many buildings in Paris, with the exception of the facades, were made of a poor thin masonry which had little resistance.
15. National Archives; published in Coste XIII.
16. Coste I, *Monsieur Vincent*, 147-148.
17. Coste XII, 219, 2nd May 1659; Dodin 637.
18. CF Coste I, 491; IV, 535; V, 567, IV, 321; I, 90-91; Abelly III, 292
19. Coste I, *Monsieur Vincent*, 215-221, 224.
20. Coste XIII, 198.
21. Coste, *Monsieur Vincent*, 176-131.
22. Coste III, 399.
23. Coste XIII, 60-61.
24. Coste, *Monsieur Vincent*, 177-178.
25. Coste XII, 8.
26. Coste XIII, 204.
27. Coste XIII, 62.

Formation

A new sphere of activity was to open up for the missionaries. It was becoming clear that the fruits of the missions could not be sustained without good priests in the parishes. Now many of these were neglectful, several even were openly scandalous... and there was no institution to train them. Dioceses had of course opened seminaries some sixty years or so previously in response to the Council of Trent, but without success. In 1612, a year after their establishment, the Oratorians had taken charge of the seminary of the diocese of Rouen in Paris, then Langres (1), Maçon and Luçon; in 1624 they opened the Saint-Magloire seminary in Paris. In 1620 a good Parisian priest, M Bourdoise opened a seminary in connection with his community from the parish of Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet (our parish). One day, in conversation with the bishop of Beauvais, the thought occurred to me that it would be less distasteful for most candidates, and also more effective, to begin with a very short but intense period of preparation: a fifteen day retreat before each of the Sacred Orders, sub-diaconate, diaconate and priesthood, consisting of specific training and practical direction. These retreats for Ordinands began in Beauvais in 1628 and spread quickly. We ourselves did not open a major seminary until 1641, in Annecy.

In 1628 I began to petition the Pope for approval for our Congregation. (2) My contact with M de Bérulle, who was made a Cardinal in 1627, was curtailed due to my many tasks. I now turned to M Duval, priest and doctor of theology, for spiritual direction. But I always referred to M de Bérulle in glowing terms throughout life, even though I sensed a certain coldness towards me on his part... did he perhaps think that we were invading his domain by giving missions? (3) I could not have known that he himself would depart the scene so soon... he died while celebrating Mass, just at the moment of the consecration on 2nd October 1629, at the age of just 55. (4)

NOTES

1. An addendum left out in *Vincentian* notes: “Very slow in being established.”
2. Coste I, 42-45.
3. A letter from Bérulle to Fr Bertin, in Rome, dated November or December 1628, asks him to intervene with the ambassador with a view to blocking others taking on missions, because the Oratorians are giving them very successfully. It would seem to refer to M Vincent due to the convergence of the dates and because he doesn’t have to speak of it to Fr de Gondi in this way. However it seems to have been unsuccessful because, soon afterwards, the ambassador replaced an Oratorian with a diocesan in Saint-Louis-des-Francais, and Bérulle intervened against him with Richelieu on 9th February 1629.
4. P Cauchois: “Bérulle”, *Spiritual Masters*, p63.

Animating Others

I have not spoken much of the Confraternities of Charity. They had grown slowly but surely along with the missions, and I undertook to visit them from time to time. To tell the truth though I was not enough help to them. In 1629 I suggested to Mlle Legras, that she might take charge of them, and in spite of her lack of self-confidence, she worked marvels. (1) In Paris in particular, there were problems. The Confraternities there consisted of many noble ladies who were not all disposed or suitable for visiting and serving the poor. Several of them used to send their servants, and some of them even treated the poor harshly. Providence however, sent me a good country girl from the village of Suresnes, Marguerite Naseau. She was a poor uneducated girl who looked after the cows... but she had a desire to teach young people. She bought a dictionary and went to the parish priest and the curate to ask them to teach her to read... little by little she learned enough, and resolved to go from village to village teaching young people. (2) In the end she came to me and so, around 1630 she began looking after the poor in the Confraternity of Saint-Sauveur in Paris, and then in other Confraternities.

NOTES

1. Coste, *Monsieur Vincent*, I, 241-243.
2. CF Coste IX, 77-78; Comb 52.

Saint Lazare

I was almost fifty – an age when many people die – and I was aware of the recent death of Cardinal de Bérulle. On 7th September 1630 I drew up my will, a spiritual one to begin with, but also a will in favour of my brothers and sisters and nephews. I only had whatever had come my way since 1626, in essence a house with a forest and some land which my brother-in-law had sold and which I had bought back on 21st January 1627. (1)

To the north of Paris, just outside the walls, there was an old leprosy hostel situated in a large estate, dedicated to St Lazarus, risen from the dead. It was run by eleven canons of St Victor, but there were only a couple of lepers, three or four homeless people and a few difficult young people entrusted to the prior by their parents. The prior and canons did not get on well, and trouble erupted in 1630. The prior was aware of our group of missionaries, and one day in 1630 he came to see me at Bons Enfants. He came to offer me his priory. My initial reaction was that this estate was much too vast for our small number, but he impressed on me that if our numbers grew, the Bons Enfants would be too small... it took a year to convince me. There were also numerous practical problems to be addressed. In the end M Duval advised me to accept and, on 7th January 1632, we signed a contract of unification with the Congregation of the Mission. (2)

The next day, 8th January 1632, the Archbishop of Paris gave his approval, and the Congregation of the Mission took possession of the priory. It was from St Lazare that we took our name (in French-speaking countries), Lazarists by popular acclamation. This was no gift we were receiving because it involved heavy responsibilities – especially the upkeep of the prior and canons. There were also those who objected which led to a whole year of protracted litigation. (3) In the end St Lazare became a centre from which would emanate all the works I would initiate both spiritually and materially.

NOTES

1. *Annals* No 101, 1936 p704-707.
2. CF Coste XIII, 234; Coste, *Monsieur Vincent* I, 191-199.
3. Coste, *Monsieur Vincent* I, 200-207.

Co-Founder

At this time more young women came to look after the poor in the Paris Confraternities, following Marguerite Naseau's example:

Marguerite gave all she could at every opportunity... everyone loved her greatly. Her love was such that she died because she stayed with a poor girl who was sick with plague. (1) She contracted the illness, bidding farewell to the sister with her as if she foreseen her death, she went to the Saint Louis hospital her heart full of joy and acceptance of the will of God. (2)

It happened in February 1633, and in spite of the care Mlle Legras and I procured for her, she died soon after.

These kind girls did not yet form community. (3) I had developed the habit of preparing them for the service of the poor by a four day retreat. It was important to prepare them in advance for a difficult task; to help them persevere, it was important to advise them to live together rather than scattered throughout the parishes. Although she was very busy with her travels visiting and supporting the Confraternities, Mlle Legras agreed to take charge of these girls. On 29th November 1633, three or four came together in community with Louise de Marillac near the Church of St Nicolas du Chardonnet. (4) They would not be nuns so as to avoid enclosure as the Council of Trent had urged. However, since the end of the thirteenth century, there were Sisters, of the third order of St Francis, who took solemn vows, prayed the Office in choir, but went out to look after the poor and sick in their homes: Grey Sisters, Sisters of St Elizabeth or Tertiaries. The Rule of Third Order dispensed them from the law of the Second Order (Women's Orders). I didn't know them although there were some in Beauvais, Nantes and even Paris...there are so many Orders and Congregations!

Our "*Daughters of Charity*" would be more flexible by not having solemn vows. They will not be delayed with long Offices in choir, but they will have an interior spiritual life: meditation twice a day, spiritual reading, Mass in the parish Church, but the centre of their day will truly be the poor. And their habit will be a uniform of course, the uniform of the poor of the Ile-de-France. In a word, simple young women, "*Daughters of Charity*."

NOTES

1. CF Coste I, 187.
2. Coste IX, 79; Comb 53.
3. Coste, *Monsieur Vincent* I, 264-269.
4. Coste I, 215 note 2. This small street running parallel to the Rue d'Arras, linked the Rue St Victor to the Rue Traversiere or Traversine. The house with the ensign of the Royal Sword was in the middle of the Rue de Versailles. The spot corresponds, it seems, with No 1 Rue Monge.

In The Service of Priests and the Faithful

In, 1633 several priests who had made the Ordinands (1) Retreats asked for ongoing formation for their spiritual and pastoral development. To this end they proposed meeting with me regularly. This came to pass, and we met first in June 1633. A second gathering took place in July and we named these sessions the Tuesday Conferences. Even though the Congregation of the Mission is not specifically oriented to the priesthood since it includes laypeople or Brothers, yet this new Congregation

aims to honour the life of Our Lord Jesus Christ his eternal priesthood, his holy family and his love for the poor... and each one will offer himself, as a kind of *bons propos* (*good purpose or intention*), on Holy Thursday every year. (2)

You might call it a kind of third order for priests. And God knows how much good they have done through missions given in many towns, while we devoted ourselves to the country people.

There is a spiritual malaise of which I have not yet spoken, partly because, thank God, it has receded somewhat. In the early part of this century (3) belief in sorcerers and diabolic possession was widespread. The civil powers clamped down on this activity with unbelievable cruelty, helped often by a large number of priests. (4) In the last century humanist poets had portrayed to all and sundry, various poor old countrywomen as witches. They were crudely tortured until they confessed. In 1633, there was the tragic story of the Ursulines in Loudun who conspired to accuse the parish priest of having bewitched them. This led to him being burned alive the following year. Our neighbours in Lorraine behaved worse still: between 1576 and 1650 they burned more than 3,000 poor country people under the pretext of witchcraft. There was nothing we could do in the face of these civil courts. (5) I myself have always tried to bring reason to these to these situations, as the bishops and those who understand such matters have done. In 1640, for example, the Bishop of Tours did not believe that evil spirits (6) were at work in Chinon. I wrote to M Lambert, on 22nd July:

I implore you to direct the confreres to say or do nothing counter to the bishop's decision... everything I hear from others prompts me to distrust the mind of this good woman.

This calm low key approach was, I felt sure, more beneficial than all the

exorcisms and burnings. During this same period 1635-40 the Bishop of Montauban wrote to me in this vein:

The priests of the mission are greatly needed in this diocese since, in all the places where they have worked, there was not a single sorcerer or witch. That is the fruit of religious instruction and general confession everywhere. (8)

Indeed, a proper understanding of “*the things necessary for salvation*”, as they were termed at the time, freed people from these fears and phantoms.

NOTES

1. Abelly II, 246-249; I, 201-202.
2. Coste XIII, 128-129.
3. CF J. Delumeau, *Fear in the West*, p350-363.
4. CF Dagens “*Bérulle and the beginnings of the Catholic Counter-Reformation*,” DDB, p158-159. Bremond, “*Literary History of Religious Belief*,” V, 179-195.
5. 5 CF *Revue Lorraine Populaire* No 32, February 1980, p71.
6. Coste II, 66.
7. Coste II, 84, note 4.
8. Coste II, 429.

Providing Relief to Lorraine

Even more cruelties and terrors must be added to those already mentioned. The political situation brought these about. A number of the nobility opposed Richelieu, including the Duchess de Chevreuse and the King's brother, Gaston d'Orleans. These took refuge in Lorraine where the Duke Charles IV helped their conspiracy. Lorraine at this time was independent, being part of the Germanic Empire, except for the towns and bishoprics of Metz, Toul and Verdun which had been occupied by France since 1552. In 1631 Richelieu persuaded Louis XIII to invade Lorraine. After an enforced peace, the Duke believed he would initiate hostilities once more. He succeeded in bringing on himself a punitive campaign in 1632 and then outright invasion the following year. All the evils of war befell the unfortunate land. The city of Nancy was captured and occupied, forcing the Duke to carry on the struggle using guerrilla tactics. Even now by 1659 the matter has not been resolved.

Lorraine was not spiritually bereft; in particular Pierre Fourier had endowed it with his Notre-Dame Sisters and his Canons Regular of the Saviour. However the Administrator of the diocese of Toul, soon to be bishop, called on us, so that in 1635 we set up a mission house in a hospital with two confreres. In 1636 or 1637 they accommodated, cared for and helped many wounded soldiers as well as countless refugees from the surrounding countryside... they kept me abreast of these hardships and so many atrocities. On September 1st 1636, I wrote to our confrere Robert de Sergis, almsgiver to the army, asking him to intervene on behalf of the people from Clichy who had been forcibly conscripted. (2) By the end of 1638 and into 1639 (3) refugees from Lorraine began to flood into Paris. With the help of Mlle Legras we tried to accommodate as many as possible; at the beginning of May 1639, in the Chapel near St Lazare, we had three hundred refugees whom we housed and fed.

It was necessary to continue assisting the people of Lorraine from where horrific stories were emerging. Whole communities were in hardship as the country was sacked by seven columns of the army. I tried every means possible to gather resources, even asking the confreres to do without. We ate a basic type of brown bread during this time. I used to say to the confreres:

Isn't it only right that we should give up something to identify ourselves with and share in this public hardship?

And again “*should we not do without something ourselves for their comfort?*” (4)

For such mass suffering, a mass remedy was required... we needed a network of communication to collect and transport materials. In April I sent six missionaries as reinforcements, including four seminarists with the two priests (5) already in the field. I followed up with two more priests and a brother in October, and three more in 1640. I should mention one brother in particular, Matthew Regnard. He was full of ingenuity, and made 54 trips from 1639 to 1649 with unbelievable amounts, (6) perhaps as much as one million five or six hundred thousand pounds. He told us many stories of how he evaded bandits and errant soldiers.

I also tried to intervene at a political level. I went to see Richelieu, asking him to bring about peace. To no avail, so I went to see the King and the Queen. They agreed on several occasions to give large sums to help the poor, especially the religious... but they continued the war. On the ground, priests and brothers administered aid throughout the land, going from town to town. In accordance with the rule I gave them on 15th April 1639, (7) they involved the local priests, and in their absence the best qualified laypeople. Everyone worked along with them. In Paris, however, the effort began to weaken. On February 28th, I wrote to a confrere in Rome:

We continue our assistance to these poor people to the tune of five hundred pounds per month to each town; I fear however that we won't be able to sustain this as it is very hard to come up with two and a half thousand pounds every month. (8)

I conceived the idea of asking missionaries to write often an account of the sufferings they were striving to relieve, so that by circulating these letters people would see how the resources are being used and might be inspired to raise more.

I show these to the good ladies every month and they are much consoled. Last Saturday we spent two or three hours looking at further letters which gave them immense comfort. (9)

I wrote that to a confrere in July 1640. So often however I thought all sources had been exhausted, and felt so deflated at being unable to respond to further appeals... but each time manna came... I learned that this is what it means to trust in Providence, namely to believe that the Holy Spirit can touch hearts.

The Ladies of Charity in Paris, to whom I often turned for help, already had a lot to deal with. As well as the poor they had been helping

for years, refugees were now streaming in, including the nobility of Lorraine now coming to Paris in a state of great hardship.

NOTES

1. Abelly II, 375; Collet I, 291-292: I, 538.
2. CF Coste I, 344.
3. CF Coste I, 542, 552.
4. Abelly III, 298; Collet I, 289.
5. CF Coste I, 552.
6. CF Abelly II, 381.
7. Collet I, 290.
8. Coste II, 32.
9. Coste II, 61.

Abandoned Children

Paris suffered from yet another cruel wound: abandoned children... on average one a day, three to four hundred a year. “*La Couche*”, the institution set up long ago in the city, was outmoded. I was urged to do something, and having thought through the issue in 1637, I took the risk of writing to Louise de Marillac on 1st January 1638:

The view was expressed at the last assembly that you should be asked to undertake an inventory of abandoned children. (1)

In 1639, however, the Ladies of Charity who were providing financial assistance put forward several objections of a moral as well as a financial nature. On several occasions I had to quell their repugnance at having to look after these children which they were inclined to view as offensive to God. On 12th January 1640 I spoke thus to them:

Our Lord became flesh and died because humanity was accursed of God due to Adam’s sin. (2)

Furthermore they are the image of Jesus himself abandoned: “As long as we do what we can, it will be good to honour the abandonment of the Son by his Father for the good of the world. (3)

As regards their financial objections,

two things I would say: one, we must trust in God and do what we can; secondly, we have only undertaken to make an effort, and if the burden proves unbearable we will discharge it. (4)

The Ladies continued to render support.

NOTES

1. Coste I, 417.
2. Coste XIII, 775-776.
3. Coste XIII, 777.
4. Coste XIII, 784.

Men of Prayer

In the midst of so many activities, I was determined to remain faithful to study, especially theology. It was particularly important to face up to the ideas of Baius, Jansen and Arnaud. (1) I had to adopt a stance on these in 1637 and by 1638 Jansenism was causing a major doctrinal conflict. (2) I also kept a keen interest in religious formation as the religious instruction of children and adults was a central part of missions. (3)

Of course I was anxious to promote the spiritual development of laypeople, Daughters of Charity and the confreres. Yes,

let us devote ourselves to the practice of prayer through which all kinds of blessings come to us... if we persevere in charity, if we are ourselves saved, all is due to God and prayer (4)

As I said recently on August 10th 1657 (and you are aware of the saying that has become famous)

Give me a man of prayer and he will be capable of doing everything; he will be able to say with the apostle: I can do all things in Him who strengthens and comforts me. (5)

As for myself I contemplated more and more the person of Our Lord Jesus, his thoughts, words, deeds and his virtues, trying to put them into practice, trying always to see things as he sees them... in this way events nurtured my prayer.

In 1641, the Bishop of Annecy asked us to combine a seminary with one mission house, and M Bernard Codoing, the superior, initiated this at the year's end. This was our first Major Seminary. (6)

On 29th December M Jean-Jacques Olier also opened a Major Seminary in Vaugirard, near Paris. In 1646, he transferred this seminary close to the Church of Saint Sulpice where he was parish priest, and the priests who gathered there for priestly formation began to be called "Sulpicians".

NOTES

1. CF Coste I, 401; III, 319.
2. CF Coste XIII, 147-156.
3. CF Coste XI, 381; XII, 472; VIII, 79-82; XII, 288-298.
4. Coste XI, 407; Dodin 369.
5. Coste XI, 83; Dodin 963.
6. Coste I, 152, 206.

Opposition to Jansenism

From time to time, Christians debated the question of God's omniscience and human freedom. Jesus declared "*without me you can do nothing*" and St Paul insisted on the necessity of grace to do good. Throughout history some writers insisted on the necessity of human effort while others insisted on the necessity of grace. In the fifth century the former position was adopted by the followers of Pelagius, whereas St Augustine, alarmed by this unilateral position, defended the necessity of grace. In the heat of debate extreme positions were expounded, whether the possibility of being saved without God's help or only by God's help. The German monk Luther concluded that works are useless towards salvation: one only has to believe in the mercy of God. The French thinker Calvin went further: the all powerful God saves those he chooses and damns those he refuses; we are pre-destined, and those who accept this doctrine are predestined for salvation. We have seen how these beliefs ravaged Europe, being adopted by rulers great and small who used force to instil them, bringing about the many atrocities of the wars of religion in Germany, France, England and in Ireland where one of our Vincentian brothers, Thady Lee, was martyred in front of his mother.

St Augustine was studied anew from 1630 on by the Flemish theologian Janssen – or Jansenius as he was in Latin – and by the French Basque, Du Vergier de Hauranne, the abbot of Saint-Cyran. Jansen completed his vast book, *Augustinus*, before he died. His followers, soon to be known as Jansenists, undertook its publication: it appeared in French in 1641. This book was widely read as theologians took up one or other theses such as "*Jesus did not die for everyone*". This caused a storm and the Jansenist debate raged from 1651. I wrote many letters to advise people on this matter.

I took part in the campaign to petition Rome to condemn these theses, which is in fact what happened on several occasions. The Papal Bull condemning the Five Propositions of Jansen was published on 9th June 1653. I thought this would be an end of the doctrinal argument but far from it. (1) Arguments continued on the questions of whether it is right to condemn the Propositions and on the question as to whether these Propositions are in fact developed in Jansen's book. If they are deserving of condemnation in fact, the Jansenists maintained that they are not actually expounded in the book. Others also took this stance.

Two or three of the Propositions are in the book and I devoted a study *On Grace* (2) to these. I have always been careful that the confreres should not adhere to these condemned theses, and have severely criticised the Jansenists in several letters. However, I have never written

or spoken publicly against them, and I have always forbidden the confreres to preach against them or against the Protestants. We must preach only the Gospel.

Furthermore, I maintained contact with Saint-Cyran and others reputed to be Jansenists, such as Charles Maignart and Canon Des Lyons. I also continued to dialogue with the hermits of Port-Royal des Champs.

NOTES

1. Coste IV, 607.
2. Coste XIII, 147-156.

Home and Abroad

I had been thinking of giving Rules to the company as far back as 1635. The theological basis and other important elements were already in place in the Contract of Foundation and the Bull of Approval, but more detailed guidelines were still needed. Our life required them and I had drawn up a text. It was necessary to consult about these guidelines so I gathered our superiors, or a substitute for those who had to stay at their work, and we held our first general assembly in 1642.

On 13th October, at 4pm I informed the general assembly that the first we must deal with was the Rules of the Company. I presented an outline of the Rules and explained then... then I distributed to each a copy. These they read, commented on, offered corrections, additions and suggested omissions. (1)

We spent four days in consultation from 14th to 17th and agreed, given the large body of comments, to entrust to a commission the work of drawing everything together. This process was ongoing until the assembly of 1651. At the end of the assembly I handed in my resignation asking that a new superior general be elected, a request that was refused. (2)

Richelieu died on 4th December 1642. After the death of Louis XIII in 1643, Queen Anne of Austria, the Regent, appointed me to the Council of Conscience which was consulted about the appointment of Bishops, and which the Queen proposed to the Pope. I wrote at the time to Bernard Codoing:

never have I deserved the mercy I now do, or needed the prayers I now need, than in this new appointment. I hope I will not be long at this task. (3)

I was on the council for ten years, until 1652.

1645 marked the beginning of the spread of the Company outside of France. In 1639 of course I had sent confreres to Rome, primarily to deal with matters concerning us and the Vatican. Ministry soon followed on. In 1645 Cardinal Durazzo, Archbishop of Genoa, impressed by the work Bernard Codoing had done in the diocese, asked us to send missionaries to Genoa: four priests and a brother arrived there in the summer of 1645. (4)

The faithful were concerned about the wretched state of Christians who were slaves of the Muslims in North Africa. Our house in Marseilles had been established in 1643 by the Duchess d'Aiguillon as a base

for missionaries to care for these slaves. (5) The number of slaves was thought to be 50,000. On 22nd November 1645, a priest and a brother left for Tunis where they stayed with the French Consul with the title of “almsgiver”. When the consul died 1647 our confreres took on the title of consul. In 1646 furthermore, I sent a priest and a brother to Algiers in May. I gave them these instructions before they left:

In Algiers they would rent and establish there a chapel... they were to try to be more careful in their dealings with the Viceroy, the Pasha, and the Divan, gladly accepting any insults the people might give them... that if possible they would visit poor slaves in the countryside, to reassure and comfort them with practical help as necessary. They were to be subject to the laws of the country, religion excepted, and were neither to dispute or despise the religion of the people. (6)

Although they took great care they were unable to avoid insult. (7)

In the course of this same year, 1646, we opened a mission in Ireland. (8) The Papacy, moved by the circumstances of the Catholics among the Protestants who were in control, asked us on the 25th February 1645 to send people there. Due to a series of difficulties, it wasn't until October 1646 that a team set out. Eight missionaries, French and Irish, arrived towards the end of the year, but persecution forced the French to return in 1648. Only the four Irish remained, and one of these a seminarist, Thady Lee,

fell into the hands of the enemy in 1652 and they battered his head and cut off his feet and hands in front of his mother. (9)

The others managed to escape and returned to France. This mission lasted for only six years.

By 1647 the work for the abandoned children had become too onerous for the Ladies of Charity. In the course of the decisive meeting I made a pathetic appeal to them:

You are now ceasing to be their mothers to become their judges; their life and their death are in your hands; I will go and hear their cries and pains. (10)

This was once again a moment of mercy! Once again I pointed out that we can trust in Providence. I have often had this recourse since and,

because I have experienced it to be true, I could, just this very year 1659, on 21st February say to my confreres:

We have reason to hope, as long as you are firm in this conviction, that all kinds of blessings will come; yes, you have good reason to trust, even when all seems lost. (11)

And God knows how very often all seemed lost.

The high point of the spread of the Missions came in 1648 with Madagascar. (12) The Portuguese had begun to penetrate this island, but the efforts of evangelisation were fruitless. In 1642, Richelieu awarded the control of commerce with Madagascar to the East India Company. In 1647 the Nuncio

chose the Congregation to serve God in the isle of St Laurence, known as Madagascar. (13)

I sent Fathers Nacquart and Gondree who went ashore on 4th December 1648. This mission would afford us much joy, and much sorrow... M Gondree died soon after at a young age, then M Nacquart (14) also died. On 29th October 1655 three more set out; one died en route... Fathers Mousnier and Bourdaise arriving on 13th June 1656. (15) Fr Mousnier died and Fr Bourdaise was the one who lasted longest: two years and ten months until his death on 25th June 1657. But I was unaware of this when on 11th November 1658 I made one last appeal to him:

Fr Bourdaise, are you alive or not? If you are please look after yourself! If you are in heaven, pray for us! (16)

Other misfortunes befell also, this time in France: 1649 saw the Fronde when the Princes rebelled against Mazarin and the Regent, Anne of Austria. The Ile-de-France was itself ravaged. Something had to be done. This time I began on the political front: the only way to appease the Frondeurs and the people was for the Queen to separate from her minister Mazarin, so I determined to tell them so in the castle of St-Germain-en-Laye where they had taken refuge with the entire Court.

I left France on January 14th 1649 (with Br Ducourneau, on horseback) to travel to St-Germain in order to do some small service to God; but my sins rendered me unworthy of this.

in other words, I was dismissed by Mazarin... *“and after three or four days stay, I went to Villepreux.”* (17)

At the same time, as I later found out, six hundred soldiers, staying in St Lazare, had raided and looted the house. (18) Furthermore, at the start of February, the Orsigny farm near Saclay was looted:

this forced me to go by Freneville (19) where, due to the severity of the winter, I had to stay there for a month; I left there on 22nd February 1649 with a flock of 240 sheep. This was the flock we had rescued from Orsigny. The warmongers had come within a quarter league of Freneville to take horses from a farm so that I was forced in very severe weather to herd the sheep to a safe place four or five leagues beyond Etampes. I herded the horses to Le Mans arriving on 2nd March. The following evening I began the visitation. (20)

As I was unable to do anything more, I took advantage of this big excursion to make a canonical visitation of our houses in the West, as well as those of the Daughters of Charity: Le Mans, Angers, Saint-Meen, Nantes, Richelieu. Even in the midst of our losses the confreres in Paris continued their work:

From such a small stock of corn we still managed to distribute 3 or 4 measures every day to two or three thousand poor people. This consoles us and makes us happy in the midst of our troubles, giving us hope that God will not abandon us. (21)

You may surmise that these wanderings were not without incident. The most serious took place at Durtal, between Le Mans and Angers:

I became feverish during the night due to a fall into water when my horse lay down. I would have been unable to get out if someone had not come to my rescue. (22)

I didn't head back until the end of May, arriving in Paris on 13th June; "*in good health, thank God*". (23)

1650 saw the war spread further. Picardy and Champagne were invaded. Once again widescale assistance was required. We began again to raise awareness by disseminating letters which the Ladies of Charity enhanced between September 1650/24 and 1656,

as the priests and brothers of the Congregation described the suffering they witnessed, both spiritual and material,

we had accounts of these printed and the Ladies of Charity distributed them in the well-off homes. Here too they sought alms which, combined with their own resources, they used to help those in difficulty. They often spent up to 16,000 pounds per month. (25)

All of these good works were carried out by missionaries, Daughters of Charity, the Ladies themselves, and numerous laypeople.

In July 1651 we received our Rules at a general assembly, (26) and, declaring them to be in conformity with our way of life, we approved them on 11th August. At the end of that year the Congregation entered two new countries: Scotland with two missionaries, joined by a third in 1652 (27) (they also evangelised the Hebrides); and Poland (28) where we sent two priests, two seminarists and a brother.

NOTES

1. Coste XIII, 291.
2. CF Coste XIII, 296
3. Coste II, 406-407
4. CF Coste II, 544
5. CF Coste, *Monsieur Vincent*, 1,552
6. Coste XIII, 306-307
7. As an example of this, on 28th July 1683 (23 years after the death of Vincent), Jean Le Vacher, Consul and missionary, was executed by being tied to the mouth of a canon during the bombardment of Algiers by the French.
8. Coste II, 505; III, 82
9. Coste IV, 343
10. Coste XIII, 801
11. Coste XII, 144; Dodin, 560
12. Coste, *Monsieur Vincent* 1, 221-228
13. Coste III, 278-279
14. Coste, *Monsieur Vincent* II, 259-260
15. Coste, *Monsieur Vincent* II, 271-273
16. Coste XII, 69
17. Coste III, 402; Villepreux, a village of the de Gondis, north-west of Versailles
18. CF Coste III, 403
19. Freneville: a hamlet in the Val Puiseaux district, near Etampes (Essonne)
20. Coste III, 412, 416
21. Coste III, 417

22. Coste III, 424, note 3
23. Coste III, 454
24. CF Coste IV, 88
25. Coste IV, 52-53
26. CF Coste XIII, 357-359
27. CF Coste, *Monsieur Vincent* II, 201-202
28. CF Coste, *Monsieur Vincent* II, 207

Man of my Time

In 1652 I was once again in negotiations with Mazarin. At the beginning of July, I mediated between him and the Duke of Orleans with a view to making peace on condition of Mazarin's resignation. (1) This was unsuccessful. On 11th September when things had settled down in Paris, I wrote to him that all of Paris wanted the King to return, but that there should be no punishments. That was more or less what happened. (2) In this same month, however, I was let go from the Council of Conscience: "*I don't believe that I was any the poorer for being freed of this burden*" as the Bishop of Cahors, Alain de Solminihac, wrote to me on 2nd October. He went on:

but the church is poorer as it would be better if you had remained in this position. (3)

Other struggles awaited. The Jansenist debate was at its height since 1651, and I wrote so many letters... on 9th June 1653 the Papal Bull condemning Jansen's Five Propositions was finally published. I thought this would put an end to the conflict but unfortunately the very opposite ensued. (4)

I have not spoken yet of the very great problem of begging. The State wished to enclose beggars in one big general hospital to protect itself. I have always preferred solutions which reflect a more familial outlook and so, in the summer of 1653, we opened a hostel called "The Name of Jesus." I say "*we*" because Louise de Marillac had also given it much thought. Here we looked after about forty elderly poor – twenty men and twenty women – in separate buildings. The house was run on donations, but also the work of some able-bodied people who kept one quarter of what they earned. (5) What could we do in the face of the will of the body politic?

From 1655, I became increasingly housebound by the pains in my legs. Elsewhere difficulties multiplied as well... in 1656 plague broke out in Rome at first. Our confreres were quick to respond. (6) When it spread to Genoa our confreres, who were more numerous there, looked after the sick from July onwards. One man died, then another... in 1657 I lost a former disciple on the mission who was also a good friend. Jean-Jacques Olier died on April 2nd as a result of breathing problems. As a last gesture of gratitude I sent a message of comfort to his spiritual sons. (7) Meanwhile the plague in Genoa continued... from July onwards I was in mortal terror, as my letters show. (8)

NOTES

1. CF Coste IV, 423
2. CF Coste IV, 473-478
3. Coste IV, 491
4. CF Coste IV, 607
5. CF Coste, *Monsieur Vincent* II, 486-496
6. CF Coste, *Monsieur Vincent* II, 178
7. CF Coste, XIII, 166
8. CF Coste, VI, 391, 400-422

Pause

There began to manifest in my life at this time what is perhaps the deepest action of God's grace... the greatest stripping away of self... I understood that the cross ultimately imprints itself on the life of whoever gives himself to Jesus Christ, and on the history of the Church. At the same time however, it is through the cross that we discover true hope, the strength only God can give when all is lost, all taken away... then we can speak of resurrection not just in words. I explained all of this to the confreres on 25th August, concluding thus:

I beg you to reflect on how God works. He built and strengthened His Church, as it were, by the destruction and ruination of those who supported it and who were its chief mainstay. I am telling you this, confreres, to prepare you to receive whatever news may come with absolute conformity to God's good pleasure... and so that you won't conclude that we should abandon Genoa, or Madagascar... oh no not at all. (1)

I succeeded finally in giving our Rules to the confreres on 17th May 1658 after some final alterations. I could now go in peace; the missionaries, like the Daughters of Charity, had now the essence of my spirit. They would continue the work. (2)

It is now evening, the 19th December 1659; the memory of my father has returned to me as I remain here, confined to the house by my illness. Now I can exhort the missionaries and sisters only by these conferences and my advice. Monsieur Portail, Louise de Marillac and I, all grown old and weary yet deeply rooted in faith and charity, we await our calling to the Father's house.

Oh Saviour, You gather to yourself in this life those only who deny themselves to glorify them in the life of Heaven. (3)

NOTES

1. Coste XI, 416; Dodin 378.
2. CF Coste XII, I; Dodin 414.
3. Coste XII, 427; Dodin 850.

Epilogue

Monsieur Portail died on 14th February 1660, aged sixty-nine and a half. Louise de Marillac died on 15th March 1660, aged sixty-eight and a half. M Vincent, suffering terribly with his legs that were swollen and covered in sores, could no longer walk. He stayed in his room, still pursuing his affairs. He was carried in a chair to the landing to offer Mass each day. He usually slept in his chair because he suffered more by lying down. A confrere kept a diary of his last days and moments. He died on Monday 27th September at 4.45 am, aged seventy-nine years and five months;

he died in his chair, fully dressed, beside the fire. (1)

NOTES

1. Coste XIII, 191.

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