

# A HUNTER OF SOULS.

## (Saint Vincent De Paul.)

By Very Rev N. S. Rossiter, C.M., D.D.

Australian CATHOLIC TRUTH SOCIETY No. 1077 (1958).

After eight hours run, the Biarritz Express, south from Paris, passes through a flat, sandy and marshy area planted, with pines and almost bare of other vegetation. A small station platform about three miles beyond the episcopal city of Dax bears the name "*Saint Vincent de Paul*", for a few hundred yards from the station, is a small four-roomed house on the spot where Saint Vincent was born and reared. The village here, chiefly orphanages, homes for the aged, a Minor Seminary and school, is called the "Birth place of Saint Vincent de Paul", and is one of the pilgrimage centres of Southern France, on the way to Lourdes, forty miles farther on.

Vincent was the third child in the family, with three brothers and two sisters. Born on April 24, 1581, he was baptized the same day in the church of the village, then called Pouy. His father owned a small property, keeping cattle and pigs, toiling to remake the poor land to grow the vegetables, millet and grapes that supplied his rising family. Vincent had to take his share in the labours according to his powers, and like any small boy in the country, was put to minding the cattle as they grazed over the district, and to tending and feeding the pigs.

His father and mother realized his quick and keen intelligence, and hoped to give this son a better opportunity in life than they themselves had had. So he was sent to board in a college, kept by the Franciscan Fathers at Dax, when he was about 14. During his two years there, he could walk home to see his family often and they were proud of his progress. He loved his family, but at this age he had developed a little snobbery, for he tells us how ashamed he was to be seen on the street with his father "because he was badly dressed and a little lame." On one occasion when his father called to see him at the College, he refused to meet him "because he was a poor peasant." Vincent was regarded by the Friars as an unusually bright student, so they recommended him to a local lawyer, de Commet, as a tutor for his sons, by which undertaking Vincent was able to pay his own way at College.

### VOCATION TO THE PRIESTHOOD.

Soon Vincent felt strongly his vocation to be a priest. His lawyer patron saw his piety, charity and holy life and encouraged the idea. This was in the days before the seminaries, so in the late summer of 1597 he went across to Toulouse to take up his theological studies at the University

among the several thousands of other students of various faculties. It was a seven-years course and costly; the sale of a pair of bullocks by his father gave him a start, but he decided to fend for himself. He opened a small academy for boys some miles from the city, and having built it up, transferred it to Toulouse, where he was able to continue his studies whilst not neglecting his pupils. Steadily he approached his priesthood, associating intense work with keen piety, and was ordained on September 23, 1600. He was young, but the practice of early ordination was in vogue in France at that time.

He was still intending to continue as a student, and his capacity and practical judgement, with his university education, gave him opportunity for a livelihood. Income from investments or rent from land or property was the usual source of benefices, and the bestowing of these was in the hands of the Bishops in some measure. On the recommendation of Monsieur de Commet, Vincent was promised one parish with its revenues, in his native diocese. The gift was challenged and he withdrew his claim, returning to his studies and his boarding school. In 1604, he obtained his bachelorship in theology, making the future look bright. His father had died a few years earlier, so Vincent's heart was now fixed on being able to do something for his mother and assisting the younger ones of the family, as well as on making sure of his own financial state. He seemed caught up in the stream of the ambition of the day. By reason of his school, he was making his way, and had friends so powerful that in spite of his youth, he had some hope of being made a bishop, which would have guaranteed his revenues and his mother's welfare. He was in great need of money at this time for some reason, when he learned that a good old lady in Toulouse had died making her will in his favour. It was a windfall and he decided to grasp it at once, and go and sell the property. A debtor to the estate fled to Marseilles where Vincent pursued him and recovered the debt.

When a friend offered him a passage of part of the return journey by sea, he accepted in order to make a saving in his expenses, and in July 1605, set sail across the Gulf of Lyons for Narbonne.

### **CAPTIVITY IN AFRICA.**

This was the beginning of a changing, restless, patchwork period of twenty years of his life. The ship was captured after a fight by Turkish pirates, Vincent receiving a wound in the leg. The crew and Vincent were taken to Tunis to be sold in the slave market. He describes the sale: "After stripping us quite naked, they handed out to each a pair of breeches, a linen vest and a small cap and then marched us up and down the streets. When they had taken us around, the town five or six times, with a chain about our necks, they brought us back to the ship, so that the merchants might come and see who were able to eat well and who were not, and also to show that our wounds were not grievous. When this was over, they brought us back to the market place, where the buyers came to see us, for all the world just like people come to the sale of a horse or an ox, making us open our mouths to see our teeth, feeling our sides, examining our wounds, making us walk, trot and run, making us carry weights and wrestle to show our strength, with a thousand other brutalities as well."

His first owner was a fisherman, but being a bad sailor, Vincent was soon sold to an old alchemist, for whom he fed a dozen furnaces, and who taught him some medical secrets and some tricks and amusements of his art. He toiled hard, but this was little compared to the outlook for the young priest, cast among Mohammedans trying constantly to pervert him, with no sign of redemption from a lifelong servitude.

But he kept his faith and confidence in God and trusted to the Blessed Mother. He wrote later: "God always gave me a firm conviction that I should escape, by reason of the unceasing prayers I offered to Him and to the Virgin. Mary, through whose sole intercession I believe I was set free."

After a year of slavery, he was re-sold to a Frenchman, who after capture had apostatised and gained his liberty. Vincent worked in his fields on the mountainside, and whilst singing psalms and hymns at his work, in his rich clear voice, he attracted the notice of one of his master's wives. She questioned him more about his faith, and was so pleased with what he told that she reproached her renegade husband for having deserted his religion. He was touched by grace through her words, and, since to return openly to his faith would mean certain death, the next day told Vincent that they must make a plan to escape to France.

### **RETURN TO FRANCE.**

It was ten months before they boarded a little skiff and landed in the south of France in 1607. At Avignon, the apostate was publicly absolved and entered a religious community. Vincent now wrote home to his mother to explain his two years' silence and to comfort her after his absence, and also he wrote to one of his former pupils, a de Commet, to tell of God's Providence over him in his exile.

The Pope's Vice-Legate at Avignon kept Vincent with him as a guest, and promised to help him restore his position by procuring a benefice for him. On account of the tricks and magical effects learnt from the old Turk and reproduced by Vincent, the Vice-Legate took him to Rome with him, much as a showman might, or lest anyone else should get these amusing secrets from him. Vincent spent several months in the Eternal City, reviewed his Theology, made friends of some important people, made his pilgrimages to the hallowed spots of the City of Peter, and seeing the solidity and the supernatural character of the Church, burnished up his faith into the brightness and clearness that remained with him for life.

Writing thirty years later to one of his priests at Rome he says: "What a consolation it was to me to find myself in that city, the mistress of Christendom, the dwelling of the Head of the Church militant, the spot where are the bodies of Saint Paul and of so many other martyrs and holy persons, who in past times have shed their blood and spent their lives for Jesus Christ; how happy I considered myself to be in treading the very streets so many saints had trodden; It was a consolation which affected me even to tears."

## **RESIDENCE IN PARIS.**

At the end of 1608, Vincent went for the first time to Paris. Instead of returning to his diocese or home to his people, he must have had some special reason to make this change of abode. Perhaps he was there on a Papal mission to King Henry IV, which appealed to his desire to get ahead in high places, or maybe he wished to begin life anew in new surroundings. At any rate a letter to his mother in 1610, shows him in great hopes of advancement and prosperity, and of being able to retire and spend the rest of his days (he was only thirty) near her.

He was soon appointed one of the chaplains of the Queen, Marguerite of Valois, charged with the distribution of her magnificent alms, and receiving a benefice of £300 a year. Many financial obligations were attached to it, so it was not all it seemed; but the position gave him contact with notable people at the Court and in Paris, and it was a beginning of security for himself and his mother. In his duty as almoner, he was also coming into contact with his future inheritance in the person of the sick, suffering and destitute, towards whom his heart was always drawn. Besides his charitable deeds, he spent a lot of time in prayer in the Royal Chapel, in the splendid church of Saint Louis, the *Sainte Chapelle*, and in Notre Dame Cathedral, where without notice he could freely indulge his love for the presence of God and his devotion to Mary. He had occasion too, for some great acts of virtue. Accused of theft by his room-mate, Vincent bore the injustice silently, though his character was being attacked and damaged among his friends, until suspicion was cleared by the confession of the guilty party six years later.

Also, out of compassion for a friend who had helped him and was now in grievous torment and sickness with doubts about his faith, Vincent, after long prayer, offered himself to God as a victim to undergo this trial in his stead. The sick man felt his doubts vanish, but darkness came over Vincent. He fought calmly and stood firm against the assaults of doubt, but was released only on deciding that he would devote his life to the poor. A big hospital of the Brothers of Saint John of God was near his dwelling, and as chaplain to the Queen, he had entry there and means to disburse. A gift of about £3,000, which he received in 1611, he handed over to the hospital authorities – a sign that his anxiety about finances had now been supplanted by charity for the suffering member's of Christ. He had found friend, confessor and guide in Father Peter de Berulle, who, in 1611, founded the French Oratorian Congregation, and under Berulle's direction, his life was planned for the next period of years.

## **PARISH PRIEST OF CLICHY.**

One of the first members of the new Oratory was the Parish Priest of Clichy, who resigned his parish in favour of Vincent on advice of de Berulle.

It was an extensive district on the border of the city, really a country parish of six hundred parishioners, with a dilapidated church that Vincent now took as his chief care. He began to restore the church, preached and heard confessions diligently, caring for the sick and afflicted so

as to gain the goodwill of all. He never forgot the goodness of his people. "When I was a country parish priest," he said years later, "my people were good folk. I used to say to myself. How fortunate you are to have such good people. They came to church and went to confession. The Pope himself is not as happy as a parish priest in the midst of such kind-hearted people. I listened with admiration to those peasants singing the psalms and never missing a note." The Baptismal Font, the Pulpit and Cross of Vincent are still in use in the old church, which is now attached to the beautiful big church of Saint Vincent in the present crowded workingman's suburb of Clichy.

### **CHAPLAIN AND TUTOR FOR THE NOBILITY.**

He worked here only for a year when his adviser Father Berulle, directed him to change his occupation. He was to be a tutor to the children of Philip de Gondi. An administrator was chosen, and installed to care for the parish, and amid the sorrow and tears of his flock Vincent set out in obedience for his new home, with his few belongings on a handcart, in 1613.

The de Gondis had been high officers of the kingdom for a century, and the Bishopric of Paris had been in their family for over fifty years. Peter, Henry and John Francis held it in turn, Henry being Bishop at the time Vincent was called to Paris to the home of the Bishop's brother Philip, a Count, Marquis, Baron, Admiral of the Fleet and the King's Lieutenant-General. Vincent was thus brought back among the nobility and it was a mark of the high esteem felt for him that he was chosen for the education of the children of such a notable family, though it must have amused him, a son of the poor from the remote and barren country districts, to be moving and living in such circles.

Here he came to know many of the important people of the day, though he was not interested in their patronage now; later on, he would know where to turn for help. Following a strict order of the day, his room was a monk's cell in his free time for reading and meditation, where he drew the fervour and strength, which urged him in his activities. God's destiny for him was being slowly worked out in these vagaries of his earlier life. The lady of the house was a noblewoman, pious and virtuous, generous and determined; she had one son of eleven, another of two, and the baby John Francis Paul, all naturally destined for high stations in life. The eldest was to be Vincent's charge for the next four years. Besides the family, the household staff were also under his spiritual care for instruction, Mass and confession; and he was still able to take some part in the welfare of his poor of Clichy. His taste for pastoral work had inclined him definitely to this side of the apostolate, and whenever the de Gondis went to their country houses, Vincent would go with them and spend the time in the spiritual concerns of the villages. Countess de Gondi aided him and the two visited the sick and gave alms to the needy.

Near Folleville, they called to see a dying man. After Vincent, had heard his confession the sick man sent for Madame; "I should have been damned", he told her, "but for the general confession I made at the request of your chaplain, because of the many grave sins I never before dared to confess." Madame was shocked and amazed; if this could be true of a man so well esteemed in

the neighbourhood, how many others may be in a similar state? She thought long and hard about a remedy and asked Vincent to preach in the Church at Folleville on January 25, 1617, about general confessions. The result was that all the people came to confession. He continued his instructions to prepare them for the sacraments, but the crowds were beyond his capacity. Help was obtained from some Jesuit Fathers, and together they continued the same good work for other nearby villages. Madame de Gondi established a fund of £4,000 to guarantee a repetition of these missions in the country villages and towns, but none could be got to undertake them, so it was left for Vincent to arrange when and where possible.

### **PARISH PRIEST AGAIN.**

This short term of his ministry among the people, brought him again to consider his position. As a priest, his time was claimed by one family, and how many others were in dire need of his assistance? *What about his promise to God to devote himself to the poor and needy?* He placed his difficulty before his director, Father de Berulle, and in a few months left the de Gondi Mansion under the Oratorian's instructions, to care for a small parish at Chatillon, in the Archdiocese of Lyons. This little town was very low spiritually, and uncared for by the local clergy, Calvinism making rapid progress there. Vincent by his zeal and fervour, by his example and preaching, reformed the place, beginning with the clergy, and converted many heretics because of his kind ways. But Madame de Gondi had missed him. She lamented her loss and left no stone unturned to have him back: the salvation of her household of the thousands of people dwelling on her rented properties, that of her husband, and her children, and above all, her own, depended on Vincent's presence in her house. She could neither eat nor sleep, and wept day and night, (she wrote to de Berulle) and so insistent was she, that acting as the Finger of Providence, he sent Vincent back, to the joy of the heretics and the grief of the good parishioners of Chatillon.

Knowing his desire for active work, she decided to placate him and altered his status from tutor to be supervisor of the children's education, allowing him freedom to go about her estates among her tenants (who numbered 8,000) for missions and other good works, in which she co-operated by her activity and her money. Vincent promised to stay with her till her death, resigned his parish and was domiciled again in Paris at Christmas, 1617. Evidently, he was being used as a plaything by the Hand of God, being thrown about, back and forth, without any permanent position, devoting his time and talents as occasion offered.

### **THE CONFRATERNITY OF CHARITY.**

Whilst in his parish of Chatillon, he had started a Confraternity of Charity for Women. Asked one Sunday to say a word in his sermon on behalf of a sick and helpless family, he spoke feelingly of their plight and of the divine charity it would be to aid them.

Going to call on them himself in the afternoon, he found a procession of people coming and going, and at the house itself, a crowd of willing helpers with loads of food. Here he saw need for order and discretion and the result was the organization, on the feast of the Immaculate

Conception, after three months of experiment in practice, of the Confraternity of Charity; Our Lord Himself was to be its Patron, and the Blessed Virgin, its patroness; he framed all the rules, setting out the religious duties of the members, the means to virtue for them, the details of how to approach the sick, how to serve them, to fix up their trays, what to prepare for them, even the recipes to use, what to say to them, how to console them and prepare them for the sacraments, and the rest. It was his first attempt at enlisting the help of lay people in an ordered form, and its results were beyond all expectations.

Now back at the de Gondi affairs, he set up a plan for missions in each town and village of the estates, preaching, catechising and hearing confessions, and a permanent result of each mission was the establishment of the Association of Charity on behalf of the sick poor. The men folk wished to take a hand also, so from 1620, he made associations for them. Besides their spiritual duties as set down, they took care of the poor, who, though not sick, were in need, such as children, the aged and feeble. They found places for those who could work, supplemented the earnings of others, and took full care of the helpless. Boys were lodged and provided with employment in the factories run by the association, and taught the trades of the place. Their resources were obtained by gifts and collections, as well as from the sale of the cattle and of the fleeces of sheep owned by the association and farmed out to graze on different holdings. For a time some of these groups were mixed but experience showed that men and women could not work together. It was such associations that inspired [Blessed] Frederic Ozanam's society of charity, in the nineteenth century — the Saint Vincent de Paul Society. Both men's and women's Associations fostered the spiritual life of the members and their contacts, as well as procured some remedy to the needs of the poor and sick. Vincent's constant urging, his supervision and visitation of the branches occupied his time, and gave him the pleasure of spending himself for the needy. He was not now thinking of making his way, or of retiring on a good income, but was being led along the path Providence had laid out for him to give him the knowledge and experience required for the larger undertakings ahead of him.

### **CHAPLAIN-GENERAL OF THE FLEET.**

In his search for those in distress, he took a look at the prisoners of Paris. Their evil state moved him to tears and he begged for their improvement by the authorities. To see the spiritual and temporal betterment of the convicts became his urgent charge, for which he enlisted the aid of clerics and laity with undreamt of results.

He was especially interested in those men condemned to punishment by serving at the oars of the King's Galleys of the Navy. His present patron, Philip de Gondi, was the General of the Galleys, so Vincent was appointed Chaplain-General, with rank of an officer in the Mediterranean Fleet. This gave him free access to the men and supervision of the other chaplains. Thus, he was able to conduct missions on the boats at Marseilles and Bordeaux, regulate the order and opportunity for Mass and the sacraments, as well as to use great influence for the better treatment of the convicts. A well-known picture represents Vincent being leg-ironed with the ball and chain to take the place of one of these prisoners in the ship and allow him to escape to his needy wife and family.

Certainly, his charity would lead him to such an extreme, for his compassion for these unfortunates was unlimited.

### **HIS VISIT HOME.**

After one of his missions to the Navy at Bordeaux in 1621, being quite near his home district, he decided, on the advice of friends, to pay a call to his relatives. It was nearly twenty years since he had seen any of them, and his return was a grand joy to them and to him. He spent ten days with them. They noted his piety and devotion, his enquiries about their religious life and practice; he told them not to expect any financial help or other help from him, urging them to trust in Providence and to give all their efforts to the saving of their souls. He made a special visit to the church of his Baptism and renewed his Baptismal promises, and a final act of devotion, he went barefoot with a large crowd in pilgrimage to the neighbouring village of Buglose, which was then a famous shrine of Our Lady, where he sang Solemn Mass.

After the Mass and breakfast together, he bade his people farewell. But he was heartbroken. His tender feelings led him, though now forty years of age, to cry the whole way along to Dax, and in his tears, he thought of all the ways he could benefit them by money, by his influence and by advancing them in the world. These plans played upon him for three months afterwards, but in prayer he obtained of God deliverance from this scheming and his over-tender feelings, to such a degree that he handed over his relations, completely to Divine Providence and never after was of any material help to them, beyond once transmitting some money given to him for them, nor did he ever return to see them. God's call to the work appointed would not be refused at the call of the flesh and blood he loved so well.

### **SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES AND SAINT JANE FRANCES DE CHANTAL.**

It would seem that Vincent's hands were now full; he had whole districts to provide for spiritually with regular missions, he had the Galley convicts under his care, as well as the supervision of the increasing number of Associations of Charity. Besides, he still had the de Gondi family, Madame and the boys; the second son had been killed by the kick of a horse, and the youngest, John Francis Paul, was in line for the Archbishopric of Paris, to succeed his uncle, as the second Cardinal de Retz. But in 1622, another office was passed on to Vincent. A few years previously he had met in Paris the holy Bishop of Geneva, Francis de Sales; they became firm and close friends, exchanging their plans and consulting on all their great secrets, with an unlimited esteem for one another. Francis had brought a community of his Visitation Nuns with their saintly Foundress, Mother Jane Frances de Chantal, to Paris at this time; he asked Vincent to be their Superior and Director, and had him appointed so by the Archbishop of Paris, which settled the matter for Vincent. Francis de Sales died on December 28, 1622 and Mother de Chantal then relied on Vincent in the government of her Community. They saw one another rarely, but their correspondence was frequent until her death in 1641.

The holy and intimate union of the three grand saints was shown in the fact that Vincent was



given a vision by Almighty God of the souls of his two friends rising to heaven. It is the only miraculous occurrence we meet in the life of Saint Vincent. According to his report, there appeared to him a small globe of fire, which rose from the earth, and proceeded to join in the upper region of the air another larger and brighter globe, both of them then rose higher, entered into and shone resplendently in another globe infinitely greater and brighter. He was told interiorly that the first globe was the soul of Mother de Chantal, the second, that of Francis de Sales and the third, the Divine Essence. Because of the entreaty of the two saints, Vincent retained the guidance of the Paris house of the Visitation until his death, although he was averse to his priests taking up any similar duties, since it impeded their freedom for the work of the missions.

### **BEGINNINGS OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION.**

After all these years of changing occupation, of continual round from place to place, of taking a hand as circumstances offered in so many varied works for the neighbour, Providence had given Vincent sufficient experience and advanced him sufficiently in holiness to lead him to his chief undertakings. He was following the ways of His Divine Master, doing the Will of God as indicated to him, subject to those in authority, seeing Christ Himself in Philip de Gondi and the Blessed Virgin in Madame de Gondi; without pomp or show amid the persons of wealth he dealt with, he shared the privations of the poor; seeking to preach the Gospel to every creature, to preach the remission of sins, and instruct the ignorant in all that Christ had said, he went about as an apostle; he read literally the Word of Christ: "As often as you did it to one of these My least brethren, you did it to Me", and in favour of the sick, and needy and imprisoned he gave his time, patience and charity. He studied the condition of the people, and, as he travelled up and down the Provinces, he learned at first hand the wants of the faithful and the neglect of the shepherds. But to relieve all this he was content to pray to God, and to do his best in his own lowly way to improve matters. He was no firebrand or professional reformer, nor did he rush in to any evil to show what was at fault and what he could do to remedy it. As a rule, he was forced or led into his various works, waiting or even resisting, until he could no longer hold back against the Hand of God that pushed him onwards as he groped step by step in the creation of new works.

He was forty-five years of age when, in 1624, he was induced to begin his Congregation of Priests for Missions. Madame de Gondi still kept her £4,000 ready to endow anyone who would take up regular mission work among her tenants and employees, and Vincent, as her chaplain, made the offer to one Order after the other, but it was constantly refused for a variety of reasons.

However, the necessity of the work weighed so heavily upon him that, for want of others, he gave way to the pressure of the de Gondis and of Philip's brother, the Archbishop of Paris, promising in 1625 to organize within a year a band of six ecclesiastics, zealous, learned and free to devote themselves under the direction of the Hierarchy, to the salvation of the poor country people by preaching, instruction and general confessions, with special care for the de Gondi estates and the convicts. He was given possession of an old dilapidated students' hostel, the *College des Bons*

*Enfants*, near the *Porte Saint Victorie*, for the residence of the new community, and the revenue from £11,000, donated by the de Gondis, was to supply their upkeep. By the contract of April, 1625, Madame de Gondi required Vincent to continue to reside in her house; however, the designs of God soon removed this obstacle, which would have separated the Superior from his companions, by the holy death of Madame in June, Vincent being faithfully beside her, preparing her entrance to heaven. Monsieur de Gondi consented to Vincent's going to live in the College, and, he himself joined the Oratory in the following April to become a priest.

### **EARLY YEARS OF THE COMMUNITY.**

Whilst Vincent was in the parish of Clichy in 1612, he had given lessons to a dozen clerics, one of them, Anthony Portail, being lodged in the presbytery. After his ordination, he had worked with Vincent for the convicts and now at 33, he was the first and only companion in the College. Helpers were engaged temporarily, and the following year two more priests joined the group. By virtue of a duly registered legal document, these four formed a "Congregation, Company or Confraternity", and acquired their legal status in 1627. Opposition from some clerical bodies in Paris was easily overcome by his friend the Archbishop, but to make their rights secure, Vincent wanted the assurance of Papal approval. It was not so easy in distant Rome, and strange to say the chief opponent was his former guide, de Berulle: however, in 1633, he was blessed with the authorization of Pope Urban VIII for his Company.

Meantime the seat of the Community had been transferred to the northern side of Paris, to *Saint Lazare*. This was the property of a hundred and twenty acres with large scattered buildings housing a priory of Augustinian monks. The offer of it made by the Prior caused Vincent in his humility to tremble. It was such a big estate for his small needs; after the persuasion of more than thirty visits, Vincent took the advice of a canonist friend, Duval, and accepted. Once accepted, regarding it as the Will of God that he should have it, nothing would stop him until he was in peaceful possession. He was like that; slow to move, but irresistible when he had made a decision. It is from this house of "*Saint Lazare*" that the missionaries got the name "Lazarists" in France, and when the Community was removed from there during the French Revolution, their new and present headquarters opened in 1817, was given the old name, and the title "Lazarist" still prevails in many countries.

They went about the country parishes in twos or threes, preaching, teaching the catechism, giving the sacraments, restoring peace and harmony among the people, staying at a place until all had made a general confession. They tried as much as their work allowed, to have some few religious exercises together, and lived in rented houses or boarded out for the time of the missions. At home, they followed an order of the day to make use of their time in prayer and study and improving their preaching, Vincent himself giving the directions and instructing them in the mode of procedure. Their routine copied that of religious communities to some extent, but they improvised as occasion demanded, fitting their life to their activities on behalf of the neighbour. Far from setting out with a fixed plan determining the details of their life, they had no set rule for thirty-three years, that is, until they had established the line of life that suited them, and that

worked in practice.

Their increase was slow, thirty-five in the first ten years, but the majority were already priests, led to take a share in the missions by the burning zeal of energy of the small band, and by the need and eagerness of the people. There was no novitiate or probation until twelve years after the commencement of the Congregation, as Vincent was waiting to see what the Will of God might be for the future of the society.

But the hundredfold of the Gospel was given the four foundation members, for before the death of Saint Vincent, thirty-five years later, there were over four hundred priests in the Community, as well as two hundred lay brothers. Vincent was sure that God had planted, watered and given the increase. Looking back years after, he said, "We went forth to preach the Gospel to the poor as Our Lord had done. This is what we did; and God on His part did what He had foreseen from all eternity. He blessed our work; and when other ecclesiastics saw this, they begged permission to join us; not that they came all at once, but from time to time. O my Saviour! Who could ever have thought that such results could have sprung from the condition in which we once were? If any one had told me what would come to pass, I should have thought he was making fun of me; and yet it was in that way that God willed our company to begin."

Most of his subjects came from the country dioceses; about three per cent from Paris, and a few were exiles from Ireland. Altogether, the progress showed the goodwill of so many of the clergy to meet an evil when it was pointed out to them, with its remedy, and the power of Vincent in co-opting assistance for his labour.

His first idea was to have this band of workers at the disposal of their Lordships the Bishops, for use in their dioceses and under their command. But this plan was altered by Pope Urban VIII, who named Vincent Superior-General and exempted the Congregation from the control of the Bishops. In order that the members of the Congregation would not be taken away from the works of their vocation and engaged in duties that would hinder the missions, they were considered as belonging to the secular and not the regular clergy, though they lived together in common. It was thirty years before any private vows were added to their rule.

Vincent had been trained principally in the spirituality of de Berulle and the Oratory, emphasizing the cult of the Divine Lord, Incarnate, Risen and Glorified, the Eternal High Priest; but as he grew older, under the influence of Saint Francis de Sales and by reason of his own dealings with the people, he took as his line of life the imitation of Christ in His public Actions. Coupled with an intense devotion to Mary Immaculate, he chose his path as the ordinary well-worn ways of the spiritual life, with the ideal of following Christ in all his doings, and his motive for undertaking or declining any work was that Christ had done so; once he had the lead from Our Lord's words or deeds in His public life, he would adopt the way indicated, and according to this guidance he developed the virtues that made him a saint. It was this that led him so earnestly in

his zeal for the missions; he was continuing the mission of Christ, Who preached to the poor, especially to those outside the cities.

### **MISSIONS ABROAD.**

From 1625, to the end of his life, Vincent had his chief life's work in his hands; but he took part also in many other affairs at the same time, so that it is not possible to follow his interests year by year. At the end of ten years existence, there were thirty-five members in the Company, and the work was limited to their capacity. The Founder was no propagandist; he waited for God to bless their endeavours by an increase of workers, accepting those who came, doing his utmost to keep them, and unwilling, once they had established their vocation to that life, to let them depart under any pretext. The Society's sphere of action gradually covered France; they were invited to Rome in 1642, then to Genoa and Turin, and to Warsaw in 1651, founding houses in each and opening the way for more additional members.

In 1645, though the total personnel was only 180 priests and 80 lay-brothers, foreign missions came under their zeal. Vincent was glad of the opportunity given by King Louis XIII, to send a priest and a lay-brother to Tunis, where he himself had lived in captivity, to help the poor Christians languishing in slavery and in daily danger of apostasy. This was followed by a similar mission to Algiers, another pirate station, where 20,000 Christian slaves were held under Mohammedan control. These two missions have their own history of successes, of hardship, torture and martyrdom, and are continued to the present; a Vincentian, Archbishop Charles-Albert Gounot was the Archbishop of Carthage, and Primate of North Africa from 1937 to 1953. In 1645, Vincent was also preparing to send missionaries to Persia, at the request of the Holy See. The plan was frustrated, and the eight priests were sent to Ireland, then in the toils of religious war, famine and pestilence, where they laboured with wonderful fruit for eight years. Yet another outpost taken, still active, was in the faraway island of Madagascar, near the French settlement of Fort Dauphin, where in a pestilential climate, the missionaries died one after another, from fever and, plague or at the hands of the savage natives.

The Orkney Islands and the Highlands of Scotland too, had their missionaries from Paris at this time, the large heart of Vincent willingly sending the message of the Gospel and the comforts of religion wherever he was called, not counting the reduction of his home forces, but trusting in the favour of God to send labourers to the vineyard.

### **HELPS FOR THE CLERGY.**

As the home missions continued, Vincent could not close his eyes to the fact that to give a mission in a place and then leave it without zealous clergy to stabilize the good results would be to act like a general who captured a town from the enemy, and then went of to attack another without leaving a garrison behind in the first one. He had seen the lack of holy and earnest priests throughout France, and the neglected state of the people. But much as he lamented it, it did not seem to him that it was his personal affair. Before he was born, the Council of Trent had ordered

that seminaries be opened in the dioceses where possible, and more than twenty had been begun in France, mostly to fall within twenty years. The religious wars, pillage and arson, stopped the spread of this reforming move; but the beginning of the seventeenth century showed up more hopefully. Plans were ready for many colleges and the Bishops were full of zeal to bring them into being. The Oratorians, conducted a number, and Adrian Bourdoise established several houses where the parish clergy could live together and be instructed in the duties of their ministry.

Still, the remedy was inadequate. Vincent had been asked at times by Bishops to give a fortnight's retreat and instruction to candidates before their ordination, with notable success; also in the gift of *Saint Lazare House* in 1632, the Archbishop of Paris required that his ordinands be received there for a fortnight's retreat under the missionaries, or other directors. But such preparation was very little, so it was suggested to Vincent that a weekly meeting of the clergy could be held at which they would consider the virtues proper to priests and the ways of practising them, as well as review the duties of their office. He willingly agreed, and *Saint Lazare* was laid open to them gratis every Tuesday. Annual retreats were free also to any who wished for the opportunity. These arrangements were but a small contribution to the improvement of the clergy, and though Vincent could see that more fundamental and lasting preparation was a necessity, he and his confreres had their missions to attend to as their vocation. They did start a junior school in the *College des Bons Enfants* where the humanities were taught to children who were possible candidates for the priesthood, but it was not a success: "We have twenty-two in the seminary", the Founder wrote, "but of that number only two or three are passable."

Still, he was slow to abandon what he had once begun, and the institution was according to the mind of the Church. Though he had not had the benefit himself, Vincent had nurtured the idea that seminaries should take in clerics already in orders or approaching orders, who would be trained for a year or two in virtue, prayer, chant, ceremonies, preaching and theology; but distrusting his own initiative, he waited for some Providential direction through authority. It came in 1642, from Cardinal Richelieu, who as Bishop of Lucon had failed with his seminary, and now as chief minister of the King, was heartily interested in the affairs of the clergy. He urged Vincent to carry out his scheme by admitting clerics to the *Bons Enfants*, giving him a sum of money to maintain twelve for two years. Thus, Vincent had two institutions under one roof, separate, and under different rules of life and education. After three years the juniors were transferred to a house in the boundaries of *Saint Lazare*, which was called after Saint Charles Borromeo, but this opening of the doors to the ecclesiastics and students as distinct from the boys, was the beginning of the senior seminaries.

It was the crown to what was to be the second proper work of his Congregation, the training of the clergy. He had now the complete chain of works for the benefit of the priesthood, the minor seminary of Saint Charles for beginners, the major seminary of the *Bons Enfants* for their theological studies, retreats at *Saint Lazare* before their ordinations, then the Tuesday conferences

and the annual retreats to renew constantly and stimulate their piety and devotion. From then on he was committed both to the service of the souls by the missions and the parallel work of providing holy and learned priests for the parishes; giving his attention to the ignorant and uninstructed as well as to the masters and teachers of Christian knowledge. Today the Congregation of the Mission conducts over 100 major and minor seminaries in various countries.

### **SAINT LOUISE DE MARILLAC.**

His zealous activity was not all consumed in these two great works. The Confraternities of Charity for the poor and sick had developed all over the country, and to remain efficient and keep to their purpose they required a lot of time and supervision; much more than he was able to give.

Moreover, he realized that a woman's hand was needed to manage and train these groups of charity. God supplied this hand in Louise de Marillac, whose maiden name was Mademoiselle le Gras. She probably had known him since 1620, for they dwelt in the same parish, but it was in 1624 that she was sent by her director, Bishop le Camus, to give the guidance of her soul to Vincent. She had one son, aged ten, and her husband, the chief secretary of the Queen Regent, Marie de Medicis, was practically invalid.

On his death in 1625, she dedicated her life to works of charity and religion. Putting her son to college, she led a life like a fervent religious, with daily meditation morning and evening, daily Mass, Communion three times a week, the Rosary, little office of the Blessed Virgin, spiritual reading every day, and taking the discipline three times a day. Her free hours she gave to visiting the poor, or making clothes for them and ornaments for poor churches. Vincent had to moderate her intensity whilst waiting to know what he would advise for her future, telling her to honour meantime, the inaction and delay of the hidden state of the Son of God. After three years, the hour of Providence came, and Vincent engaged her in the active life of visiting the Confraternities about the country. A well educated organizer, with real love for the poor and ignorant, she cheered and fired the zeal of the branches, gently reviving and directing their good deeds, as she travelled back and forth in the stage coaches during four years, at her own expense.

She had delight in teaching the catechism to the growing girls and the young children, but grieved to think of the lack of school-mistresses who might perfect the instruction. After she had seen this field of charity and had experience of its working, guided in the minutest points by constant letters from Vincent, she was ready for her further vocation. The Confraternity had been begun in several parishes of Paris, but the members were mostly ladies of rank and of the aristocracy. Good intentioned and with money to give, they were not used to the constant and unpleasant hard work entailed in membership, the preparing of food, its distribution to the poor and sick, the visits to them in their dingy and dirty hovels. They pass on these duties to their employees, who were wanting in the essential thing — charity. Louise and Vincent saw the failure, but the remedy was not in sight.

## **THE DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY.**

If they could get some young women, not inclined to marry and willing to serve the poor, to devote themselves to the poor for the love of God, under the guidance of the Confraternity, it would be a solution. God provided these young women. The first was Margaret Naseau, from the country outside Paris. Having taught herself to read, whilst her cows were grazing on the roadside, she met Vincent on one of his missions, and asked his advice about teaching other girls.

He encouraged her and she induced a couple of the others to do the same. As soon as she heard of the society in Paris for helping the poor, she gave up teaching and came to offer herself for this more needed duty, and she became the right hand of Mademoiselle le Gras, in the parish confraternity. Lovable, kind, prudent and holy, she died in a few years of the plague caught from a poor girl whom she had made sleep in her own bed. She had brought other girls to join with her and others came along, as the cause became known, so that in this way the associations continued their works of mercy. But great virtue was required in these girls to persevere in their difficult tasks. A spiritual training and formation was necessary, so Vincent decided to group three or four of them under Louise's direction in her house, and thus after seven years of waiting, her vocation was settled, she being now at the age of forty two. Paris had got used to these women going about in their lay dress, serving the poor, visiting their homes, and caring for the sick and the dying; it was now time to unite them and give them solidity, to begin the Company of the Daughters of Charity; and November 29, 1633, was its foundation day.

They were to show a new type of community life, guided by a precise rule, imitating the virtues of Jesus Christ, serving the sick poor, a distinct body from any of the Nuns or Sisterhoods of the time, being secular persons living together, without any public vows, though making vows for one year at a time. Vincent loved to remind them that as Daughters of Charity, they were Daughters of God, and as Servants of the poor, they were the Servants of Christ. He kept a constant interest and direction over them, and when the Company was officially approved in 1648, by the Coadjutor Archbishop of Paris, John Francis Paul de Gondi (the baby of the de Gondi house when Vincent first went there), Vincent was named its Director for life.

Such was the beginning of this community, and it has suffered little change since then, numbering now over forty thousand members, their cornette being seen in all the countries of the world where they tend every ill man from the cradle to the grave. It was another creation and an innovation, brought into being by the man who was so tenacious of tradition and firmly opposed to novelty and change; but who at the same time knew how to adapt himself to the needs of the times, and to serve the Church with his genius.

## **THE LADIES OF CHARITY.**

With the Daughters of Charity just under way, another duty was thrust into Vincent's hands in 1634. The big general hospital of Paris, on the other side of the square from Notre Dame Cathedral, was well-known to his charity. Three, four, or five thousand patients were housed

here, varying with the crush of three to six in a bed; over twenty-five thousand persons a year were admitted there. It was in charge of a Community of Augustinian Nuns, aided by a number of chaplains. Many religious priests also gave a hand in helping the sick and the dying. Some ladies of the nobility used to visit it to exercise their kindness and give some relief to the wants of the inmates. One of these, Madame Goussault, the wife of the President of the Court of the Exchequer, was astounded in her visits, at the ignorance of the patients of their religion and of the duties of their Faith, and at what she thought was the neglect of preparing the very sick and the dying to receive the sacraments; here, she thought, was a good opening for some activity for womenfolk. She made the suggestion to Vincent that he take up the problem. But to intrude in other people's concerns was too delicate a matter, even at her request. Not satisfied, she went off to the Archbishop to get Vincent to take a hand.

His request was a command to the holy man, so he called a meeting of Madame de Goussault's friends. Besides Mademoiselle le Gras, there were several wealthy ladies, wives of some of the chief officials of the King, and a duchess or two. A confraternity was formed for the spiritual instruction of the patients, and their preparation for the sacraments, and for death; four ladies would go every day visiting them; a book of lessons they were to read to the sick was drawn up. They were to be careful not to cross the Sisters there in any way and to put off their style and vanity, to dress simply and plainly whilst on this holy occupation.

They brought little gifts of sweets and fruit, later extending this to an extra meal for the sick. As they increased their activity, they got some of the Daughters of Charity to help, and their own ranks increased to hundreds. Vincent remained their Director, presiding at their weekly meetings and urging them in the spirit of charity, reminding them of the blessing allowed to them to take such a place in the activity of the Church, and deciding for them the questions which they discussed freely for the perfection of their enterprise. Among the members are the names of countesses, marchionesses, duchesses, and many ladies of the Court, including some of the princesses, and other ladies, married, widowed and single, of all ranks; a good indication of the fervour and the active Christianity of these people, as also of the infectious zeal and charity of the friend of the poor and destitute, who would have everyone contribute to the relief of their needs.

The Confraternity flourished vigorously in the French Revolution, when the nobility in great part lost their status. It was revived in 1840, and is now an active organization in many countries, a women's society parallel to the Saint Vincent de Paul Society for men.

This company brought Vincent into other fields of action. One of its members, Mademoiselle de Pollallion, got him interested in a work of her own. On her husband's death, she quitted the Court and gave her time to establishing a community, the Daughters of Providence, to care for refuges for fallen women and girls whose virtue was in danger. Vincent encouraged her and got the Ladies of Charity to supply funds; he drew up the rules for them, and it spread rapidly. During the wars, it encountered many crises, bringing them to rely on Providence in earnest, with Vincent always by their side to advise and exhort. After the Foundress's death, he appealed to the Ladies



not to let the good work fail, and sought gifts from them, from the Queen down, to maintain it. Under his protection, it survived and its existence was secured.

Another lady of the Confraternity, Madame Villeneuve, set up a society of the Daughters of the Cross, to teach schools, and instruct girls and women in their religion.

It passed through many trials, financial and otherwise. But Vincent was always able to avert disaster, getting the required help from the Ladies of Charity, preventing their dissolution and confirming them in their spirit of charity, so as to preserve the good work of this Institution which goes on vigorously to the present day.

### **THE FOUNDLINGS.**

Another type of charity came into Vincent's sphere in 1638; it was to father the fatherless, by the care of the foundlings. In the big city of Paris, there were hundreds of children deserted by their parents each year through want, or shame, or sheer barbarity. A government Institution received them, but weak and small, sickly and underfed, their chance of life was little and even their baptism was neglected. Could Vincent close his eyes to such an evil, or merely shed a tear of grief, and give all his attention to the host of other charities he controlled? He told the Ladies of Charity of the state of affairs and sent them to see for themselves. The result was the opening of a house to take a dozen infants, who would be mothered by the Daughters of Charity, the expenses being found by the Ladies. It was a small start by way of experiment. Its good results were an incentive, and their devotion grew to the stage of taking over the full number, incurring a very large annual cost. The Thirty Years war was raging and bringing untold misery throughout France, Paris was being asked for the maximum of help, relief was urgently required on all sides.

Everyone was feeling the pinch, so the idea of returning the children to their former guardians was mooted; it had only been an experiment; it had achieved some success while times were not so bad, and could be resumed after more drastic needs were met. In 1648, Vincent called a general meeting of the Ladies; he put to them their present difficulties in carrying on the orphans' homes; he opposed to that the good that was done in snatching them from death and making them children of God, to know Him and love Him. "But nevertheless", he went on, "it is for you to decide. You became their mothers by grace when their mothers by nature abandoned them; see now if you too, will forsake them. Cease to be their mothers and become their judges; their life and death are in your hands. The time has come for you to pronounce sentence. If you continue your charity, they will live, if you abandon them, they will undoubtedly perish, as your own experience surely shows you."

The home for the foundlings continued, however much it was to cost, and as time went on the number of its buildings increased to thirteen, to give a real home and a Christian upbringing to the helpless little ones of Christ. It is no wonder that the commonest representation of Saint

Vincent de Paul is the one that shows him with a small child in his arms and another in the folds of his soutane by his side.

### WAR RELIEF.

The Thirty Years' war, from 1618 to 1648, enveloped the whole of Western Europe from Sweden to Spain. Chiefly religious in its origin as an effort to restrict Protestantism, it developed into a struggle for wealth and commerce irrespective of religion. France under the policy of Cardinal Richelieu, lined up with Holland, England and Sweden; Austria, Spain and some of the German states opposed them. When Richelieu died in 1642, he was followed as Prime Minister by his pupil, Cardinal Mazarin (though a cardinal, he was never ordained); and Queen Anne of Austria, on the death of Louis XIII, took up the Regency for her son, Louis XIV, aged five, in 1643. The war continued. The Rhine Valley, Belgium, Alsace and Lorraine provided the battlefields in great part. In 1636, the French overran the little kingdom of Lorraine, to the north-east of France, and in 1639, both the Swedes and the French, ravaged it again, reducing it to be a French Province. The widespread misery there is beyond description. Towns and villages lost their whole populations; some were reduced to ashes. No one was safe for their life or virtue; famine and pestilence took off hundreds who had none to bury them; men killed one another for food; mothers ate their own children, and children their mothers. Refugees brought the accounts to Paris, crowding to *Saint Lazare* for food and help. Vincent set about large-scale relief; there was a whole province to be succoured, but the whole world was not too big for his charity. Beginning with a reduction of food at home so as to have more to give, he called on his unfailing helpers, the Ladies of Charity, and the Queen, and their lavish gifts were sent on the way to Lorraine.

It is estimated that he collected from these sources over half a million pounds for the stricken ones. For over twenty-five towns he had to supply food and clothing; crowds went about with scarcely a rag to cover them; and in places food was given to over a thousand every day. The distribution was under the care of some of the missionaries and the lay-brothers, and their charity and zeal was inflamed by the Superior, directing the whole scheme from Paris. Missioners who had any skill in medicine were the first sent, and it was not long before the benefit of missions was also offered to the desolate people. Calamity was often the time of grace. Sinners became penitent under the heavy hand of God. The sick, aged, young mothers, the religious women, all were the object of the gentle charity and thoughtfulness of this noble priest. Accounts of the distress relieved were sent back, which he had printed on leaflets, to show the donors the use of their gifts, and to spur on their generosity. Until peace came, this host of helpless sufferers, depended in large measure on the charity of the great city of Paris, and God blessed the undertaking, such a mighty work of relief. Many women and girls came to the capital for safety, and groups of them were cared for by the Daughters of Charity, who found positions for them when they were able to take them. For one class Vincent showed a rare delicacy, those who had been rich or were of rank, and now felt the shame of asking strangers for help.

Some noblemen were gathered and the young Baron de Renty deputed to distribute their alms,

which he did over a number of years with such tact and graciousness, that their less fortunate friends seemed rather to be doing a favour, than receiving one. When it was at last possible for many of these displaced persons to return to their districts, the open hand of Vincent put the finishing touch to this mighty achievement by giving them the means to go home and providing for them until they were re-established.

### **DISTRESS IN MANY PROVINCES OF FRANCE.**

The same relief on a bigger scale went on for another ten years, till 1659, in other parts of France. The war in Flanders, against Spain, brought the opposing armies back and forth through the well-known battlefields of Picardy and Champagne, in the north and north-east of France, where the usual evils, crime and brutality, devastation and pillage, famine and disease, made paupers of hundreds of thousands. All eyes and hands were lifted towards Vincent to move him to become the Father of his Country. Towns and cities were fed by the alms given out by his missionaries and lay-brothers; the soup-kitchen was begun in this dire need; houses were set up for the expelled religious, for young women and for the orphans; hospitals were opened in the charge of the Daughters of Charity, who in half-a-dozen towns were engaged in attending the wounded and sick soldiers. With all the material help, it was spiritual care, by the sacraments, instruction, and comfort for the dying, which was the special duty of the missionaries, who pressed into service all the local clergy whom they were able to rescue from their sad plight. It seemed as if an army of Christ was brought into existence by the evils of the armies of hate.

At the same time, there was universal distress in Paris and in the Province surrounding it. The Peace of Westphalia was hardly signed in 1648, when the Parliament and Nobles, dissatisfied with the Regency and its financial policy for them, revolted to begin what is called the war of the Fronde. The Queen fled to *Saint Germain*, and Paris was blockaded. After three months, it was reduced, but the city, the suburbs especially, suffered horribly by murder and pillage and starvation. There was no peace, for the civil war carried on in the outer parts of the province.

The state of the country is described in a letter of Vincent de Paul to the Pope, Innocent X, whom he sought to induce to intervene in August, 1652; "The Royal House, divided by dissension, the people divided into sections; cities, and provinces afflicted by civil war; villages, towns and cities and provinces overthrown, ruined and, in ashes; labourers unable to harvest what they had sown, and sowing nothing for the year to come. The soldiers go to every excess, without punishment. The people are exposed not only to theft and pillage, but even to murder and all sorts of torture. The country people, who are not stricken down by the sword, die of hunger; priests, no better spared by the soldiers than others, are treated inhumanly and brutally, tortured and put to death. Young girls are dishonoured, religious women even are exposed to the wantonness and madness of the soldiery; churches are profaned, pillaged or destroyed; churches that remain are mostly abandoned by their pastors, the people being deprived of the sacraments, of the Mass and of all other spiritual help. And, horrible to think of and worse to say it, the Most August Sacrament of the Body of Christ is treated with the utmost indignity, even among Catholics; for to get the

sacred vessels they throw the Holy Eucharist on the ground, and tread on it with their feet."

All aid possible was organized, the same agents as for Lorraine were brought into play, and inflamed with generosity and charity from the furnace of Vincent's love for the distressed and his desire to do for them whatever work of mercy was in his power.

He went about Paris collecting from one friend's house to the next; the Queen put in her diamonds and the courtiers gave their jewellery. The power of God worked with him, and his superhuman activity was the means of solace for thousands of the afflicted. At the beginning of the Fronde, he thought to make use of his good standing with Queen Anne to induce her to put a stop to the war.

Though nearly seventy-years old, he set out on horseback, accompanied by his secretary lay-brother to interview the Queen; his mediation, however, was fruitless. His journey to the country brought him an occasion to go further afield. For many years now the multitude of his engagements had kept him near Paris and robbed him of his active part in the missions, so he undertook a tour of some of the houses of his confreres in the north to supervise their work, and also to see at first hand the devastation of the war. This winter was severe, but he rode on from town to town, until, exhausted and sick, he had to be brought back to Paris in the early summer, where he was soon engulfed in all the works of relief.

A new side of his character showed itself in these times; in the spirit of a crusader, he did his utmost to get the King and Mazarin and the commercial interests of Marseilles to undertake a campaign against the Turks in North Africa, to rescue the Christian slaves and overcome once and for all, the Mohammedan power in these parts. Nothing was done in the matter in his lifetime, but his plan was fulfilled later on.

### **THE COUNCIL OF CONSCIENCE.**

It was impossible that so important a figure in the life and training of the clergy should not be taken into consultation in the appointments, which the Crown then had of Bishops for the many Sees of France. Political advantage and personal favour had regulated many of these nominations, although Louis XIII and Richelieu had been often influenced by Vincent's opinions. Anne of Austria, as Regent, set up a body to attend to these matters in 1643, called the Council of Conscience, for which she chose Vincent as a member. Mazarin, the agile politician, was another. It was a real hornet's nest for Vincent, leaving him open to all sorts of charges of abuse and hatred; but it was an office for the welfare of the Church and he did not shrink from it.

Without personal interest, he argued and fought, for the selection of the best Bishops, and the Church of France was immeasurably indebted to his good judgement and fearless programme in choosing its episcopal rulers, during the ten years he carried this undesirable burden.

## **INTEREST IN RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES.**

Together with the care for the episcopate, Vincent was called on to use his prudence and power in the betterment of the regular life of many of the abbeys and convents of the religious orders of men and women. His common procedure was a canonical visitation, by which he tried to honour and help them, to serve and protect them; for some he obtained revision of their administration and constitutions; for others, spiritual care and guidance; for more, security of tenure and recovery of the properties from which they had been driven; and for all an increase in devotion to their life of service for God, by prayer and good works.

## **JANSENISM.**

Yet another act for the Church was his energetic opposition to Jansenism. This heresy, already condemned, and revived by a friend of Vincent, the Abbot of *Saint Cyran* at Poitiers, now denied the present existence of the Church, and the authority of Pope and Councils. It would revert to the primitive Church and its practices of piety. Absolution could be given only after months of penance, and Holy Communion was to be rarely received. Grace and salvation were not open to all, and freewill was not a fact. Vincent took the advice of some theologians, and, at the Council of Conscience sought for the condemnation of these errors. In the delay, the abbot of *Saint Cyran* died, but the heresy was adopted and spread so, that in 1650, a petition, was sent to Rome, at Vincent's instigation, signed by 85 of the Bishops.

The condemnation came in 1653, and was made more explicit against any evasion in 1656. It was accepted, with ready submission and great joy by the majority, but no one was more satisfied than Vincent. And as he had had special prayers for the petition by his community, so he continued them in thanksgiving. He tried in charity and meekness to reconcile those who were too hard-headed to accept the Church's Judgement, and urged the victors not to do anything that would make it harder for their adversaries to submit. The condemnation was a sign and a confirmation of the pure and ardent faith that Vincent had, and a showing of his deep love for the Church and loyal veneration for its Head, as well as a proof of his theological learning and skill.

## **THE END OF LIFE.**

Continual occupation in the affairs of his own communities, in the interests of the Church of France, in the foreign missions, and in the spiritual and corporal miseries of all kinds was the burden he carried for so many years, and its weight was visibly telling upon his strength. The completion of his plans of rules and government of his Congregation and of the Daughters of Charity was on his hands, and he had the present management of both Companies to discharge, together with the moulding of their charism and special character. All the details of distant houses came for his advice, encouragement and restraint, requiring in return his thousands of letters to his confreres. His years were full, and crowded; it is a matter of sheer wonder how he was able to control and to effect and to perfect so many things in his thirty five years of leadership.

A personal picture of him is given by his intimate friend, Bishop Abelly, which sums up his person. "He was of middle height and well proportioned; his head was a little bald and somewhat large, but in the right proportion to the rest of his body; his forehead broad and commanding; his face neither too full nor too thin; his look was gentle, his glance penetrating, his hearing quick, his bearing grave but kindly, simple and unaffected; his approach very affable, and his character extremely kind and amiable. His temperament was ardent and his constitution strong and robust. His mind was broad and big, well balanced, capable of great things, and not taken unawares. He was very adverse to changes, novelties and singularities; gifted with a natural eloquence, he combined simplicity and prudence in everything he said. His heart was most tender, noble and generous, easily won by all that was good and holy."

With the grace and light he reaped in his long prayers to God, and in his meditations, with his humility and selflessness, seeking to do what was the will of God and to follow the footsteps of His Divine Master, dealing with all in the utmost simplicity and Christ like meekness, he was proved by the years to be a leader raised up by God for the sanctification of his times and for the glory of the Church.

As his infirmity grew, his limbs failed, and unable to stand at the altar for Mass, he had to forego this greatest privilege of his priesthood; he continued to assist daily at the Mass, being carried to the chapel each morning. He suffered day and night, but the Will of God was his comfort. His breviary was his prayer book, to which he added the Ritual prayers for the sick and the dying; full of consideration and kindness for all who visited him, he begged pardon for the trouble he gave to those who looked after him. In his full senses he was anointed in readiness for death, and sitting in his chair he gave his blessing to his spiritual children about him; and as they prayed, he quietly, calmly and peacefully finished his course as the faithful servant of God and the Father of the Poor, his saintly soul going up to the Joys of his Lord, in the early morning of September 27, 1660.

\*\*\*\*\*