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## Venues for Clerical Formation in Catholic Reformation Paris: Vincent de Paul and the Tuesday Conferences and Company

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In the eulogy he delivered at Vincent de Paul's memorial service in November 1660, the bishop of Puy, Henri Maupas du Tour, praised his subject for having "virtually changed the face of the Church by Conferences, by instructions, by seminaries . . . it is he who re-established the Clergy's glory in its first splendor, by ordinands' exercises, by spiritual Retreats, by the opening of his heart and house."<sup>1</sup> It has since become commonplace to credit de Paul with the lion's share of praise for the transformation of the French clergy during this period of Catholic Reformation. While admitting that de Paul "did not inaugurate a movement destined to end in the regeneration and organisation of the clergy," his principal modern biographer, Pierre Coste, concludes adamantly that "he was, in the hands of God, the instrument that most powerfully contributed to its success."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Henri de Maupas du Tour, *Oraison funèbre à la mémoire de feu Messire Vincent de Paul instituteur fondateur et supérieur general des prêtres de la mission prononcée le 23 novembre 1660, dans l'Église de S. Germain l'Auxerrois* (Paris, 1661), 10. All translations from the French are my own unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Coste, *Monsieur Vincent: Le grand saint du grand siècle* (Paris: Desclée du Brouwer, 1932), 1, 290–91.

In establishing the Congregation of the Mission in 1625, de Paul was undoubtedly driven by his belief that the rural populace of France was poorly served by its clergy. Initially, he restrained his ambition. Once his Congregation established its motherhouse at Saint-Lazare in Paris in 1632, though, he expected that it and Bons-Enfants, where the community had lived since its foundation, would shelter and support a community of missionaries and that these two houses would be the headquarters from which missionaries traveled to alleviate the effects of ignorance and sin in the French countryside. But these houses also became places where the community welcomed outsiders and invited them to experience Pauline resurrection and rebirth to a new life in Christ. Thus, Saint-Lazare's development as a centre of formation for its own members was equaled, if not exceeded, by the growth of its reputation as a hub of formation for other clergy during the 1630s. From 1631, the community had the duty of offering six ten-day retreats annually for ordinands of the Paris diocese, as well as retreats for other clergy.<sup>3</sup> In 1636, it opened the doors of Bons-Enfants to young students destined for ministry and, in 1642 with financial assistance from Cardinal Richelieu, de Paul established a seminary for older seminarians at Bons-Enfants.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, in 1633, de Paul began his long presidency of the *conférences des mardi*, an association of ordained and near-ordained clerics who met at Saint-Lazare each Tuesday afternoon and which has become synonymous with his name. Furthermore, these conferences have offered historians of Catholic reform in France a ready illustration of the surge in initiatives to form and reform the French clergy in the seventeenth century; all agree that they attracted and formed a new crop of zealous clerics, many of whom went on to assume positions of considerable prestige and influence within the French church. Famous individuals, such as

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<sup>3</sup> This number was reduced to five in 1643, though the number of clerics received remained high. Louis Abelly, *La vie du vénérable servent de Dieu Vincent de Paul* (Paris, 1664), 2:216–17.

<sup>4</sup> Richelieu offered the Congregation an initial one thousand écus to maintain twelve adult seminarians in early 1642. Jacqueline Kilar et al., eds., *Vincent de Paul. Correspondence, conferences, documents* [hereafter CCD] (New York: New City Press, 1985), Vincent de Paul to Bernard Codoing, 9 February 1642, 2:256–57.

Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, abound in the examples offered by Paul Broutin and Joseph Bergin, to name just two scholars who have cited the role of the Tuesday conferences in channeling reform and shaping devout clergy.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the claims of distinguished historians about the conferences, confusion about this particular expression of clerical formation and piety abounds, making in-depth analysis of its membership, structure, and proceedings fruitful lines of research. Most fundamentally, scholars have tended to equate the Tuesday conferences with any conference held under the auspices of Vincent de Paul and his Congregation; this has resulted in predictable errors and exaggerations regarding the nature of its activities, range of its membership, and its impact during the heyday of Catholic reform. Yet this conflation arises in part because contemporaries often did not refer explicitly or at length to the Tuesday conferences when commenting on the hive of clerical formation that the two Congregation houses in Paris became from the early 1630s. When du Tour pronounced his oration of de Paul in November 1660, for instance, he did so in the parish church of Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois at the invitation of fellow participants in the Tuesday conferences, one of whom, Laurent Bouchet, ministered in the parish.<sup>6</sup> He did not use the opportunity, however, to refer specifically to these conferences, preferring instead simply to include them in a summary of de Paul's involvement in providing a range of formats for vocational training. More specific was the description offered by Jean-Pierre Camus in 1643, though he was never a member of the Tuesday conferences: "[They live] in their own houses, and assemble only on certain days of the week or month, as much to exhort themselves to do well, by means of holy spiritual conferences and counsels of piety, as to advise among

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<sup>5</sup> Joseph Bergin, *The Making of the French Episcopate, 1589–1661* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 486–87, 505; Paul Broutin, *La réforme pastorale en France au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Desclée et Cie, 1956), 2:222–23.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Guichard, "Laurent Bouchet. Ami et disciple de Saint Vincent de Paul. V – Le conférences de mardi," *Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission* 100 (1935): 781–809.

themselves on the means of serving fellow men in works of mercy and missions."<sup>7</sup>

One of the reasons why contemporaries were reticent about describing the conferences in a more detailed fashion was because, unlike other conferences for clerics held at Saint-Lazare and, from 1642, at Bons-Enfants each Thursday, attendance at the Tuesday conferences was deliberately restricted to a carefully selected cohort of ordained or near-ordained clerics.<sup>8</sup> Notices of the weekly meetings at Saint-Lazare did not appear in the calendar of ecclesiastical events that was published annually for Paris from 1646, though notices of the conference held on Thursdays at Bons-Enfants did. This was because the former were private occasions with access by invitation only, while the latter were publicly advertised and all clerics were welcome.

While the Tuesday conferences had their origins in the environment of retreat that de Paul developed at Saint-Lazare, they offered a consistency and durability to the process of clerical formation that the ten-day retreats could never match. They were designed to provide ordinands with at least a basic understanding of the spiritual and pastoral essentials of their vocation, which, according to de Paul, many priests lacked entirely. But he acknowledged that such minimal preparation could never be commensurate with the dignified sanctity of the office, even if it was all that the Congregation could provide for the majority of ordinands in Paris. In short, the goal was "to teach [the ordinands] all about mental prayer, practical and necessary theology, and the ceremonies of the Church" through a program of meditation that led to a general confession, instruction in correct performance of ecclesiastical ceremonies, and attendance at conferences on moral theology that particularly

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<sup>7</sup> Jean-Pierre Camus, *Le noviciat clerical* (Paris, 1643), 33.

<sup>8</sup> Several volumes of the calendar are held in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris [hereafter BN]. See, for example, Martial du Mans, *Almanach spirituel pour la ville et fauxbourgs de Paris* (Paris, 1650).

focused on problems they might encounter when administering the sacraments.<sup>9</sup>

However, the retreats also proved valuable as a means to identify spiritual potential among the participants and to nurture their interest in sacerdotal piety once their retreat was complete. This early trend coalesced when, within a short time of the commencement of the retreats for ordinands, a number of participants banded together under de Paul's direction to form a company in which they could further pursue their devout interests in informal association with the Congregation. Almost a decade into their existence, de Paul displayed pronounced pride in the reputation that the Tuesday conferences by then enjoyed, claiming that "[o]ur Lord so permits that everyone wants to be a member."<sup>10</sup> The group's air of exclusivity was probably one of the reasons why this was the case, but contemporaries also seemed to conclude that membership in it was a sure sign of de Paul's favor and a step along the road to ecclesiastical promotion. De Paul certainly associated the conference with the production of candidates for high office: in 1638, he noted with satisfaction that "three bishops [had] just been drawn from among" its members.<sup>11</sup> Most famously, after having completed a retreat before his ordination in 1643, Cardinal de Retz attended the conferences in the mid-1640s, mainly in the hope that their reputation for piety would color his own.<sup>12</sup> For other participants smitten with its sacerdotal spirituality, the conferences proved extremely rewarding as a source of profitable reflection and comradely action that challenged its members to shun

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<sup>9</sup> *CCD*, Vincent de Paul to Clement de Bonzi, September-October 1635; *Ibid.*, 1:181, Vincent de Paul to unnamed, c. 1633, 1:297.

<sup>10</sup> *CCD*, Vincent de Paul to Bernard Codoing, 17 March 1642, 2:265.

<sup>11</sup> These were Antoine Godeau for Grasse, François Fouquet for Bayonne, and Nicolas Pavillon for Alet. *CCD*, Vincent de Paul to Jean de Fonteneil, 8 January 1638, 1:413.

<sup>12</sup> François-Paul de Gondi, "Mémoires," in A. Feillet et al., eds., *Oeuvres du Cardinal de Retz*, (Paris, 1825), 1:167, 216.

"tepidness" in their vocation, as one of its earliest members, François Renar, confessed.<sup>13</sup>

According to Coste, 250 clerics participated in the Tuesday conferences between 1633 and 1660.<sup>14</sup> While a complete list is not available to ease the investigator's task in identifying them, it is possible to name sixty-one members of the group, which, allowing for some exaggeration in Coste's numbers, accounts for over a quarter of the membership. Of these, fifteen went on to become bishops, but the majority spent varied careers moving between parish and abbatial benefices or acting as spiritual directors to religious. To take two examples, Hippolyte Féret held the *cure* of Saint-Nicolas-Du-Chardonnet from 1646 until he became *grand vicaire* of Paris in the mid-1650s; he also acted as superior of the Annuciades between 1654 and 1674 and as superior of Madame de Miramion's Filles de Sainte-Geneviève.<sup>15</sup> Adrien Gambart was a confessor to the Visitation nuns (a position he owed to de Paul, who was director of the three convents in Paris) and spiritual director to the Daughters of Providence of Saint Joseph—and still managed to publish pastoral manuals and odes to François de Sales. On his death in 1668, he bequeathed his manuscripts and a portion of his library to the Congregation of the Mission, requesting that his notes from the Tuesday conferences be published.<sup>16</sup> Alain Tallon has identified Gambart as the director of the Paris Company of the Holy Sacrament in 1651, 1656, and 1659, which was not unusual because five of his Tuesday colleagues also served in this role, and nineteen others, including de Paul, were members of the

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<sup>13</sup> Louis Abelly, *L'idée d'un véritable prêtre de l'Église de Jésus-Christ et d'un fidèle directeur d'âmes exprimée en la vie de M. Renar* (Paris, n.d.), 81.

<sup>14</sup> Coste, *Saint*, 2:124.

<sup>15</sup> Hardouin de Perefex, *Hippolyte Feret prestre, docteur en theologie, curé de Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet, vicaire general de monseigneur l'illustrissime & reverendissime père en Dieu messier Hardouin de Perefex* (Paris, 1665).

<sup>16</sup> Most famously, *La vie symbolique de Saint François de Sales* (Paris, 1664).

Company, which included 182 ecclesiastics.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, it would be surprising were the number lower, for both associations shared an interest in sanctifying society through the religious and moral resources available to their members. Moreover, the variety of activities assumed by men such as Laurent Bouchet (missions, diocesan administration, and parochial pastoral care) and Nicolas Gedouin (parochial pastoral care in Saint-Eustache parish, almonerships in the Hôtel-Dieu and Hôpital-Gènèrale) indicate that their form of sacerdotal piety corresponded well with the social engagement advocated by the Company of the Holy Sacrament and which allowed for a degree of cooperation between the two associations.

Identifying the founding members is a task of some complexity; it has been difficult for scholars to distinguish the ranks of clerics who associated with de Paul and the Congregation. Nevertheless, the identity of some may be suggested with some confidence. For example, Nicolas Pavillon, later bishop of Alet and opponent of the anti-Jansenist Formulary, was almost certainly a founding member of the conference, but he was never a member of the Congregation of the Mission and certainly not de Paul's "right-hand man" at Saint-Lazare, as has been asserted.<sup>18</sup> He was associated with eleven other clerics in the foundation of the conference: besides de Paul, the group almost certainly comprised Nicolas Barreau, Balthazar Brandon (abbé de Bassancourt), Étienne Caulet, François Fouquet, Adrien Gambart, Jean-Jacques Olier, François Perrochel, and François Renar, though unfortunately the final two slots cannot be filled without considerable guesswork. Olier has often wrongly been credited with conceiving the venture, and thus with being the priest to whom de Paul reported on 9 July 1633 that "the idea you so kindly shared with me some days past

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<sup>17</sup> Raoul Allier, *La cabale des Dévots* (Paris: A. Colin, 1902); Alain Tallon, *La Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement* (Paris: Cerf, 1990), 25. The Company had 267 lay members.

<sup>18</sup> Bergin, *Episcopate*, 680; Étienne Dejean, *Un prélat indépendant au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Nicolas Pavillon évêque d'Alet (1637–1677)* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit et Cie, 1909), 7.

was received by the ecclesiastics, by all those we mentioned in general and by each one in particular . . . in a uniformity of spirit which appears entirely of God, they resolved to do what you proposed . . . they are to meet again today."<sup>19</sup> But the identity of this priest is less important than the aftermath of the inaugural meeting. By de Paul's own admission and contrary to the effort of his first biographer, Louis Abelly, to bestow all of the credit on him, the idea for the Tuesday conferences was not de Paul's, though he was quick to recognize the potential of the proposal.<sup>20</sup> It offered an excellent opportunity to promote his ambitions for clerical excellence and to encourage the participants to adhere to a "uniformity of spirit" that he considered essential to the church's ability to remain faithful to its purpose.

In structural terms, the conferences were designed to do precisely this. To date, the only resource available to historians to determine their principles of action and procedures has been a brief rule.<sup>21</sup> Far more substantial insights may be gained, however, from the conference constitutions, which were confidential. Never published—and virtually unknown to the historical community—they augment the basic points of the rule and expand at length on the spiritual purpose of the conferences.<sup>22</sup> Most fundamentally, the constitutions forcefully articulate the confraternal nature of the organisation. Although often perceived as a talking shop with associated pious activities such as visits to prisons or missionary work, ecclesiastics did not merely "attend" the weekly conferences, as so often stated. Rather, their attendance was a privilege that they gained in joining a confraternity, for the meetings were the bedrock of a confraternity of near-ordained and ordained clerics, whose

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<sup>19</sup> The priest to whom de Paul wrote was on a mission at this time, while Olier was in Paris having recently been ordained: *CCD*, Vincent de Paul to unnamed, 9 July 1633, 1:202–03.

<sup>20</sup> Abelly, *Vie*, 2:245–46.

<sup>21</sup> *CCD*, 13a:140–43.

<sup>22</sup> Archives de la Congrégation de la Mission, Paris [hereafter *ACMP*], "De la Compagnie de M<sup>ss</sup> de la Conférence qui s'assemblent une fois la semaine à S. Lazare," unpaginated.

obligations to their fellows and the "spirit" of their group traveled far beyond a minimal duty to enjoy pious conversations.

Each meeting opened with a fervent prayer recited in unison that committed the participants to taking Jesus as the model for their lives, to observe the company's regulations, and "to live and die in it" with the help of grace. They were asked to exhibit their fraternal regard for each other through brotherly language and mutual support, while simultaneously manifesting their devotion to key virtues and remaining faithful to the example of Christ, who they believed presided over the assemblies and stood among them just as he had led and supported the Apostles during his earthly life.<sup>23</sup> They adopted a rule of life that was designed to bring consistency and uniformity to their Christlike piety wherever they lived, and to ensure that devotion to God, frequently expressed, was the basis of their daily routine. Thus, they began each day with prayer and mass; this was followed by the reading of a chapter of the New Testament in a spirit of adoration and with a resolution to enter into its sentiments and to practice its teaching and by a short reading from another spiritual text. Over the course of the day, they completed three examinations of their consciences to discover faults and identify the virtues that they needed to prioritize, and they interspersed their daily tasks with short periods of prayer. Before retiring, they read through the points of meditation on which they wished to concentrate the next day so that their minds might mull them over repeatedly in preparation.<sup>24</sup> Although such practices were common among devout Catholic priests during this period, evidence suggests that conference members did indeed observe the routine once they moved to new ministerial pastures. For example, Pavillon, bishop of Alet, appropriated its practices for his episcopal rule of life, which even quoted the Tuesday conference's rule exactly in directing him to read a New Testament chapter every morning to acquire its truths,

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<sup>23</sup> Bibliothèque Municipale de Chartres, Chartres, France [hereafter BMC], ms. 457, fol. 15r.

<sup>24</sup> CCD, 13a:141–2.

sentiments, and practices.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, those who left Paris for benefices or missionary work elsewhere were obliged to report back periodically to their confreres relating what they had "endured for God." They were also required to maintain their spiritual fellowship with them despite physical distance by adhering permanently to the rule of life required of conference members.<sup>26</sup> De Paul's first biographer, Louis Abelly was a member of the conferences and thus had personal experience of his subject's impact on the company's activities; like Coste, he presented de Paul as the dominant force in them. The constitutions offer a valuable tool to test this assertion: to what extent did the procedures defined in the constitutions offer de Paul mechanisms by which he could influence, even control, the group's membership and the views expressed in meetings?

The Company lent manpower to the Congregation's rural missions, but it also conducted at least sixteen independent missions for a variety of audiences during the period 1633–1660. These began with a mission to workers building a chapel at the Visitation monastery on rue de Petit-Musc in 1633, and it included two missions in Metz (1644 and 1658) and another led by Laurent Bouchet to the Réfuge in January 1657.<sup>27</sup> De Paul remained the director of the company until his death, and he selected individuals to participate in missions, meeting with them to discuss their priorities before they began. The group at large known as the *grande assemblée* was also given the opportunity to discuss upcoming missionary ventures, and it received reports when each was completed.

The constitutions also refer, however, to a *petite assemblée*, held monthly and composed of the director, prefect, two assistants, and a secretary. It was responsible for decision-making and for regular reviews of the conduct of individual members of the company. Strikingly, though the director held

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<sup>25</sup> BN Manuscrits, ms. français 14428(i), fols. 138r-v.

<sup>26</sup> *CCD*, 13a:142.

<sup>27</sup> Six other members accompanied Bouchet: Adrien Gambart, Pierre de Poussemothe, Le Prêtre, Courtin, Le Gouteux, and Abraham Ribier. BMC, ms. 453, vol. viii, fol. 384r.

office permanently, the other officers elected their successors every six months. However, this was not carried out through a simple voting procedure. Instead, de Paul suggested candidates for the offices, justified his selection, and asked the sitting officers to confirm it. It was then de Paul's responsibility to inform the remaining members of the results "as if he wanted to take [their] approbation regarding the election" (my emphasis). His position as director instilled an obedience to his wishes that was reflected in the procedures and in his ability to cherry pick the governing officers. Recruitment to the wider body of the company was subject to equally strict rules to ensure that only those fitting in character and outlook found their way into its embrace. Members could propose a potential "postulant," whose "life and morals and other qualities" were then investigated by the officers, before he was sent for an interview with de Paul. Once de Paul gave him leave to join, the postulant pledged obedience to "the purpose, spirit, and practices of the Company," and he was welcomed into its "most cordial union" during a ceremony presided over by the director.<sup>28</sup> Bouchet, for instance, was probably recommended to de Paul by conference members Vialart and Caulet, in whose episcopal households he had worked before his ordination retreat at Saint-Lazare in 1643.<sup>29</sup>

Ordinary members of the company played a role in recruitment and government, and they had an active part in the planning and assessment of ministerial activities. However, while the constitutions did not render them powerless, they offered de Paul as many formal opportunities as possible to favor officers, members, and recruits that he considered malleable or sympathetic to his wishes and views. In other words, the formal hierarchy of decision making that structured the company's activities maximized the director's influence from the inner circle of the *petit assemblée* to the outer ranks of those in the *grand assemblée*, while giving him the possibility of offering

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<sup>28</sup> ACMP, "Compagnie."

<sup>29</sup> Guichard, "Laurent Bouchet," *Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission* 100 (1935): 293–306.

incentives of favor and promotion to those who pleased him. But to what extent was the constitutional dominance that de Paul enjoyed mirrored in the spiritual dimensions of the company?

While the governmental structure of the conferences was designed to allow de Paul to exert as much influence as possible in the choice of members and officers, it also enabled him to nurture those that he considered to possess the requisite qualities for leadership. A collegial approach to spiritual reflection was meant to develop the spiritual confidence needed for such a role under de Paul's watchful eye. He hoped also that the group's discussions would inspire not only confidence among the participants, but would also, as Bouchet intimated in a biblical analogy, light a fire in men that would in turn enlighten the world. Naturally, de Paul and his associates sought to legitimize their enterprise not merely on the basis of its contemporary usefulness for clerical formation, but as a resurrection of practices cherished by early church fathers such as John Cassian, whose reputation for wisdom and saintliness blessed their own effort to nurture the same qualities centuries later.<sup>30</sup> It was not only de Paul and fathers like John Cassian that Bouchet found particularly inspiring, but also Renar, the Chandener brothers, and others whose frank admissions and opinions opened the hearts and thoughts of their fellow "pilgrims" and compelled them to strive for a high standard in their own piety. They were, in his opinion, his brothers and friends whose zeal and wisdom helped him to resolve difficulties and fortify him in good resolutions.<sup>31</sup> Bouchet and Renar agreed that the Tuesday conferences were quite different from other types of conferences and retreats available to them; their unique benefit lay, for Renar, in their ability to combine reflection on theology and virtue so that those "who give themselves to solid virtue being moreover convinced that a priest is obliged to know all that concerns the work of his ministry" were able to study as their consciences

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<sup>30</sup> *CCD*, 11:11; *BMC*, ms. 457, fol. 277r.

<sup>31</sup> *BMC*, ms. 586, vol. iii, fol. 263r.

obliged them.<sup>32</sup> Such enthusiastic assessments confirmed for de Paul that the conferences filled an important niche in Parisian church life, for "an ecclesiastic who will be filled with knowledge and empty of virtue is in great danger of . . . committing several notable faults if he is not excited and aided."<sup>33</sup> He pointed out that François de Sourdis had introduced conferences for clergy in Bordeaux during his tenure as archbishop (1600–1628), but that these aimed only to provide basic instruction in specific points of moral theology to assist them in providing pastoral care to the laity. Another Borromean imitator, François de La Rochefoucauld, had introduced a similar policy in Clermont, and Richelieu, while bishop of Luçon between 1606 and 1623, had also encouraged *curés* to meet on a weekly basis to discuss the moral and pastoral problems that they encountered in their parishes.<sup>34</sup> But de Paul maintained that "when I came to Paris, I had never seen anything like these conferences, at least on the virtue proper to their particular state and how to live their vocation well." As an antidote to clerical imperfections, nothing, he concluded, "penetrated me more" than what he saw and heard at the Tuesday conferences.<sup>35</sup>

Abelly suggested that de Paul actually delivered the conferences while the other participants sat listening intently to his words, but this understates the discussional nature of the meetings. Indeed, the constitutions specified that no individual was permitted to speak for more than fifteen minutes in any given session, and de Paul spoke only at the conclusion to summarize the thoughts of those who had offered their opinions

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<sup>32</sup> Abelly, *Renar*, 81.

<sup>33</sup> *CCD*, 11:11.

<sup>34</sup> *CCD*, 11:11. Sourdis' conferences, initiated in 1609 for each deanery, also dealt with points of canon law and taught the rudiments of liturgical ceremonies. Broutin, *Réforme*, 2:42–43, 108–10; Joseph Bergin, *The Rise of Richelieu* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 94; M. de La Morinière, *Les vertus du vray prelat, représentée en la vie de monseigneur l'eminetissime cardinal de la Rochefoucault* (Paris, 1646), 396–99; L.-W. Ravenez, *Histoire du cardinal François de Sourdis* (Bordeaux, 1867), 179.

<sup>35</sup> *CCD*, 11:11.

to the group. However, he did seek to ensure that the company did not dabble in speculative theology, but concentrated on training members to cultivate their "ecclesiastical spirit in the practice and ordinary exercise of certain virtues."<sup>36</sup> Of course, the conference members were often intellectually capable and highly educated, so the quality of their communal reflections was potentially of far higher quality than anything evidenced in short retreats for ordinands. Moreover, they were more likely to progress to positions of leadership within the church, so that their preparation for such offices needed to be addressed through the conference. To some extent, the sessions were an opportunity for them to honor the hidden life of Jesus before he had begun his public ministry, and they offered a supportive venue and a sheltered space, physically and mentally, to perfect the qualities and skills that they would need in their own ministries. Thus, de Paul identified three basic themes for reflection, which were explicitly identified in the constitutions: virtues, works and obligations of ecclesiastics, and ecclesiastical charges and dignities. He also chose the weekly topics to be discussed under each, beginning with a conference on the sanctity of the ecclesiastical life.<sup>37</sup> Although it is not possible to compile a complete list of topics to 1660, it is apparent from the minutes and notes compiled by one long-term member, Laurent Bouchet, for the period 1650–1660 that de Paul particularly stressed the study of virtues, choosing to have gatherings on such topics as penitence, sanctity, avarice, appeasement of God's anger, spiritual alms, and scandal, while occasionally permitting the members to learn about and reflect on the duties of spiritual directors and catechists.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> ACMP, "Compagnie"; BMC, ms. 453, vol. viii, fol. 378r.

<sup>37</sup> Abelly, *Vie*, 2:249, 252.

<sup>38</sup> Bouchet recorded fourteen conferences for the period 1650–60, of which nine concerned virtues and the remainder principally concentrated on ecclesiastical works, obligations, and charges. Three were devoted to discussing the nature and purpose of the Tuesday conferences: BMC, ms. 453, vol. viii, and 457; Joseph Guichard, "Laurent Bouchet. Ami et disciple de Saint

In sending two of the conference members, Abelly and Le Breton, to assist Congregation missionaries in Montmirail in 1638, de Paul portrayed them as virtuous exemplars of the ideal confrere: devout, sensible, prudent, discreet, and fervent.<sup>39</sup> These qualities could be described under the virtues of simplicity, modesty, and humility, as did the conference rule. The constitutions more amply challenged them to strive to master, like Jesus, simplicity, humility, and "cordial bounty," and to nurture an ardent love for the church and its discipline. They also stressed that the confreres should develop an apostolic zeal for missions, especially in rural areas, hospitals, and "the most abandoned places." As the qualities that supposedly composed the ecclesiastical spirit that the conferences were designed to foster, these bore some relation to the five missionary virtues that de Paul considered essential to a Congregation missionary (humility, zeal, simplicity, gentleness, and mortification). Of course, these were enlivened and topped by the virtue of charity, which demonstrated true love of God and neighbour and was the virtue that most fully expressed the Congregation's spirit. Although charity was not emphasized in the rule and constitutions of the Tuesday company, it was in the conferences dedicated to justifying and preparing for the confreres' missions. In 1657, seven confreres completed a mission at the Réfuge, which Marie Bonneau (Mme de Miramion) had recently established adjacent to the Hôpital de la Pitié to house, as Bouchet noted, women who had been "led astray" through prostitution.<sup>40</sup> This was characterized as a painful and perilous mission for the Tuesday members, but they were reminded that their sense of charity should press them to restore these poor abandoned souls to God through sermons on penitence and

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Vincent de Paul. Appendice," *Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission et les Filles de la Charité* 101 (1936), 429–57.

<sup>39</sup> CCD, Vincent de Paul to Jean Bécu, 20/21 May 1638, 1:467.

<sup>40</sup> Bonneau donated 10,000l for the building of the Réfuge: Alfred Bonneau, *Madame de Beauharnais de Miramion. Sa vie et ses oeuvres charitable 1629–1696* (Paris, 1868), 176–78.

presentations of saintly examples and the distribution of holy medals, rosaries, and devotional booklets.<sup>41</sup>

Most of the members of the Tuesday conferences did not intend to become missionaries. Even so, de Paul considered that it was still appropriate that they practice the missionary virtues, and the missions of their company provided a means for them to do so in God's service. He allotted special prominence, however, to two of the virtues that allowed them to express their charity, simplicity and humility. Both, underpinned by faith, were particularly apt for a group of educated churchmen who were members of a prestigious society and who would potentially proceed to high ecclesiastical offices. Thus, de Paul was keen to ensure that sentiments of pride and ambition were given short shrift within the company; he noted that it expected subjects to be treated very simply in its meetings, and observed that someone always complained when a participant vaunted his erudition or relied on rhetorical embellishments.<sup>42</sup> "The spirit of Our Lord," de Paul observed, "is not a spirit of doing things to be esteemed"; rather, it was evidenced in meetings whose proceedings were governed by humility and simplicity.<sup>43</sup> For this reason, the constitutions stipulated that the discussion of virtues should follow the same pattern that de Paul advocated for preaching: a *petit méthode* of dialogue that required participants to speak on the motives for attaining a particular virtue, the nature of that virtue, and the means to cultivate it, with each member given the opportunity to contribute two motives and means.<sup>44</sup> For example, a conference held during the Fronde dealt with the need for conference members as priestly mediators to cultivate a spirit of penitence for their own sins and "the sins of the people," which had multiplied during this miserable time of havoc. This spirit required that the priest accept all afflictions in reparation for his crimes and those of others; it derived from the

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<sup>41</sup> BMC, ms.453, vol. viii, fol. 384r.

<sup>42</sup> CCD, Vincent de Paul to Bernard Codoing, 18 March 1642, 2:270.

<sup>43</sup> CCD, Vincent de Paul to Bernard Codoing, 17 March 1642, 2:265 and 12:247.

<sup>44</sup> ACMP, "Compagnie."

life of Jesus, who was born poor and subjected to "outrages" throughout his life. It consisted of a "sovereign hatred, horror and detestation" of sin as an affront to God, but also of "a humiliated spirit." Through habitual prayer, the priest could, like David, Jerome, Peter, and Paul, learn to recognize and regret the abominations of mankind.<sup>45</sup>

As an expression of clerical discipline, the Tuesday company's constitutions fostered a spirit of fellowship in thought and action designed to provide members with a deep sense of personal and communal sacerdotal spirituality and responsibility and the tools to adhere to their vocations throughout their lives. For its members, the company was far more than a meeting or class because, as a fraternity, it inspired collective reflection on, devotion to, and expression of the "uniform spirit of priesthood" with likeminded confreres. Its constitutions defined a hierarchical form of confraternal government and discipline with an inbuilt set of controls that perpetuated the influence of de Paul not only in membership and government, but also in spiritual reflection, formation, and ethos. While Abelly's suggestion that de Paul overtly dominated the discussion at meetings is an exaggeration, there is no doubt that his directorship of the company was far from honorific. Thus, while in structure and procedures the company was egalitarian in its approach to spiritual discussions and encouraged members to absorb the collective wisdom that they and their confreres helped to express, they did so through a prism of sacerdotal piety and skills that de Paul sought to promote. Therein lay the company's broader advantage to de Paul, for it was by this means that he extended his influence beyond the immediate environment of the Congregation of the Mission to the broader reaches of the French church, establishing an enduring network of spiritual communication and pious ministry that was rooted in his sacerdotal teaching.

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<sup>45</sup> BMC, ms. 453, vol. viii, fol. 392r.