

# VINCENT'S SPIRITUALITY IN FRANCE

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## Abstraksi

Dalam artikel ini penulis mencoba menggambarkan kaitan antara *bentuk panggilan* religious seseorang dengan *waktu* dan *tempat* dimana orang bersangkutan berada. Waktu dan tempat seseorang berada, secara mendalam mempengaruhi bentuk atau manifestasi spiritualitasnya. St. Vinsensius misalnya, seperti akan diuraikan dalam artikel ini, bertemu dengan Allah melalui sesamanya, khususnya mereka yang miskin. Pertemuan yang terjadi di tempat tertentu dan pada waktu yang spesifik ini memberi pengaruh pada bentuk panggilan religiousnya. Baginya, perjumpaannya dengan orang-orang miskin yang terjadi secara tak terduga adalah medium yang dipakai oleh Allah untuk menyapanya secara personal, menuntun dan memanggilnya untuk menjadi rasul bagi orang-orang miskin. Vinsensius secara perlahan berkembang terus dalam pemahaman dan penerimaan apa yang dia yakini merupakan panggilan hidupnya. Dia melihat berbagai bentuk derita dan keresahan orang miskin dan berupaya hadir serta meringankan derita mereka.

**Key words:** *Imitasi, pelayan, tuan, orang miskin, berpusat pada Allah, keutamaan, Penyelenggara Ilahi, rasul untuk orang miskin, panggilan, iman, pembinaan.*

## Introduction

An encounter with Divine Reality is always concrete. It happens to people at a particular time and in a particular space. The time and place in which one lives always have an immense influence on one's form of spirituality. This general phenomenon is true also for Vincent de Paul, who lived in the situation of 17<sup>th</sup> century France. The specific circumstances of that time shaped the unique form of his spirituality, which he subsequently shared with his followers. I intend to take a closer look at the shaping of that spirituality from two angles. Firstly, the process of discovering his vocation and his commitment to that vocation. This will show how he gradually listened to the inner voice of his vocation, how he became convinced of it, and how he nourished it, thus deepening its roots. Secondly, I will describe how, under Vincent's influence, the Daughters of Charity started living the Vincentian model

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of the consecrated life, which is dedicated to charitable works. Finally, I will draw some conclusions.

### **Vincent's Spirituality**

The hallmark of Vincent's spirituality was his absolute service to the poor. His top priorities were to look after the poor, to remedy the ignorance of the country people and the clergy. This was his way of following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, to bring the good news to the poor. Very gradually, indeed we have to admit that, he discovered God's precious call for him. It was in events and people around him that he discovered his unique call.

This part is divided into four sections: the first section deals with Vincent's conversion, the second discusses the absolute need for renewal of the clergy, and charity for the poor. It was in the face of the poor Vincent saw God, and it was through the poor that God offered Vincent his unique call. The third section describes how Vincent followed Jesus by bringing the good news to the poor, and the fourth discusses his complete willingness to imitate the person of Jesus, by developing a proper attitude towards his vocation.

#### *The path of conversion*

Let us begin with Vincent's conversion.<sup>1</sup> His conversion coincides with his journey from being an ambitious man seeking status and financial rewards in the Catholic Church to one who surrendered himself completely to the Divine will; to a life that was God-oriented. There were four significant events in his life. All these experiences were

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<sup>1</sup>By 'conversion' we understand, first of all, the fundamental discovery of a religious dimension to life. Life is permeated with a new power and it is perceived in a totally different way. It is radically altered and renewed. The person experiences conversion as the masterful presence of God bursting unto the innermost depth of his personality. Conversion and calling are complementary realities, the two sides of a coin. This divine outpouring into the soul causes the person to break with his former way of life and to view the world, and his own existence, in a way that is completely different. Conversion carries with it a call; there is born a new dynamism and a clearly defined programme of action.

Vincent's conversion is not a sudden phenomenon. It is the result of a long progression towards maturity, though the final stage of conversion is crystallised in some rather extraordinary event which gives the impression that conversion is something sudden and immediate.

solid formative experiences for him. He learned from, and was formed by these experiences.

His initial motivation for being a priest was to have a good career in the Church and financial rewards that would ensure a comfortable retirement at an early age for him and his family. He did his best to achieve this life's ambition. One of his attempt was, he tried hard to get a rich parish at Tillh. In spite of his serious effort, his initiatives came to nothing. He found himself unsuccessful and remained empty-handed (O'Donnell1995: 16; Mezzadri 1992: 13-15).

This painful experience started him on the path of conversion. Firstly, in 1610, he came to de Bérulle, one of the important Catholic reformers in France at that time. His reason to meet de Bérulle was not anymore to seek help in finding a good office in the Church, but to seek spiritual direction. This was a new departure for Vincent. It was a small gesture but one that showed a profound change of attitude. From that time on, he began to set himself goals that were higher than merely improving his social position. He followed a more spiritual orientation. Thus his objective became less materialistic. And with de Bérulle's help, a desire to lead a truly priestly life started growing within himself.

In 1612 de Bérulle sent him to the poor parish church of Saint Medara in Clichy, north west of Paris. His earlier decision to follow a more spiritual direction was taking a clearer shape. For the first time in his life he worked as a parish priest, and he learned a new life of faith and its practice from the people. He also experienced the priesthood in a way unknown to him until then. He began to appreciate and love the pastoral ministry. He gave special care to the liturgy and catechesis. He also established a sort of preparatory seminary which had a dozen youngsters. He acted as a real priest, who looked after the souls of his parishioners. He even undertook to have the church repaired. He furnished it and provided vestments and a new baptismal font. In doing this he found himself for the first time moving in the right direction, and he discovered that he seemed able to foster a new way of living out the faith in others. His earlier decision to follow a more spiritual path had come to bear fruit (O'Donnell1995: 17; Mezzadri 1992: 17; Bedford 1856: 20).

Secondly, the occasion that led him to recognize his calling to a new life was the confession of a man of good reputation. This man, after confessing his sins, admitted that he felt relieved and joyful. This happened in January 1617 in Folleville. By this time Vincent was already aware that the country people were not looked after spiritually at all. Indeed, that confession made him more aware that the poor were

spiritually bereft. This event motivated him to prepare a good sermon and then provide an opportunity for a general confession. It was marvellous how people got the message of his preaching and besieged the confession box, to the extent that he needed other priests from the neighbourhood to help him (Mezzadri 1992: 9, 18-19).

The response of the people to his preaching left Vincent in deep thought. He could not help but reflect on this event! The spiritual need of neglected countryfolk was obvious to him. Witnessing this situation he could no longer see himself confined to the service of a single family as chaplain and tutor. He changed completely, because the plight of the peasants had touched him profoundly. He left the de Gondi's palace and accepted the position of parish priest in the poor parish in Chatillon-les-Dombes, in the South East of France. In this way Vincent went further on the path of his conversion. By listening to the voices of his parishioners and others he intuitively came to know what he had to do in order to help them (O'Donnell 1995: 18).

Thirdly, again in this parish he went through quite a similar experience from the previous one, but this time in the form of material need. Before Mass somebody informed him that there was a family who were all sick. In his sermon Vincent explained the condition of this family: all of them were sick and could not help themselves. He implored his parishioners to pay a little attention to them and to lighten their burden. In the afternoon Vincent himself visited the family. It was during this visit that he witnessed how his parishioners had been moved by his sermon. He met many people who were on their way back from the family and still many more on their way there. He observed the generosity of his parishioners, and he wondered how this generosity could be organized in an effective way because the action of his parishioners gave him an idea of how to look after the needy. He became attentive to the needs of people and moved to act. Interestingly, his motivation to help did not well up from a mere moral obligation, but from faith. He drew up a rule in which he formulated how the ladies should help the poor and sick. That is, the ladies should look after the poor and sick as if they were serving their own children, or rather, as if they were serving God, because God himself showed what is to be done for the poor. Jesus has done this. And therefore they should follow his example. In this way Vincent became closer to Jesus and started taking part in his ministry (Mezzadri 1992: 20; O'Donnell 1995: 19-20).

Lastly, was his friendship with Francis de Sales (1567-1622). In searching his way and constantly walking in the path of his conversion, Vincent met de Sales in Paris in 1618. He was a bishop, well-educated

and came from a noble family. Vincent deeply admired him not only because of his gentleness and humility instead of his position and family background but also because of his saintly life. Most striking to Vincent was his living contact with holiness. This was a revelation to Vincent. De Sales' personal veneration had opened up to him the vast horizon of sanctity and had shown the way to achieve it. That was by being humble and gentle. His contact with him made Vincent commit himself, heart and soul following the same path; striving for union with God. Through de Sales the way was disclosed to Vincent and kept all through his life. De Sales was his hero (Román 1999: 149-151).

In these four experiences is that one event always led him to the next event, and that he gradually grew in faith. When he reflected on these experiences he came to know that this was not merely a chance happening. It was an encounter with God, in which God showed Himself and drew Vincent to Himself. This is how Vincent came to experience God and how he came to relate to Him. Unlike St. Ignatius of Loyola who experienced God in a direct way in his spiritual exercises or St. Francis of Assisi who experienced Jesus speaking directly from the cross to him, in Vincent's case God takes the initiative to reveal Himself in and through the deeds of human beings. This is the locus where Vincent encountered God. He was attentive to God's revelation, trusted it and finally surrendered himself fully to it (cf. Verrijt ---: November 24).

*Awareness of the absolute need for renewal of the clergy and charity for the poor*

The clergy

On the path of his conversion, Vincent became more aware and able to see the absolute need for renewal of the clergy and charity for the poor. Vincent's concern focused on the condition of the Catholic Church at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Catholic Church in France was spiritually at a low ebb. The rural areas were almost de-Christianised; most of the villagers did not know anything about their own religion. The seriousness of the situation demanded a Catholic renewal. Some of the clergy and some devout people still had a sense of personal responsibility, and out of this came the development of a widespread missionary effort to re-evangelize these areas, parish by parish if necessary, to bring the countryfolk back to the practice of their faith, and then to keep them there (Udovic 1995: 7).

How did Vincent live and act in this situation? In cooperation with Madame de Gondi, who also was equally concerned for the spiritual care of the country people, Vincent (and later on his fellow priests too)

was able to go from village to village preaching. He worked wholeheartedly and with zeal. While engaged in this mission he discovered the miserable situation of the clergy. They did not even know the correct form of sacramental absolution in confession! This was really frightening. They did not even grasp the most elementary rules of their office. As a consequence, many Catholics had little or no knowledge of their faith. That is why it is not hard to understand why large areas of the French countryside had either been converted to Protestantism, or were so spiritually abandoned. Vincent himself maintained that it was bad priests who were responsible for this serious problem: "The Church is ruined in many places by the evil life the priests lead, for it is they who confound and ruin it" (Pujo 2003: 90-91, 217; O'Donnell 1995: 31; Mezzadri 1992: 18-19, 26).

What did Vincent do? First, he thought of reforming the priesthood by establishing a seminary and providing a good education for youngsters in cooperation with some other priests. Then, for those to be ordained soon, he organized retreats in collaboration with the Bishop of Beauvais and later on also with the Archbishop of Paris.

This initiative had satisfactory results. Those who attended admitted that they were nourished by these retreats. In order to keep alive the spirit that they experienced during the retreat, follow-up meetings were organized once a week. These became known as the Tuesday Conferences. The group became a nursery for prelates (Pujo 2003: 91, 100-101; O'Donnell 1995: 31).

Vincent took this task seriously because he wished to have good priests to restore the Church. For him this was the calling of the Congregation of the Mission: to re-establish the priesthood in its original purity: "it is on us that God has bestowed the great grace of letting us contribute to the restoration of the priestly estate..." His action was not only responding to the fact that the Catholic Church in France needed seminaries but also to the request of the Council of Trent that called for priests to lead good lives to be properly qualified. In this way he set out to renew and reform the Catholic Church (Pujo 2003: 91, 217; Udovic 1995: 2-6; O'Donnell 1995: 31).

### The poor

Seventeenth-century French society was haunted by the reality of poverty and the desperate daily struggle for survival among the poor. Suffering was on an unprecedented scale. One could neither escape nor ignore the poor. They were everywhere. Whether in the streets of the city or in the fields of the countryside, one could not escape seeing their

hunger and pain. Neither could one escape their insistent pleas for bread, alms, medicine, work or shelter. The poor and their poverty posed a challenge that urgently demanded a Christian response. In this situation one of the most important insights of the Catholic reform movement in France was its urgent mission of bringing about the lasting spiritual and moral renewal by a corresponding commitment to the renewal of Christian charity (Udovic 1995: 10).

Vincent himself repeatedly met these poor people in different places. His experience of village missions enabled Vincent to gain insight into the condition of people throughout the countryside. Most of them were extremely poor, being reduced to struggling merely to exist. Nevertheless, he found that other people, who could afford it, were willing to help. Moved by the generosity of these people, Vincent thought of organizing it. He invited these generous people and discussed with them how they could help the needy ones. At the meeting they agreed that they would care for the sick poor in their village. They were enthusiastic for what Vincent suggested. Because of this, Vincent wanted to do more for them. He invited them to have meetings; sharing experiences and thoughts. This was the opportunity for Vincent to inspire these generous people. Remarkably, people not only accepted his idea, but willingly laboured themselves for the sake of their poor sick fellows. This group were known as the "ladies of charity". Wherever he went for a mission, Vincent founded such an Association of Charity (O'Donnell 1995: 19; Mezzadri 1992: 20-29; Bedford 1856: 25-27).

After having been appointed General of the Galleys in 1619 he visited the convicts. He was deeply shaken by the way in which these men were condemned to forced labour, packed into cold, damp holes, without light or air. They were chained by a ring around their neck and to posts fixed in the ground. Vincent knew very well that this endangered the prisoners' health. So he asked for de Gondi's help. Also, since he had a good network of Ladies of Charity, he organized visits with these devout women. Vincent asked them to come and care for the prisoners in the same way as he was doing it (Pujo 2003: 77-78; Guiley 2001: 345; Mezzadri 1992: 26-27).

Another experience was the suffering of the people of Lorraine during the war. This situation gave Vincent a new insight into suffering. People suffered from hunger, illness and fear. Moved by this suffering, he organized projects to alleviate people's misery. He begged generous benefactors to support this project (Pujo 2003: 132-133).

What was significant in his charity was that his activities were never merely from a moral obligation towards those in need. His actions were inspired and moved by his faith. He coupled charity and faith. To him service to the poor was the supreme act of love, the sign of a real follower of Jesus. Thus, acts of helping the poor became his way of life, and they became an integral of his calling to follow in the footsteps of Jesus who brought the good news to the poor. Charity was then an act of faith (Mezzadri 1992: 62, 76-77).

Vincent gradually came to understand that God had a special call for him. He encountered God in and through His people. He was full of joy!<sup>2</sup> He discovered that God was pleased to call him for a sublime task in the Church. That is, to be like Jesus Christ, devoted to the poor (Ryan 1995: 140-141). In his conference to his fellow priests Vincent said: "To remedy the ignorance is the primary reason which had caused us to give ourselves to God to prepare the candidates for ordination.... Ah! Who would then have thought that God intended, by means of the Congregation of the Mission, to bring about all the good which by the grace of God we now see it doing? Ah! Who knew that He meant to make use of it to seek out the farmers, those poor Christian slaves?" (Ryan 1995: 125).

Another aspect of Vincent's relation with God lies deep within his belief that God was searching for His poor people, because He wants to save them out of love for them. Vincent came to know this urgent need by seeing the desperate situation around him. But apart from this, he also became aware of the desperate need through people: either by people in desperate need themselves or by somebody on their behalf. For example, while Vincent thought of how to remedy the terrible ignorance of the clergy, the Bishop of Beauvais suggested giving candidates an intensive training before ordination. Vincent's reaction was "that is God's voice". This is his way of listening to God, who speaks through His people and finally responds to it accordingly. "Follow Divine Providence and never go beyond it", Vincent loved to say this (Ryan 1995: 127-128).

#### *Following Jesus: Lord and Master, and Role Model*

Who is Jesus to Vincent? He is the Lord, who came on earth for the salvation of the human race. He is the Master, who graciously teaches by his sayings and deeds for the salvation for the human race; especially the

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<sup>2</sup>Kees Waaijman (2002: 455-471) calls this entire process of converting from self-centredness to God-centredness the Transformation Process.



poor (Common Rules I: 1). On many occasions Vincent quoted the passage from the gospel of Luke (Lk 4: 18) to refer the figure of Jesus: "...he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free". This Jesus is the role model for him, the one whom he wanted to imitate and be totally devoted to. (Common Rules II: 1-18, III: 1, IV:1, V:1, VI:1-2, VII:1, VIII: 1, IX: 1, XII: 1.)

It is evident that Vincent had made a clear choice. The ministry of Jesus that Vincent wanted to follow and to offer to his followers, was the ministry of Christ as the Evangelizer of the poor, and not as a healer or as "perfect adorer of the Father" (Bérulle's vision), or as "perfect image of the divinity" (the vision of Francis de Sales) (Maloney 1992: 22-23). Vincent entered into the Lucan understanding of the following of Christ in the very terms of Luke's gospel (4:18-19). In this passage, Luke gives a characterization of Jesus' work, when he starts his public ministry. Jesus said: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." This is the task Jesus has to perform (Maloney 1992:14).

Vincent's spirituality flowed from his contemplation of Christ. This Christ of Luke 4:18-19 stood at the centre of his spirituality. Imitation of Christ, that is, to bring the good news of salvation to poor people, was the aim his life's journey. A specific spirituality is a governing vision. But more than a vision, it is driving force, enabling a person to transcend himself. This driving force is, on the one hand, the specific way in which a person is rooted in God. It is, on the other hand, the specific way in which he or she relates to the created world. It is an insight and a source of action. It is a world-view that generates energy and channels it in a particular direction, as it happened in the life of Vincent (Maloney 1992:21).

Although Luke's gospel plays the more important role, Vincent was also influenced by Matthew's gospel. He frequently cited Mt 25: 31-46 to reinforce the identification of Jesus with the poor (Maloney 1992:26; Hare 1993:288).

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me... "Truly I tell you, just as you

did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you did it to me." (Mt 25: 35-36, 40).

Though he spoke at times in lyrical language about service of the poor, Vincent had by no means a romantic view of this ministry. I quote his words about it from Maloney (Maloney 1992:24). Vincent said:

I should not judge poor peasant, men or women, by their exterior, nor by their apparent mental capacities. All the more is this so as very frequently they scarcely seem to have the appearance or mental capacity of reasonable beings, so gross and earthly are they. But turn the medal and you will see by the light of faith that the Son of God, whose will it was to be poor, is represented to us by these creatures (XI, 32<sup>3</sup>).

#### *Attitudes and virtues*

Vincent was not only passionate to continue the mission of his Lord and Master, but also to adopt Jesus' personality as the one who integrated fully into his life every type of virtue (Common Rules I: 1). He developed a basic attitude - discernment and trust in God's Providence - in order to keep to his commitment. He imitated the virtues of Christ, which he found in the Gospel. He lived a virtuous life, rooted in a deep faith, and following Christ's teaching, as he was convinced that this way of life would never let him down (Common Rules II:1, 4-7).

Some authors have tried to explain Vincent's basic attitudes, and especially when referring to his virtues, they always mention the following: simplicity, humility, meekness, mortification and zeal. However, I will elaborate only about simplicity, humility, mortification in order to have an idea about his virtue.

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<sup>3</sup>Je ne dois pas considérer un pauvre paysan ou une pauvre femme selon leur extérieur, ni selon ce qui paraît de la portée de leur esprit; d'autant que bien souvent ils n'ont pas presque la figure, ni l'esprit de personnes raisonnables, tant ils sont grossiers et terrestres. Mais tournez la médaille, et vous verrez par les lumières de la foi que le Fils de Dieu, qui a voulu être pauvre, nous est représenté par ces pauvres.

## Attitude

### a. Discernment

Discernment played a very significant role in the way Vincent lived his faith. He always tried to discern what was God's will for him. He had his own way of discerning:

Among the multitude of thoughts and inclinations that continually arise within us, many appear to be good, but do not come from God and are not pleasing to him. How, then, should one discern these? We must look at them carefully, have recourse to God in prayer, and ask for his light. We must reflect on the motives, purposes, and means, to see if all of these are in keeping with his good pleasure. We must talk over our ideas with prudent persons and take the advice of those placed over us. These persons are the depositories of the treasures of the wisdom and grace of God. In doing what they suggest, we are carrying out the will of God (O'Donnell 1995: 34).

This paragraph gives an insight into Vincent's process of discernment. It has three moments: first, awareness of the multitude of thought in prayers, second, weighing the evidence with specific questions, and finally, taking counsel.

The first step is awareness of thought. To Vincent awareness of what is happening within oneself and being rooted in prayer was the first disposition for knowing God's will. This implies that one will carefully examine one's thought whilst praying for total readiness to do God's will. For Vincent, total readiness was the disposition of a true disciple. Vincent was deeply convinced that following the Lord's will in all things, and waiting for the lead of Providence, was the way to life. For him, following one's own will and negotiating with God was an obstacle to the coming of the Kingdom (O'Donnell 1995: 34).

The second step is weighing the evidence by asking specific questions. The first question is 'why am I doing this?' This question makes people aware of the motivation in doing something and keeping them directed towards the will of God. The second question is 'what is it for?' What is the purpose? This is a matter of knowing the outcome of one's decision. It implies openness and a listening heart, unrestricted readiness to respond to a calling from God that may be different from

one's personal agenda. Finally, the third question is 'how can I do this?' Finding out what means can be used, and weighing the pros and cons. These three questions are the way to listen to Him, to be in accord with God's will. Unrestricted readiness leads one to weigh the evidence from the Lord's point of view, whilst remaining detached from one's own agenda (O'Donnell 1995: 35).

The third step is talking to prudent persons. To Vincent prudent persons were the source of the treasure of wisdom and grace of God. Vincent did this himself on many occasions. Father André Duval was Vincent's wise counsellor. We already saw that when Vincent was considering founding the Congregation, he went to Duval and presented his dilemma to him (O'Donnell 1995: 35).

b. Trust in the Providence of God

In carrying out God's will in his work, Vincent put great trust in God's providence. He wrote:

Christ said: "Seek first the kingdom of God and his justice, and all those things which you need, will be given to you as well." That is the basis for each of us having the following set of priorities: matters involving our relationship with God are more important than temporal affairs; spiritual health is more important than physical; ... we should not worry too much about temporal affairs. We ought to have confidence in God that he will look after us since we know for certain that as long as we are grounded in that sort of love and trust we will always be under the protection of God in heaven... (XII, 130, 143, 145-146<sup>4</sup>) (Maloney 1992: 172).

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<sup>4</sup>...: ((Cherchez premièrement le royaume de Dieu et sa justice, et toutes les choses dont vous avez besoin vous seront données par-dessus))...En la même règle il est dit qu'un chacun préférera les choses spirituelles aux temporelles, l'âme au corps, Dieu au monde...ils le doivent faire. Messieurs, préférer l'âme au corps, cela est du royaume de Dieu, préférer l'honneur de Dieu à celui du monde...Enfin il faut se résoudre, avec l'Apôtre, à choisir les tourments et la mort même, plutôt qu'à se séparer de la charité de Dieu...*Et partant, dit-elle, le missionnaire ne se mettra trop en peine pour les biens de ce monde, ains jettera tous ses soins en la Providence du Seigneur, tenant pour certain que, tandis qu'il sera bien établi en sa charité et en cette confiance, il sera toujours sous la protection de Dieu et qu'aucun mal ne lui arrivera, ni aucun bien ne lui manquera, ....*

Vincent knew the source of great peace. He trusted in God as his own Father who watched over and cared for him. He believed deeply that God was the author of all type of his work. He was confident that his Father who had begun these good works, would bring them to completion. He had utter trust in God's unseen plans which work through human history to reveal his love. He knew that grace has its moments and he praised those who had learnt the rhythm of God's movements. He knew that this same loving, provident Father acts in and through human instruments, as he prepared the way for the works of providence (Maloney 1992: 172-173).

Guided by his faith in God's providence, he loved Jesus deeply as the evangelizer of the poor. He embraced the meaning of the good news and burned with an intense desire to share it with the poor. He lived simply. Yet he did great things in a very humble way. He taught his company the way to follow Christ: "say to ourselves that we are useless servants, that we have done only what we were supposed to do, and that, in fact, we could not have done anything without him" (Maloney 1992: 174).

## Virtues

### a. Simplicity

Simplicity enabled Vincent to be more united with his Master, Jesus. This was the virtue that he loved most. "It is my Gospel," he said. For him, simplicity was first of all, speaking the truth. It is saying things as they are (I, 144), without concealing or hiding anything (I, 284; V, 464). The heart must not think one thing while the mouth says another (IX, 81; IX, 605; XII, 172).

He wrote of simplicity:

Jesus, the Lord, expects us to have the simplicity of a dove. This means giving straightforward opinions about things in the way we honestly see them, without needless reservations. It also means doing things without any double-dealing or manipulation, our intention being focused solely on God. Each of us, then, should take care to behave always in this spirit of simplicity, remembering that God likes to deal with the simple and that he conceals the secrets of heaven from the wise and prudent of this world and reveals them to little ones. But while his Christ recommends the simplicity of a dove, he tells us to

have the prudence of a serpent as well. What he means is that we should speak and behave with discretion. We ought, therefore, to keep quiet about matters, which should not be made known, especially if they are unsuitable or unlawful.... In actual practice this virtue is about choosing the right way to do things. We should make it a sacred principle, then, admitting of no exceptions, that since we are working for God we will always choose God-related ways for carrying out our work and see and judge things from Christ's point of view and not from a worldly-wise one (XII, 167-168<sup>5</sup>) (Maloney 1992: 163).

b. Humility

Humility lies at the basis of the gospel: God resists the proud and raises up the humble. Vincent knew these things well. He was convinced that humility is the foundation of evangelical perfection and the core of the spiritual life. When he talked about humility, he said that few try to practise it and still fewer possess it. Why? It is because its practice and very appearance is disagreeable to our human nature. To practise it means that we should always choose the lowest place, or put ourselves below others, things we find naturally undesirable. Yet it is essential to overcome this repugnance; it is essential to make strong efforts to arrive at the actual exercise of this virtue. Otherwise, we shall never acquire it (Maloney 1992: 165).

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<sup>5</sup>Notre-Seigneur Jésus-Christ demandant de nous la simplicité de la colombe, qui consiste à dire les choses tout simplement, comme on les pense, sans réflexions inutiles, et à agir tout bonnement, sans déguisement, ni artifice, ne regardant que Dieu seul, pour cela chacun s'efforcera de faire toutes ses actions dans ce même esprit de simplicité, se représentant que Dieu se plait à se communiquer aux simples et à leur révéler ses secrets, lesquels il tient cachés aux sages et aux prudent du siècle. Mais parce qu'en même temps que Jésus-Christ nous recommande la simplicité de la colombe, il nous ordonne d'user de la prudence du serpent, laquelle est une vertu qui nous fait parler et agir avec discrétion, c'est pourquoi nous taisons prudemment les choses qu'il n'est pas expédient de dire, particulièrement si de soi elles sont mauvaises et illicites.... Et pour ce que cette vertu regarde aussi, dans la pratique, la choix des moyens propres pour parvenir à leur fin nous aurons pour maxime inviolable de prendre toujours des moyens divins pour les choses divines, et de juger des choses suivant le sentiment et le jugement de Jésus-Christ, et non jamais suivant celui du monde, ni selon le faible raisonnement de notre esprit.

Vincent believed that one is never fit to do the work of God if one does not have profound humility and self-contempt. To him, if the Congregation of the Mission is not humble, it is more apt to spoil everything, and it will never accomplish anything great. But where it possesses and lives in the spirit of humility, then, it will be fit to do the work of God. Vincent is convinced that God makes use only of the humble person for His great works (Maloney 1992: 165-166).

In helping his fellow priests to acquire this virtue, Vincent emphasized that we have to learn from Jesus who says "learn of me, for I am meek and humble of heart". To Vincent these words of Jesus were a reminder that only through humility are the hearts of human beings well disposed to be turned back to the Lord. And those who deal harshly and roughly with others will never accomplish anything valuable (Maloney 1992: 165).

### c. Mortification

Vincent grasped how important mortification was. For him, to be Christ's follower, one must deny oneself. He accepted the imperatives of the New Testament, particularly the saying of Jesus and Saint Paul: "If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily" (Mk 8:34; Lk 9:23), and "if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the spirit you put to death the deeds of the flesh, you will live" (Rom 8:13) (Maloney 1992: 169).

Mortification is always for the sake of something better. We give up good things, not because we think they are bad. We acknowledge that they are good, even as we give them up, because we want something better. A person may decide to cut out smoking because he wants to be in good health. A person may renounce material possessions because he wants to share them with the poor, or because he wants to enter into solidarity with the poor by sharing their lot. The real purpose of mortification is to choose and to construct one's real life. Vincent turned from looking for a good office in the Church to becoming a servant of the poor. He made a clear choice and focused his energy into achieving his calling (Maloney 1992: 63-64).

### **The Daughters of Charity**

This part is an explanation of the Daughters of Charity, particularly how they live the Vincentian model of consecrated life. However, since Louise de Marillac has played a significant role for the Daughters of Charity (she was the co-foundress of this Congregation) it is good to know more about her life.

### ***Louise de Marillac***

Louise de Marillac was born an illegitimate child in the Marillac household in 1591. Her father was Louis de Marillac. She never knew her mother. Her health would always be delicate due to the conditions in war-torn France at the time of her birth. As a member of the eminent Marillac family, which held positions of power and influence in the courts of Marie de Medici and Louis XIII, she received her education at the royal monastery of Poissy, near Paris, where her aunt was a Dominican nun. There, she encountered the arts and the humanities, as well as liturgical prayer, spiritual reading, and responsibility for the poor. She thus had a good education and the opportunity of deepening her spiritual life.

It was in Poissy that she felt the call to the cloister. She asked to be accepted into the Franciscan Daughters of the Passion in Paris but the Provincial of the Capuchins, Fr. Honoré de Champigny thought that she was not making the right decision. He told her that her health was not up to it (Sullivan 1995: 40-41; Mezzadri 1992: 41; Thousand 1917: 27).

The Marillacs, for their own interests rather than hers, arranged Louise's marriage to Antoine le Gras. They were married and in October 18<sup>th</sup> 1613, they had a son, Michel. Unfortunately, Antoine le Gras was constantly ill, and died in December 1625. Their married life was not happy because her husband had other interests in mind rather than those of his wife and son. So bad was this that she contemplated separation from her husband. And added to her suffering, her son was always a source of anguish for her. In this situation she took refuge in God and her spiritual directors.

When Louise met Vincent in 1624 or 1625, her spiritual storm had quieted. Nevertheless, she had yet to find the necessary balance between her considerable human talents and her personal form of sanctification. She was an intelligent and decisive woman, an intellectual with a practical sense and remarkable organizational ability, capable of conceiving and actualizing vast enterprises in minute detail. Paradoxically, she experienced a need for nearly constant support in her spiritual life. This was because she underwent periods of discouragement in her interior life and sought the presence and support of a spiritual guide to supply much-needed reassurance (Sullivan 1995: 42; Mezzadri 1992: 42-43).

She already had a regular prayer life, was very well familiar with Scripture, and had read many important spiritual writers such as Jean Gerson, Francis de Sales, and Pierre de Bérulle before she met Vincent.



She had also received spiritual guidance from Michel de Marillac, Jean-Pierre Camus, and possibly Francis de Sales. She was not a beginner in the spiritual life when Vincent became her spiritual director. Furthermore, she did not absorb Vincent's spiritual life to such an extent that her spiritual journey copied his. What she received from Vincent was a method. This method would be the means that would enable her to reach her full human and spiritual potential (Sullivan 1995: 42).

One of her mistakes in her spiritual journey was that she wanted to know, to see and to take control of her life in the service of God. From his own experience Vincent knew that this attitude was not suited to the service of God. To Vincent, what was more important was unconditional abandonment to God's Providence. But peaceful abandonment was not in Louise's character. Thus the challenge existed for both of them: how to prevent her from rushing headlong down the dangerous slope; how to enable her to fulfil the directive she had received years earlier from Jean-Pierre Camus, who asked her to turn her gaze away from herself and fix it on Jesus Christ. Her openness to Vincent and her ability to cope with her problem bore fruit. In the course of time, though she remained anxious and scrupulous, Vincent came to appreciate that she had borne more than her share of suffering.

Vincent shared with her the lesson he had learnt: that one must avoid haste and trust in God's Providence, which is to be followed and not overtaken. He showed her the importance of humility: "it is a single beautiful diamond, more valuable than a mountain of jewels", Vincent said. He advised her to ease up on her spiritual practices in her prayer life: "God is love and wants us to go to him through love". Gently, he turned her gaze away from herself and toward Jesus Christ and the poor (Sullivan 1995: 42 -43; Mezzadri 1992: 43).

Slowly, under Vincent's influence, she recognized that she was called to dedicate herself to the poor. She felt confident enough to engage in personal charitable activity. Louise was sure of herself and saw the sign of the will of God that she wanted to follow (Sullivan 1995: 43).

Meanwhile the Association of Charity (which Vincent had established) that was flourishing in the beginning had gradually become less effective. Someone had to visit them, study their activities, correct abuses and revive their original zeal. Vincent thought no one seemed better suited to undertake this task than Louise. So on May 6<sup>th</sup> 1629, Vincent sent her to the Association of Charity of Montmirail. This was the beginning of her activity in the service of the poor. She was confident and successful. In her spiritual writings, she wrote detailed accounts of

her visits to the association of Ladies of Charity which revealed her keen intelligence, organisational ability, and capacity for leadership.

It was also during these visits that Louise experienced the depth of human misery and discovered the resources of charity. With all her energy and talent, she sought to take up the burden of others, instead of lamenting over her own. In doing so, she broadened her horizons and expanded her heart. She discovered love in its widest dimensions and it set her free. Since this transformation in Louise's personality was greater than Vincent could hope for, he was overjoyed. His letters from this period expressed his growing confidence in Louise and how pleased he was to hear that God was blessing her work (Sullivan 1995: 44-45; Mezzadri 1992: 43).

In meeting with Vincent she found the way to give herself to God in charitable works, helping the poor. Amazingly, her zeal for the poor had given her renewed physical and spiritual strength (Sullivan 1995: 47-48; Mezzadri 1992: 43).

### *The Daughters of Charity*

Let us now see how the Congregation of the Daughters of Charity came into being. Vincent always maintained that he had never thought of founding a religious congregation; he and the foundress, Louise de Marillac, had simply sought to meet a need of the time (Thousand 1917: 1).

When the rich ladies of Paris heard that Vincent had instituted the Associations of Charity in various provincial towns in France, they wished to do likewise. So, with great earnestness, they began to visit and relieve the poor in the parishes of Paris. However, as time went on, in spite of their good will, the ladies found themselves unwilling to go through the terrible slums of Paris. They found it quite unbearable. Sometimes they delegated their task of carrying the kettle to the needy to their servants instead of themselves. Moreover, as mothers, they discovered that the demands of their household limited their ability to carry on the work of charity satisfactory (Sullivan 1995: 44; O'Donnell 1995: 26; Thousand 1917:2).

Confronted with all these problems, Louise de Marillac had the idea of being helped by true servants, whom she would organize into a sort of company. Vincent, for his part, thought this over with his customary prudence. Around that time, in 1629 or 1630, a devout girl came to them, Margaret Naseau. She could read and had started, on her own, to teach the other girls in her village. She came and put herself at

the disposal of Vincent to work for the associations of charity. She did this well: carrying food around the town for the sick poor, giving baths, making beds, and sitting at the deathbeds of people who were alone.

She died on March 1633, while caring for a woman stricken with the plague, with whom she shared her bed. Margaret Naseau provided Vincent with the very embodiment of what he had been looking for without being able to describe it. She was to be the first Daughter of Charity. In November 1633, Louise de Marillac, having finally obtained Vincent's consent, welcomed four or five girls to her lodgings near Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet. She trained them both in the service of the needy and the spiritual life. They would be the first core group of the Company of the Daughters of Charity (Pujo 2003: 102-103; Mezzadri 1992: 43; Thousand 1917: 1-5).

In May 1636 they moved to another small rented dwelling in the village of La Chapelle, near Saint-Lazare. Then again, in 1641, they moved into two houses in the rue Faubourg-Saint-Denis, facing the church of Saint-Lazare because the previous one was too small. The houses were bought by the Congregation of the Mission. Meanwhile the idea of receiving girls to join them developed. Louise de Marillac received postulants there (Pujo 2003: 122-123).

Later on, when the number of Daughters of Charity was steadily increasing, Vincent decided to establish them officially in order to give strength and focus to their work. His effort to establish a company of girls, who had no cloister and always go to those people who needed them, as a congregation of Religious Women, was remarkable. This was unusual at that time! The cloister was the only model for religious life for women of his time, where the religious life was lived inside the cloister. Women who wanted to dedicate themselves to God always did so in the monastery.<sup>6</sup>

Thus what Vincent did was new at that time. There was no example for him to follow. He welcomed women wholeheartedly, and renewed the model of charity in the Church. He developed a firm network among these generous and pious women. Mezzadri offers a remarkable explanation for Vincent's high esteem for women and their capacities. According to him the memory of his mother and sisters probably played a large part in the way Vincent regarded women. In his time, both in society and in the Church, there were few who valued the presence of women as he did (Mezzadri 1992: 10).

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<sup>6</sup>For details on the process of official establishment see Lovat & Vaughan 1917:359-368.

Finally, the approval of the Cardinal Archbishop of Paris was obtained in 1655, and the Sovereign Pontiff Clement IX granted a Decree of Approbation in 1668. The correct Latin name of the Community is "Congregatio Puellarum Caritatis." In France the Community is known as "Les Filles de la Charité" but in England the title "Sisters of Charity" has also been used (Thousand 1917: 6).

#### *Charitable Works*

The Daughters of Charity engaged in many charitable works. I will give two examples only, in order to give some idea of the range of their works of charity.

Firstly, apart from visiting the poor and sick in their homes, they undertook a new and urgent work in Paris for foundling children. Vincent had a particular affection for this work; he never failed to visit them when he had a free moment. After a small beginning this work developed rapidly. As time went on, problems of staffing, lodging, and financing arose. For the time being it was covered in part by gifts from the king and the queen and the contributions of the Ladies of Charity. As for the problem of lodgings, it was temporarily solved by the construction in 1645 of thirteen little houses close to the enclosure of Saint-Lazare, which were rented to the Ladies of Charity for the Foundling Hospital. But soon this proved insufficient. The number of children grew, the space became too tight and funds were exhausted (Pujo 2003: 163; O'Donnell 1995: 27; Mezzadri 1992: 64-66).

The situation became critical in 1647 so that the Ladies of Charity who were in charge of the work began to think of abandoning the project. However, Vincent had a different idea. He came to the Ladies of Charity and implored them to persevere in their task:

Courage, ladies, compassion and charity led you to adopt these little creatures as your children; you have been their mothers by grace, ever since their mothers by nature abandoned them. Now see whether you really want to abandon them as well. Stop for a moment being their mothers and take the role of their judges. It is time to pronounce the verdict and to know whether you no longer wish to have mercy on them. They will live if you continue your charitable help for their upkeep and if you give them up they will certainly die; experience tells you

that there is no doubt about that (XIII, 801<sup>7</sup>) (Pujo 2003: 163-164; Mezzadri 1992: 65-66).

Vincent did not think in terms of resources, but of the need: to refuse to help was the same as killing the infants. Vincent knew how to keep the Ladies of Charity on his side and convince them of the importance of continuing the job. The Daughters of Charity acted in the same way, by continuing to care for the infants. In a fatherly talk to the Daughters of Charity he let them see the nobility of their work: "If ordinary people regard it as an honour to serve the children of important families, you should think yourselves even more honoured in being called to serve God's children" (Mezzadri 1992: 65).

Secondly, early in 1652, the chaos of the civil war known as La Fronde made villagers abandon their houses and their goods to find shelter in Paris. Soup kitchens were organized for them in all the parishes. All the religious congregations did charitable works collaboratively. The Daughters of Charity were active as well, as Vincent wrote:

The poor Daughters of Charity are doing more than we are as far as the corporal works of mercy are concerned. Every day, at Mademoiselle Le Gras' house, they make and distribute soup for 13,000 of the genteel poor, and in the Faubourg Saint-Denis, for 800 refugees, while in the parish of Saint-Paul alone, four or five of these young women make soup for 5,000 poor people over and above the sixty to eighty sick people for whom they are caring (IV, 407<sup>8</sup>) (Pujo 2003: 203).

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<sup>7</sup>Or sus, Mesdames, la compassion et la charité vous ont fait adopter ces petites créatures pour vos enfants; vous avez été leurs mères selon la grâce depuis que leurs mères selon la nature les ont abandonnés; voyez maintenant si vous voulez aussi les abandonner. Cessez d'être leurs mères pour devenir à présent leurs juges; leur vie et leur mort sont entre vos mains; je m'en vais prendre les voix et les suffrages; il est temps de prononcer leur arrêt et de savoir si vous ne voulez plus avoir de miséricorde pour eux. Ils vivront si vous continuez d'en prendre un charitable soin; et, au contraire, ils mourront et périront infailliblement si vous les abandonnez; l'expérience ne vous permet pas d'en douter.

<sup>8</sup>Les pauvres Filles de la Charité y ont plus de part que nous quant à l'assistance corporelle des pauvres. Elles font et distribuent du potage tous les jours chez Mademoiselle Le Gras à 1.300 pauvres honteux, et dans le faubourg Saint Denis à 800 réfugiés; et dans la seule paroisse de Saint-Paul quatre ou cinq

Surely Louise had an important role, for she had a good education. It is not so difficult to imagine that she taught the Daughters of Charity how to read and to write and arranged the custom of teaching the illiterate in the communities as we can see here in her letter. What we can also see from this is that these sisters had to be taught before they could teach others. That was the only solution! To help these young illiterate girls, Louise opened several schools. Later on education of the poor became one of the sisters' principal duties (Thousand 1917: 5).

*The motivation to do charitable works*

Looking at what the Daughters of Charity did from the beginning, we might ask why they did these things. It was the events and the people around them who indirectly invited them to do something, e.g. bringing food to the sick and poor, and caring for children.

However, these activities did not stem from mere concern for others, but rather they resulted from a call from God to follow Jesus to bring the good news to the poor (Lk 4: 18- 19), and to serve Him in "one of the least" of His people (Mat 25: 31-46). This calling they lived out by doing charity. They developed this calling within them by allowing it to determine their attitude. Their way of performing charity was unique, it was driven by respect for the poor. It was rooted in Vincent's deep faith in his calling. He saw this as an honourable mission, and therefore he always maintained that his call was a noble calling from God. He saw the Lord who calls him among His people. This conviction gave him respect for the poor and made him seriously see the poor as his lords and masters.

Service of the poor was a priority for the Daughters of Charity; even at times of prayer they could leave when someone needed them. However, this should not stop them from communicating with God. While doing their job in silence, they kept intimate conversations with God. To "leave God for God", Vincent says (Thousand 1917: 20-22).

Above all, the core of their service was love. That is, to love God and others, especially the poor, and to act with love in serving. In his conferences, Vincent frequently shared with them his passionate belief in love as the driving force for service. This was his way to help the Daughters of Charity grow in right motivation for charitable work. We

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de ces filles en donnent à 5.000 pauvres, outre soixante ou quatre-vingts malades qu'elles ont sur les bras.

will see this issue again in the virtue of the Daughters of Charity (Thousand 1917: 16-17).

### *Rules*

The Rule of the Daughters of Charity, which was drawn up by Vincent, derived from the reality of their lifestyle. In the Rule the lifestyle and mission are explained.

There are nine chapters in the Rule. The first chapter is an introduction which gives the purpose, basic form, and the basic attitudes of the Daughters of Charity. This is followed by three chapters concerning the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Then, four chapters on mutual relations, plus one chapter on the order of the day, the week, and the month conclude the rule of life. In the Rule, Vincent's spirituality is well described, especially in Chapter 1, Article 2. It is an explanation of the entire Vincentian Spirituality in its inner coherence (Waaïjman 2002: 160-161; Waaïjman 2000: 9; Ryan 1995:169).

We follow the text of the Rule, Chapter 1, Article 2.

They will keep in mind that, although they are not in a monastic order, because this state is not suited to the activities of their calling, nevertheless, since they are much more exposed to the outside than the religious, their monastery being generally no other cloister than the homes of the sick, no other cell than a rented room, no other chapel than the parish church, no other walkway than the streets of the city, or the halls of the hospitals, no other enclosure than obedience, no other bars than fear before God, no other veil than holy modesty (X, 661<sup>9</sup>).

This is a very brave passage, especially since previous Church law, in order to safeguard the integrity of the life of dedication and prayer, had erected imposing barriers around monasteries, making enclosure obligatory. It was unheard of at that time to think of a women's

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<sup>9</sup>Elles considèreront qu'elles ne sont pas dans une religion, cet état n'étant pas convenable aux emplois de leur vocation. Néanmoins, à raison qu'elles sont plus exposées aux occasions de péché que les religieuses obligées à la clôture, n'ayant pour monastère que les maisons des malades et celle où réside la supérieure, pour cellule une chambre de louage, pour chapelle l'église paroissiale, pour cloître les rues de la ville, pour clôture l'obéissance, ne devant aller que chez les malades ou aux lieux nécessaires pour leur service, pour grille la crainte de Dieu, pour voile la sainte modestie.

community dedicated to a ministry of service. Those women who desired to consecrate themselves to God were always cloistered, and thus separated to a very great extent from contact with their fellow human beings in the world. A small illustration in order to see how essential the enclosure in the Church was, is the case of Bishop Francis de Sales. In the spirit of making innovations for women Religious, he wanted the Sisters of the Visitation to go out to help the sick. However, he was not allowed. He was forced to change his plans and require the sisters to live the enclosed life. Vincent acted beyond these boundaries. He made it possible for women to dedicate themselves to a ministry of service outside the cloister. He took a radical step by founding a women's community (Mezzadri 1992: 45-46; Thousand 1917: 4).

From this rule it is clear that the style of religious life lived out by the Daughters of Charity was characterised by three elements: first going "outside" to serve the poor, second developing virtues to strengthen their vocation, and third, following spiritual exercises. I will explain these issues one by one.

Go "outside" to serve the poor

When we read the Rule, we can see that the Vincentian way of life fundamentally opens up from within the situation of the sick and the poor. All the activities basically take place "outside" (among the poor and sick at home). The motivation behind the activities is that, for Vincent, exposure to the "outside" is the noblest calling in the Church (Waaajman 2002: 161).

In the Rule Vincent made this clear by explicitly mentioning the homes of the sick, a rented room, the parish church, the streets of the city, or the halls of the hospitals. All these are meeting points with the poor. He used these images to point out the difference between the life of the Daughters of Charity and the traditional model of religious life at that time.

In Vincent's view, however, it is not simply about living "outside". It is a call. To help them be faithful to this call, Vincent replaced the value of the cloister building by behaviour: obedience, fear before God, and modesty (Waaajman 2002: 161-162).

Obedience is to be consistently focused on the sick and the poor. The Daughters of Charity go where their work requires it and lose no time in useless visits. Fear before God is awareness that God is here among his people. Based on this faith they learned to be gracious and gentle in their dealings with the poor. "You know that they are our masters and that we must love them with tenderness and respect them."



Vincent said: "modesty is the natural result of respectful service." A modest attitude is about self-control in conversation (IX, 86), in personal dealings (IX, 121; XIII, 555), in personal contacts (IX, 86; X, 662). It is designed to break one's self-interest in giving care" (X, 60) (Waaïjman 2002: 162).

### The practice of virtue

Since the life of the Daughters of Charity is exposed to those people who need them, they must balance this exposure by the practice of virtue. "They are obliged to lead a life that is as virtuous as if they were professed in a religious order." The challenges of their way of life are great! If they are not careful they can easily be disoriented and not achieve the goal of their vocation. For this reason Vincent warned them: "There is no one who spends as much time among the people as the Daughters of Charity, and who have so many opportunities to do evil as you, my sisters. It is therefore of great importance that you be more virtuous than the religious". In other words, virtue must be developed from within in order to strengthen them (X, 658).<sup>10</sup>

There are four virtues that need to be practiced: humility, love, obedience, and patience (X, 521-539). As a living memorial of this fact every sister wears a little wooden cross. Of these four, love is the central virtue. "Love is the most sublime of all the virtues. It gives weight and value to all the other virtues. The goodness of God has chosen us to love him by calling us 'Daughters of Charity'" (X, 472) (Waaïjman 2002: 163-164). For Vincent, love is mercy:

We must try and allow our hearts to be quiet, making them sensitive to the suffering and misery of others, and ask God to give us the spirit of mercy. We dearly need mercy, as we are called to bear witness to it everywhere and persevere in everything for its sake (XI, 341<sup>11</sup>).

Seeing someone else's misery affects us and moves us. This empathy is rooted in love. "Love makes it possible that we cannot see

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<sup>10</sup>For details on the virtue see Waaïjman 2000: 31-33.

<sup>11</sup>Et por cela, il faut tâcher d'attendrir nos cœurs et de les rendre susceptibles des souffrances et des misères du prochain, et prier Dieu qu'il nous donne le véritable esprit de miséricorde, qui est le propre esprit de Dieu... Persons un peu combien nous avons besoin de miséricorde, nous qui devons l'exercer envers les autres et porter la miséricorde en toutes sortes de lieux et souffrir tout pour la miséricorde.

someone suffering without suffering with them. Love opens one's heart to the other" (XII, 271). Love is the orientation to the other. In mercy, love opens the heart of one person to another (Waaïjman 2000: 36).

This love must become central for the Daughters of Charity: "It is not by length of time that people judge whether a daughter is worthy of the beautiful name 'Daughter of Charity,' but by whether she is inwardly clothed with this garment of love of God and neighbour. This is what makes a person a 'Daughter of Charity'" (X, 461). This love unites us with God:

A way of doing it as God wants it done is to do it in love, in love, my daughters. Oh! I pray that that may make your service excellent! But do you know what it means to do something in love? It means doing it in God, for God is love; that is, doing it with complete purity for God's sake (IX, 249<sup>12</sup>).

Love gives God the opportunity to be present: If you serve the poor with goodness, gentleness, and respect, you make the presence of God tangible. Doing what God has done is to be God oneself (X, 134<sup>13</sup>) (Waaïjman 2002: 163-164).

#### The spiritual exercises

After discussing the life of virtue Vincent went on to characterize the spiritual exercises: The Daughters of Charity are obliged to conduct themselves in all places where they find themselves among people with as much modesty, purity of heart and body, detachment from creatures, and edification as the true religious in the seclusion which is characteristic of their cloister. Vincent described the spiritual exercises in four words: modesty, purity of heart and body, detachment from creatures, and edification.

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<sup>12</sup>Un moyen de le faire comme Dieu veut, c'est de le faire en charité, en charité, mes filles. Oh! Que cela rendra votre service excellent! Mais savez-vous ce que c'est que le faire en charité? C'est le faire en Dieu, car Dieu est charité, cest le faire pour Dieu tout purement.

<sup>13</sup>C'est faire en quelque façon ce que Dieu fait, car tout ce qu'il opère, c'est pour sa gloire et pour son plaisir; de sorte que nous pouvons dire qu'en faisant ces œuvres par ce principe de donner de la joie à Dieu, c'est faire, autant qu'il est possible, ce qu'il fait, et ainsi c'est être Dieu même.

Modesty is a spiritual exercise in interiorization and concentration on calling. This is the way to develop consciousness and commitment to the needy. Purity is aimed at the reception of God. There are some concrete exercises for achieving this goal such as fasting, solitude, and meditation on the Scriptures. These are the means to lead one's heart to be open and ready to accept God's presence and His influence. Once someone reaches this stage, one gives support to the opening to God's works in the core of one's self. When this happens, and one develops one's awareness of it, it goes to the core of the heart and brings purity in oneself (Waaajman 2002: 164-165; Waaajman 2000:44).

Detachment is the act of taking a necessary distance. By nature we are attached to objects, people, places and work. By attachment we disconnect things from their original context: we separate them from their Creator. Attachment is a deeply rooted pattern of separation and alienation. Detachment frees us from this pattern in which we get entangled over and over again. It puts us into order, founded on the source from which everything flows and which keeps everything together. We usually regard creatures in themselves, disconnecting them from their Creator and incorporating them into ourselves. But what is important is to free them from our self-centredness. Let the person and situation fully speak out again. Detachment is therefore aimed at freeing things from their fixation and opening them up as signs speaking of their Creator. They are part of a divine whole. The aim of detachment is to be fully attached to the Creator (Purba 2002: 8).

In the context of the spiritual life, edification denotes a process of spiritual growth. For Vincent, the question is: How could a life that is continuously outside (always among the people) gain cohesion? How can interiority be built up, be 'edified'? That cohesion can be found in responsibility. Responsibility springs from the presence of one's neighbour. The other affects my heart, moves me, and directs my attention. Their touch sets me free from my false inner orientation. A neighbour has torn me away from my self-concept, my self-determination, and my self-advancement (Waaajman 2000:47). In this way my identity unfolds by the emptying of myself. This is a responsibility that consumes the self by being affective to others. It grows when it allows itself to be carried away. I keep nothing for my self. This is real piety and devotion (Purba 2002: 8).

Thus, we can see that the Daughters of Charity lived Vincent's model of the consecrated life. This is clear from their lifestyle of going "outside" for those who needed them and in the way they developed virtues and spiritual exercises to strengthen their lifestyle. For them this

way of life is a calling from God; to follow in the footsteps of Jesus to bring the good news to the poor and to serve Him in his people, as Vincent himself did.

### **Conclusion**

What is clear from Vincent's spirituality is that he had a distinctive and new spiritual insight, as well as a new emphasis and perspective. The locus of his encounter with God as Divine Providence occurred in the intense poverty which he found around him. People in the countryside were terribly ignorant; they knew nothing: neither God nor what God has done out of love for them. Faced with this reality, he set about remedying this dire need. He imitated Christ, his Lord and Master, who came to bring the good news to the poor. Vincent not only imitated Jesus, but he devoted his entire life to this Lord and Master, and to caring for the poorest and the least. This was how Vincent saw his task in the world.

Although Vincent committed himself to bringing the good news of salvation to the poor, especially those who lived in rural areas, and although he made clear in his conferences and later on in Common Rule (Common Rule I: 1), that this was an absolute need, he did not restrict himself to the people in the country side. He adapted his attitude each time a new need emerged. His activities were not uniform and not restricted to one place. We can see this in the ministry of the Daughters of Charity. But always the people he worked for were the poor and needy.

Vincent's faith transformed him into an instrument of God's hand. To keep him conscious of this, he developed certain basic attitudes and virtues. This enabled him, on the one hand, to be deeply rooted in God, and on the other hand, to be involved in the concrete struggles of life. His faith had always renewed and reshaped through the events and circumstances of his life. From his life journey we can see that there was a clear dynamic relationship between the context of his life circumstances and his spirituality. It influenced and shaped the manifestation of his faith.

The inclusion of women is worth mentioning here because it was new to welcome women in the ministry at that time. He shared with the Daughters of Charity the spirit of serving the poor. He inspired them to cultivate their calling by developing virtues and spiritual exercises, as a way of keeping them in the direction of their calling. All forms of charity works were for the benefit of the poor.

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