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**THE USE OF ACCEPTANCE AS FOUND IN THE WORDS AND
WORKS OF SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL**

by

Harry William Schloetter

**A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the School of
Social Work of Loyola University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Social Work**

June

1954

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to examine the words and works of Saint Vincent De Paul in reference to one of the concepts of contemporary social work, "acceptance."

It will be noted as this study unfolds that Saint Vincent had no ready body of knowledge to draw upon, or a set pattern of regulations by which to be guided, yet his work stands as one of the most important contributions made by anyone in the entire history of Social Work. The motive for his social enterprises was the supernatural virtue of Charity, and his inspiration was Jesus Christ, the God-man.

Since acceptance of the individual person is such a necessary and basic principle of modern day social work, it would seem that effective social work in any era would prize it equally as high. Is it found so in the social work of Saint Vincent De Paul? This is the question that this study is attempting to answer.

Scope: This study will be introduced with a brief historical and biographical sketch of Saint Vincent De Paul. The purpose is to provide a background for a better understanding of the man and his social work activities. A resume of the social conditions with which Vincent was faced will also be incorporated into this study.

The chapter on acceptance will constitute the body of this study. An examination of the principle has been made and this paper will present areas in which Vincent was active.

Method: The method used in this study was primarily an academic form of study. Some primary source material and much secondary source material was gathered and read. From these various writings, information was gathered for presentation in this paper.

Sources: Material utilized in this paper were primary and secondary sources which included biographies, pamphlets and periodicals. The sources are listed in the Bibliography.

Plan of Presentation: The plan of presentation is as follows; the introduction is a biographical sketch which presents an overall picture of the setting in which Vincent functioned and was active. There is a chapter devoted to the principle of acceptance and how it is found in the words and works of Vincent De Paul. The importance he placed upon the supernatural as the necessary base for the successful application of Charity is shown in this chapter. The study closes with a conclusion which attempts to bring together the important points presented in the body of the paper.

CHAPTER II

AN HISTORICAL SKETCH OF SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL

St. Vincent De Paul, the Father of the Poor, was born about the year 1580 in the little village of Pouy in the province of Gascony, France. He died on the 27th of September 1660, at the age of eighty. Since 1828 Pouy has been officially named St. Vincent De Paul in honor of the saint. The village of Pouy at the time of St. Vincent consisted of about fifty squat thatched houses. In one of these dwellings the De Paul family resided and grew up.

There is little information available concerning St. Vincent's parents, aside from the fact that they were poor, simple and pious peasants whose main interests were their six children and their farm. Vincent was the third born of the six children. Historians have said that the particle "de" in the family name is no indication of nobility.

During his early and formative years, Vincent was entrusted with the care of his father's flocks. He was a conscientious and serious young man. His parents recognized in their son an interest in the ecclesiastical state, and to this end they offered him their assistance. At the age of twelve Vincent was placed in the care of the Franciscan fathers at the College of Dak. He remained at the academy for four years where the main academic interest was the study of grammar and Latin.

The following are the dates of Vincent's ecclesiastical life:

"In 1598 he was ordained subdeacon by the Bishop of Tarbes; in 1599 he obtained dimissorial letters for the priesthood from the Bishop of Dak, and had himself ordained priest by Francois de Bourdeilles, Bishop of Perigueux, Chateat-l'evêque on 23rd September 1600."¹ Today the ordination of a priest is usually not performed at such an early age. However, three hundred years ago early ordination was one of the practices that beset the Church. Vincent began his ecclesiastical life by teaching and preaching at the University of Toulouse. "He received the degree of Bachelor of Sacred Theology from the University of Toulouse, which entitled him to a chair in the University with faculties to explain and teach the Second Book of Sentences of Peter Lombard."² It has also been reported that he received the licentiate in Canon Law, but there is no record of his ever having been accorded this honor.

For about seventeen years, Vincent was the cure of the village of Chatillon. This may be referred to as the beginning of his charitable organizations. The following is a reference made by St. Vincent in later years in a conference to the Daughters of Charity regarding the care of the poor:

Whilst I was living in a little town near Lyons, to which God had called me to be parish priest, one Sunday, when I was vesting to say Holy Mass, I was told that, in an isolated house, a quarter of a league away, everybody was ill; that there was not even one of them who could render any assistance to the others and all were in an inexpressible state of poverty and indigence. This news touched me to the heart. I did not fail to commend affectionately the charity of the congregation in the course of

1 Monsignor Jean Calvet, St. Vincent De Paul, Translated by Lancelot E. Sheppard, New York, 1951, 19.

2 Reverend Cyprian W. Emanuel, O.F.M., The Charities of St. Vincent De Paul, Chicago, 1923, 14.

the sermon and God touching the hearts of those who heard me, moved them with compassion for those poor afflicted people. After dinner a meeting was held in the house of a good young lady of the town to see what help could be given them, and everyone present felt disposed to pay them a visit to console them with words and to help to the best of their powers. After Vespers, I took along with me a citizen of the town, we went together for a walk to visit these people. We overtook on the road some ladies who had set out before us and a little further on, we met some others who were returning home. As it was summer and the weather was very hot these good ladies were sitting on the side of the road to rest and refresh themselves. To sum up, my daughters, there were so many of them, you would have said it was a regular procession. On my arrival, I visited them to see how to provide for their needs. These poor people were well cared for and supplied for a few days but what would happen to them a week or so later? I proposed to all these good ladies who had been animated by Charity to visit those poor people that they should club together to make soup and provide other supplies and needs and give them care, each on her own day, and not only for them, but for all who might afterward come.³

This episode in the life of St. Vincent is thought to be the beginning of his charitable works of mercy. From this seemingly unplanned and uneventful occurrence in the life of a simple parish priest, many great and noble works of mercy were to evolve.

The actual scope of Vincent's works was enormous and farflung. They encompassed many areas. The following is only a listing of some of the areas that St. Vincent was interested in and in which he was active.

One of the largest areas was the care of the poor, sick and the insane. He established what is now known as the visiting nurses, and to this end the Ladies of the Parishes, the Daughters of Charity, and the Priests of the Mission and the Sick were organized. They visited the sick in their homes and assisted them in both spiritual matters and physical care. These individ-

3 Spiritual Conferences of St. Vincent De Paul, Translated by Joseph Leonard, C.M., Westminster, 1952, 216-218.

uials were to possess great insight and tenderness in working with the sick. They were to exercise a great deal of patience because many of the poor sick were unaccustomed to having any sort of care, and could conceivably resent an intrusion into their private lives by these good people. St. Vincent believed that spiritual services as well as physical care should be rendered to the sick.

We should not indeed be doing enough for God and our neighbor if we supplied the sick poor only with nourishment and medicine and if we did not assist them, according to God's designs, with the spiritual services we owe them. When you serve the poor in this way, you are true Daughters of Charity, that is to say, Daughters of God, and you are imitating Jesus Christ.⁴

Hospital nursing was an important adjunct to the activity of the care of the sick. The hospitals of the time were sometimes only hospitals in the name, as they made no real provision for medical care and were no more than a resting place. St. Vincent and his co-workers were instrumental in bringing about many needed reforms in the care of the sick.

He was eminently interested in children and in their welfare. Today if a label were given to his work it would be Child Welfare work or services. His heart was filled with compassion for the suffering, some of the children of France were enduring. There was great poverty throughout France at that time due to numerous wars and battles for power that had weakened her both economically and spiritually. Along with poverty there was prevalent the accompanying evils of disease, moral breakdown, and other signs of unrest that chaotic conditions bring. Vincent set out to remedy some of these bad situations in the only way he knew. That way was in working with the people who

⁴ Ibid., 55.

were involved, both of the ruling class and of the ruled. As mentioned earlier, children had an especial domain in the hear of Vincent. He had been known to weep over the plight of some of the children he came into contact with.

St. Vincent did not undertake the care of the foundlings as a constituent part of a preconceived program of social relief. He was led into it, under God, by an accidental occurrence. While returning to Paris one evening he detected a begger in the act of mutilating an infant. He rescued it and brought it to La Couche.⁵

Foundlings which were brought to La Couche were badly neglected and ill-treated. When St. Vincent learned of this deplorable state of affairs, he resolved to effect a betterment. "He and the Ladies of Charity rented a house near the Gate of Saint-Victor. They felt financially capable of caring for only twelve of the foundlings."⁶ Others were transferred from La Couche from time to time as the means of the Ladies permitted.

Vincent established schools and centers for the industrial training of the older child.

Industrial training was a logical phase of St. Vincent's practical program for relief. . . . He had his charges learn to keep themselves busy from their earliest years not for the sake of any material profit that might accrue from their work but that they might be reared from the beginning in an atmosphere of honest work. And when they were of competent age, they were apprentices in some trade suitable to their age.⁷

To further his work in industrial training, Vincent secured funds from the more wealthy patrons who were known to him and were in agreement with his program. He had not ill feelings about soliciting funds for his programs because

5 Emanuel, The Charities of St. Vincent De Paul, 199.

6 Ibid., 201.

7 Ibid., 230-231

he felt it was what God wanted him to do.

Equally as important a task was his work with individuals who had been imprisoned. Using the term, "prison," as it is known today is a gross misnomer. Prisoners were placed in chains and kept in a dungeon-like atmosphere. Little recognition was given to either their spiritual or temporal welfare until St. Vincent became active in their behalf.

St. Vincent promoted the spiritual welfare of the convicts whenever possible. . . . Vincent had missions conducted on the various galleys. The first of its kind was given to the convicts assembled at Bordeaux in 1623. He obtained the assistance of a number of religious of the city, two of whom he assigned to each galley. They worked with enthusiasm and success disposing the criminals to reconcile themselves with God and to accept their penalties with patience and in satisfaction for their sins.⁸

A somewhat more humane attitude towards the prisoners was exhibited by the officials of the prisons, and the conditions gradually improved. Vincent also effected a change in the minds of the officials in regards to the spiritual welfare of the men. He visited the prisoners and brought them the solace of their faith. Some of Vincent's co-workers also carried out this program in other prisons. Today, almost every large jail or penitentiary has on its staff a prison chaplain to offer advice and guidance to the men placed behind bars. The present day programs are an outgrowth of what Vincent and his followers started over three hundred years ago.

Vincent's work did not stop with the adult offender, however. He was interested in promoting programs in which juvenile offenders could benefit. Again his organizing genius came to the fore when he originated a variety of

⁸ Ibid., 241.

schools especially adapted to the needs of the youth of his day. Special protective services were also within the scope of his work. He knew that merely to take a person off the streets was no guarantee he would not return to his previous manner of acting. "One category from among the unfortunate prisoners, the delinquent children, Vincent reserved to himself and obtained permission to gather them together in a special building at Saint-Lazare which he made into a reformatory."⁹ Under Vincent's care, the wayward youths learned to lead useful and virtuous lives.

St. Vincent's method of treating these delinquents ran along three lines: strict confinement, good bodily care, and kind moral persuasion. The results of this type of treatment were satisfactory. In later years many of those youths who had spent some time at Saint-Lazare were found in every walk of life, leading honorable and virtuous lives.¹⁰

In France at his period, sexual immorality was widespread. Vincent was keenly interested in mitigating this vice and its evil effects. He was directly connected with two institutions laboring to regain these unfortunates from their sinful lives. He also did much to protect innocent girls from the snares of the world and the malice of men. Vincent established homes where women and children in danger of entering a sinful life could live and work in a healthy environment. In this way they could have recourse to a more sheltered type of existence, and perhaps be spared from a degrading life of sin. A necessary aspect of this endeavor was that employment would be sought for

⁹ Calvet, St. Vincent De Paul, 163.

¹⁰ Emmanuel, The Charities of St. Vincent De Paul, 247.

the women and children residing in the homes. They were usually placed in homes doing some type of servant duty or were sent to the country to help out on farms. It is reported many of these women later helped in some of his charitable works.

Too much cannot be written about St. Vincent's activities in reducing poverty through the giving of relief. He actually gave three types of relief or assistance. One was the giving of money to a family to be used in the everyday purchase of necessary items to sustain life. Another form of relief was the giving of relief in kind. This meant that the families were given material relief which was used to help them over a difficult period, i.e., food for the family, feed for farm animals, some implements and animals for a farm. Clothing was also a large item in the type of concrete assistance. The third type of relief given by St. Vincent was goods of a spiritual nature. He knew and preached that if only temporal relief were given, the entire purpose of charity was defeated. The mere giving of material things did not, in the eyes of St. Vincent, accomplish the purpose of Charity, which is to provide for spiritual and temporal welfare.

An attempt has been made to sketch the life and activities of St. Vincent. He played an outstanding role in the development of social work activities, and the modern world is still benefiting from his work. Today, in many of the countries of the world the Society of St. Vincent De Paul continues to do the work he started. The Priests of the Congregation of the Mission, founded by St. Vincent, operate seminaries, universities, high schools and academies. They are following in the footsteps of their illustrious found-

er in trying to help others achieve for themselves a better life. The Daughters of Charity, a world wide organization of religious women, are today operating a vast network of schools, orphanages, day nurseries, settlement houses, and other activities which entail the giving of the self. They have as their ideal, the Patron Saint of Organized Charity, Saint Vincent De Paul.

CHAPTER III

THE USE OF ACCEPTANCE IN THE WORDS AND WORKS OF SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL

In this chapter an attempt will be made to identify the principle of acceptance as it is used in casework practice today, and was used in the welfare activities of Saint Vincent De Paul.

In contemporary social casework, acceptance is recognized as one of the most important and basic of all the principles used. Two contemporary definitions of the principle of acceptance will now be discussed. It appears that both have adherence and indorsement by a great number of present-day practicing social workers. Gordon Hamilton in her book Theory and Practice in Social Casework states:

Interviewing skill rests on a fundamental professional attitude called "acceptance." This means acceptance of the other person as he is--in whatever situation, no matter how unpleasant or uncongenial to the interviewer, with whatever behavior, aggressiveness, hostility, dependency, or lack of frankness he may manifest. This attitude can come only from respect for people and a genuine desire to help anyone who is in need or in trouble. It is translated through courtesy, patience, willingness to listen, and not being critical or disapproving of whatever the client may complain of, request, or reveal about himself.¹

In the above definition the worker is instructed to be possessing of a genuine

1 Gordon Hamilton, Theory and Practice in Social Casework, Second Edition, New York, 1951, 52.

respect for people, which is an excellent motive. It is certainly true that without this genuine respect for people, the practice of social work would lose a great deal. Hamilton does not give any indication where this respect for the person is to originate or spring from. This definition is an excellent one, as far as it does. However, it seems to be lacking the one vital element in that it does not take into consideration a Supreme Being or a Creator. Human worth and dignity must be based upon something more lasting than the shifting emotions that are human feelings. With that in mind the following definition by Reverend Felix P. Biestek is offered. Father Biestek states:

Acceptance is the recognition by the caseworker of the innate dignity, ultimate destiny, human equality, basic rights and needs of the client, regardless of his individual qualities arising from heredity, environment, behavior, or any other source. Acceptance, however, does not necessarily mean an approval of the client's behavior, attitudes, or standards. Acceptance includes thought and feeling elements, and is expressed in the manner of service.²

The definition that Father Biestek presents is much more like the actual work in which St. Vincent was engaged. Vincent, with the press of a great many details, did not overlook what may appear to be small and insignificant matters. He was consciously aware that the people he was dealing with possessed many great and noble attributes. He was never too occupied to pay attention to the smallest details.

Vincent De Paul was a man who was endowed with that greatest of God's

2 Reverend Felix P. Biestek, S.J., "An Analysis of the Casework Relationship," Social Casework, Volume XXXV, Number 2, February 1954, 60.

gifts, personal sanctity. The supernatural aspect of life permeated his soul and was the driving force that motivated his actions and behavior. Father Emanuel in writing about Vincent said:

He was kind, affable, respectful and considerate towards all. In spite of his many labors, he was ever disposed to receive and listen to those who called on him, whatever their mission. He received with equal attention and affability the rich and the poor, the high and the lowly. If he was in any way partial, it was rather in favor of the lowly and the afflicted. His respect for the poor was almost a veneration. It was a respect so deeply founded on conviction that, far from abating because of his daily and familiar contact with poverty and misery, at times the most squalid and repulsive, it increased with years.³

In the above quotation the deep seated conviction which Vincent had for his fellow man was clearly shown. He understood with the knowledge of faith, and all of his motives sprung from faith. In all of his actions he was aware of the part that the supernatural played. The following excerpt from Ansart's book, The Spirit of St. Vincent De Paul is an excellent portrayal of Vincent's feeling regarding God and man.

Vincent had no other end than the Glory of God. To it tended his thoughts, desires, projects, enterprises, advice, counsels, exhortations, and the spiritual and temporal aid that he gave his neighbor. His conduct was in all respects conformed to that of Jesus Christ, the Gospel was his rule, he carried it as a torch in his hands to direct his steps. Two objects always occupied him, his own sanctification, and the sanctification of his neighbor. He began with his own and continued with that of his neighbor, because he knew that a minister of the Son of God is raised to produce fruit.⁴

The Glory of God, the sanctification and salvation of his own soul and those of his neighbor were of primary concern to this man whose entire life was conse-

3 Emanuel, The Charities of St. Vincent De Paul, iii.

4 M. Andre-Joseph Ansart, The Spirit of Saint Vincent De Paul, New York, 1867, 103.

crated and dedicated to the helping of others. Presented here is an illustration showing how Vincent proceeded. Vincent made a distinction in the care and relief of the sick and the poor. His fundamental distinction was made between the able-bodied poor and the poor who were not able to work. He then further grouped the able-bodied into two groups; one group, the professional tramp and beggar, and the other whom adverse economical or political disturbances had affected. He also grouped the impotent into two groups, according to the degree of their dependency. One group comprised the totally dependent such as children, the sick, crippled, and the decrepit. The other distinction made was with the group that was partially disabled.⁵ It was necessary for Vincent to make this type of distinction because of the many attempts made by the unscrupulous to secure temporal relief. This does not diminish his attitude regarding his feelings concerning the poor. "His respect for the poor was, in fact, almost a veneration."⁶ It was a respect for man so deeply entrenched that it increased in intensity rather than diminished because of his constant contact with poverty and misery. It might be easy to assume that a person always faced with the social failures could become easily discouraged and despondent. Vincent may have been in this position at one time or another. It must be remembered that Vincent was a man, and as such was influenced by human emotions and feelings. The prevailing force that forbade him to lose heart with the failures of society was the driving and compelling knowledge that all humans have the same destiny and Creator. "As long as you did it to

5 Emanuel, The Charities of Saint Vincent De Paul, 119.

6 Ibid., 20.

one of these my least bretheren, you did it to me,' was to Vincent not merely an idle slogan or an empty figure of speech, or only a manner of expressing himself, nor only a lefty ideal."⁷ Vincent wanted to assist the least of God's children and to somehow make their lives more pleasing to Almighty God and to themselves. This aim was the rallying force that prevented him from losing faith in humanity. Following along this line of thinking, Vincent in one of his conferences to the Daughters of Charity said:

One of the acts of charity is to compassionate the sufferings of our neighbor and to weep with him, because love gains for us an entrance into the hearts of others. Moreover we are members one of another, members of one mystic body of which Our Lord is the head. But, has it ever been heard of, even among animals, that one member of a body was insensible to the suffering of another? For a much greater reason should the bond of common sympathy exist among men and especially among Christians.⁸

This basic idea was repeated many times over in his working with the poor and afflicted. He treated all with humility, love and tenderness, and by doing so he was to assist both temporally and spiritually.

That the practice of acceptance was both widespread and farflung in Vincent's work is found in the following passage.

In later years his active charity was as general and as universal as the foundation on which it rested, the love of God. It was all embracing. He consecrated his energies to the spiritual and moral amelioration of the poor, ignorant people of the country. He encouraged and fostered the establishment of elementary schools. As far as corporal relief, there was no distress, no disease, that failed to strike a responsive chord in his generous heart. Neither nationality, nor creed, nor social rank and status, formed a barrier to his charitable zeal.⁹

7 Emanuel, The Charities of St. Vincent De Paul, 20; Matthew, 25-40.

8 Reverend J. B. Bowdignon, St. Vincent De Paul, St. Louis, 1925, Translated by Reverend Patrick A. Finney, C.M., 287.

9 Emanuel, The Charities of St. Vincent De Paul, 21.

Here it is seen that the basis for all charitable work is the love of God. Regardless of the individual's station in life, Vincent would dispense relief to all.

In the next quotation, Vincent gives one of the simplest and yet deeply profound statements on the entire question regarding acceptance, and his feelings about the basis for it. St. Vincent says:

I ought not consider a poor peasant or a poor woman according to their exterior not according to the degree of their intelligence, since very often they scarcely have the figure or the intelligence of reasonable persons; they are so rude and earthy. But turn the medal and you will see by the light of faith that the Son of God, who wished to be poor, is represented to us by the poor. . . O God, how delightful to behold the poor if we consider them in God and in the esteem in which Jesus Christ has placed them! But if we regard them according to the sentiment of the flesh and of the earthly mind they will appear contemptible.¹⁰

The following are maxims which Vincent originated. These were used in his conferences to the Daughters of Charity, and also in his writings, addresses, and discourses. They are indications of his own feelings and attitudes regarding the respect which must be shown for all. Vincent wrote: "Give admonitions with humility, meekness and forbearance. Such is the spirit of our Lord, without which a person does more harm than good."¹¹ Another example of his complete acceptance of the person is found in the following paragraph: "One of the acts of Charity is to bear with one another, in view of our own admirable weakness and the need we have of being borne with by God. O admirable forbearance of our Lord."¹² This is another example of the use of acceptance

10 Ibid., 91.

11 Boudignon, St. Vincent De Paul, 223.

12 Ibid., 224.

as formulated by Vincent De Paul. He is asking that man bear with the failings of the less fortunate.

Much of St. Vincent's work was carried out in hospitals where he formulated certain rules, regulations, and counsels that were to be made a part of the nurses' personal code of acting towards the patient. Some of the regulations Vincent set down for the nurses are:

To treat their patients with compassion, kindness, cordiality, respect and devotion, even the most troublesome as also those toward whom they feel some repugnance, considering that it is not so much to them as to Jesus Christ that they render service. You ought to listen to their little complaints, he continues, as a good mother would do, for they look upon you as their foster mothers, as persons sent to assist them.¹³

In another of the conferences with the Daughters, Vincent proposed the following:

After saluting the sick in a modestly gay fashion, you should obtain an account of the present state of their illness; after sympathizing with them in their sufferings and telling them that God has sent you to serve and comfort them, as far as you are able, you should inquire into the state of their souls.¹⁴

In this concept of the principle, even the most repugnant are deserving of the love and devotion of the staff. This attitude was again based on the premise that since all are children of God, all are entitled to the very same treatment as anyone could reasonably expect if placed in a hospital setting. He further encouraged the nurses to explain to the patients that their suffering and pain could be used to advantage. The nurses were urged to:

Tell them (patients) that they should accept their sickness as coming

13 Emanuel, The Charities of St. Vincent De Paul, 147.

14 Spiritual Conference of St. Vincent De Paul, 56.

from the hand of God, for their own greater good and that, in His eternal love, He permits this illness in order to bring them back to Him, for it often happens that when we are well we think only of labouring for the life of the body and take no pains about our salvation. After that, suggest they should make a general act of faith in all the articles of our religion, and an act of conformity to the will of God, especially in regard to the acceptance of their illness. Teach them that God sometimes sends illness to punish us for our sins and occasionally to afford us an opportunity of showing Him our love. . . . To help you to be patient, often ask God to grant you patience and have the holy name of Jesus often on your lips.¹⁵

Thus he urged the patients to suffer their ills patiently, for it is felt that the will of God is acting upon them, and even though they might not be able to understand it, still, God in His infinite goodness and wisdom was allowing a particular event to run its course. It can only be speculated how successful he was in presenting his objectives to all the individuals concerned. All of his reasoning goes back to a basic love and acceptance of man.

To another group, those who visited the poor and sick in their own homes, he indicated a different approach. Vincent wanted it understood that the workers should treat these particular individuals with the same deep respect and love, as those cared for in the hospital. Among the rules he drew up for those engaged in helping the sick in their homes, the following are found:

Although they ought not be too yielding nor too condescending when they (the sick) refuse to take the remedies, still they shall be well on their guard not to illtreat or slight them; on the contrary, they shall treat them with respect and humility, bearing in mind that the rudeness and the contempt one shows them, as well as the service and the honor which one renders them, are directed to our Lord Himself.¹⁶

15 Ibid., 58-59.

16 Emanuel, The Charities of St. Vincent De Paul, 148.

There was the danger that the patient might be maltreated or slighted, a condition Vincent could not accept. St. Vincent was strict in his instructions regarding this matter. He always felt that "The poor are our lords and masters."¹⁷ In discussing charity and all involved in the process, Kerby says:

St. Vincent was constant in his use of the phrase that the poor are our masters. If the poor are our masters, their needs and not our own temperament or preference becomes determining. Hence the full duties of Charity toward them involve intelligent study, restraint of sympathy and patience with the limitations which we cannot control.¹⁸

Since social workers and all persons engaged in helping others cannot effectively control the feelings, attitudes, and emotions of their clients, it behooves them to accept the person and to restrain from making judgements concerning their behavior. Evidence is available to show that St. Vincent adhered to this principle wholeheartedly. In the conference of March 9, 1642, St. Vincent in addressing the Daughters said:

We are under an obligation to serve and assist the poor as much as lies in our power not only in quality of Christians and by the bond of Charity which requires us to do to our neighbor as we would wish to be done by, but still more on account of our Vocation which obliges us to serve them with willing heart, with kindness, meekness, humility and charity, for the love of God, and to imitate as nearly as possible our great model, Jesus Christ; serving all equally with the greatest care, without exception of persons, and according to their particular necessities. To avoid being wearisome or annoying to the poor and sick, we should speak but little and listen with interest and patience to all of their needs and complaints. You will be true servants of the poor as long as you acquit yourselves of the obligation of attending to the spiritual as well as the corporal necessities of the poor. It is very important to understand well how to conduct yourselves when visiting the poor sick, because by not knowing how to act and treat them you might be the cause of great harm. . . . It is consoling to see a person well instructed in all that

¹⁷ Reverend Pierre Coste, C.M., The Life and Works of St. Vincent De Paul, Translated by Joseph Leonard, C.M., Westminster, 1935, Volume II, 323.

¹⁸, Rev. William J. Kerby, Social Mission of Charity, New York, 1921, 88.

concerns her duties; the poor are also pleased and a better relationship is formed between you and the poor. Bear with their little humors, never get angry with them, nor speak harshly to them, ah, they have enough to suffer without that. Never contradict them except in what would prove injurious to them; for in this case it would be cruel to grant their request; weep with them in their sufferings, for God has established you to be their consolation.¹⁹

In another conference Vincent repeats his feelings concerning acceptance and this is shown in the following quote.

Our Lord is really with these sick persons and receives the service which you render them; therefore you must not only avoid all harshness and impatience, but you must likewise study to serve them with great cordiality and meekness, and even those who are most contrary and difficult to please. In your conversations with the poor, let it always be done with humility and meekness; it is a seed which produces fruit, whilst with a harsh and impatient spirit, you will not be able to do anything.²⁰

Another excellent description of Vincent's attributes is found in the writings of Monsignor Calvet. In his book *St. Vincent De Paul*, Calvet says:

He loved God in mankind; in doing so he fulfilled, like all good Christians, the primary precept of Christ, for Christ is the very substance of Charity. But he possessed a personal gift, the gift of humanity. It is difficult, it must be confessed, to convince ourselves that the vilest of men, sunk in vice and squalor, is really our brother, and it is difficult to love him with a natural movement of the heart and real tenderness. Vincent had that gift. He loved man, he loved the human countenance; and it appeared all the more beautiful to his eyes when wracked with sorrow.²¹

Vincent lived by the truth that all were born equal in the eyes of God, though some were gifted with either more or less of the natural attributes. Vincent turned his attention to those lacking in these attributes. This condition did not detract from his complete acceptance of all persons. Regardless of the

19 Spiritual Conference of St. Vincent De Paul, 292-294.

20 Ibid., 429.

21 Msgr. Jean Calvet, St. Vincent De Paul, Translated by Lancelot G. Sheppard, New York, 1948, 285.

individual's situation in life, he was entitled to a full measure of respect and cordiality. Vincent, with his own gift of sanctity, still lived in a world of humans, and as such readily understood and accepted the behavior of others. In light of this, the following is offered:

His own holiness and sanctity of life had not, as it were, transported him to another and superior world. He lived among men, and he dealt with them, taking human nature as it is. Though a saint himself, he was not overexact in expecting perfection of others. Not that he connived in any way at faults or shortcomings, but he was not surprised when he found them.²²

In this way Vincent was endeavoring to assist all those who came to him. He accepted all, and was not over-exacting in his demands for perfection in others.

In one of his commentaries to the Daughters of Charity, Vincent said, "I have never found anything that helped as much as humility--the lowering of oneself below everyone else with the sense that one is really worse than others, and the refusal to judge anyone."²³ Here we have a beautiful example of the manner in which this great man acted and felt with love and compassion towards everyone. His idea that nothing has been of more assistance to him than the virtue of humility is of importance to social workers. He was aware that everyone is in need of sympathetic and conscientious adherence to this principle. This was the enabling factor by which he always was able to treat each individual person with tenderness and affection. His acceptance of the person was all inclusive, and it knew no bounds. He most certainly did not approve or condone anti-religious, anti-moral or anti-social acts. This full acceptance

22 Emanuel, The Charities of St. Vincent De Paul, 36.

23 Ella K. Sanders, Some Counsels of St. Vincent De Paul, London, 1914, 9.

of the person was based on the notion that all humans are children of God. They have all been created for and destined for some end. That end according to Vincent De Paul was the ultimate union with God. St. Vincent endeavored to help all who were in need. Others who did not feel themselves capable of asking for aid, were sought out by Vincent. He set up a program of seeking out those who were in need, and yet did not or could not apply. His manner of dealing with these individuals is illustrated in the following paragraph.

St. Vincent did not content himself with assisting only those who applied for relief. He knew that shame and other reasons always kept some, especially among the refugees from joining the bread line with the ordinary poor. He therefore gave orders that a priest accompanied by a lay brother should seek them out in their dwellings, which only too often were but hovels or garrets. In this manner they had an opportunity of studying the individual needs of these poor and of giving them the necessary relief, and also the priest was always at hand to administer spiritual aid to the sick where needed.²⁴

The entire emphasis of St. Vincent's social activities had as its foundation, the supernatural as its base. All acts of charity were to be worked through the knowledge that God was always present, and all should conduct themselves in a manner pleasing to God. Monsignor Calvet says the following regarding this point:

Love of God and action for God, sustained by humility, bear fruit in fraternal charity. Humility and charity, the two virtues dear to Vincent's heart, illuminate him and cause him to stand out clearly, and endow his spiritual teaching with a definite and enduring character.²⁵

When Vincent was forced to render a decision that was distasteful to him, or to reprimand a subordinate, he only did so because he knew and felt

24 Emanuel, The Charities of St. Vincent De Paul, 319.

25 Calvet, St. Vincent De Paul, 286.

it was his duty to act accordingly. He carried through his full acceptance to those who worked with him. A description of this shows that:

He corrected those under his guidance, because obliged to do it, but that bitterness in reprimanding, which manifest caprice and partiality, was never to be found in him. He had the admirable tact of giving advice less as a man who struggles with existing evils, than as a man who wished to caution against evils that may ensue. During the missions, he denounced crime, but after having alarmed the sinner, he inspired him with confidence.²⁶

"Even if Vincent were called upon to reprimand a person, he still did so with charity in his heart. His words, actions and even his correcting of the person's faults were carried out in the manner of a loving father."²⁷

Vincent viewed the world and its problems through the eyes of faith and religion. He acted accordingly to alleviate some of the ills presented.

St. Vincent's total acceptance of the person, it can be summarized in the following manner. He loved all men with the benign, loving heart of a vitally interested father. His heart was ever open to those who needed his advice and counsel, and he was ever available to all. His social work was all encompassing and took into consideration all forms of humanity. The basis for all of his work was necessarily a religious motive. He accepted the failings of the people he came in contact with and was still extremely interested in them even though they may have committed some evil act or done something illegal. This does not mean he was in accord with what the person had done. Vincent accepted all people as children of God, and as such these children were the human sanctuary of the soul. He was aware of the great importance of

26 Ansart, The Spirit of St. Vincent De Paul, 434.

27 Ibid., 61.

the soul, and was ever on guard to prevent its being lost or destroyed by evil acts. The basic philosophy, actually the entire base of his social work was the belief in an after life, and union in heaven with God. To this end all of his activities tended, and to further this end he wanted the afflicted to have the necessary insight. He accepted all without discrimination of race, religion, or nationality. It should be remembered that during Vincent's life France was constantly in turmoil, and there was much national unrest. Great numbers of transients roamed throughout France, coming from many different cultures. He accepted all and instructed his workers to do likewise.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

An attempt has been made in this study to present a glimpse into a particular area of a saint's life. Vincent De Paul was an extremely active man, and was engaged in a multiplicity of activities. This paper has been written about Vincent's concept of acceptance, and how he used it. Examples have been given to show how acceptance was found in his words and works.

In the biographical sketch of Vincent's life, the early familial relationships were presented. Some of the influences that these relationships played in the light of his future work were considered. The chapter continued on through his early manhood to portray his attitude toward the priesthood. Various scholastic honors that were conferred upon him were included in this chapter. The beginnings of Vincent's care of the poor sick and the poverty stricken were reported. An example was given to show the start of his career in the charitable field. An account was given concerning the scope of his work. This included work with the foundlings, adult and juvenile offenders, the able sick, the afflicted, the homebound sick, some protective services, and others. Reference material showed that his basic premise was to unite both the temporal giving of relief with the spiritual aspect of charity. In this way he saw the fulfillment of man's end, which is union with God.

The chapter devoted to a discussion of acceptance presented two contemporary definitions of the casework principle. It was shown how Vincent made use of this principle many years before modern day social work. His basis for accepting a person regardless of his condition was found in the supernatural concept of man. It was not found merely in the natural order of things. There were many examples offered showing Vincent's thinking and reasoning regarding the acceptance of man.

As has been mentioned earlier, Vincent's feelings regarding acceptance found their source in the knowledge that all men are really children of God, and that they all are worthy of respect and love. The basis for this love and respect was a belief in the spiritual as personified by Jesus Christ. This self-same motive is found in the definition offered in Father Biestek's definition, where he injects the notion of "innate dignity" and "ultimate destiny." In Miss Hamilton's definition, social workers are instructed to have a "respect for people and a genuine desire to help." Both of these attributes are good and necessary, but do not appear to be wholly complete. Implied in this definition is that the respect for individuals comes only from a natural source, without any recognition of the spiritual. This is the point that differentiates St. Vincent's concept from that of Miss Hamilton's. It is felt that a definition or concept of acceptance, such as Hamilton presents, is lacking in a necessary foundation. Without the foundation of the spiritual, the fullest use of acceptance is not made.

Vincent was always uniting the temporal giving of charity with the spiritual base. This he felt was the only true way to administer real

Christian Charity. Religion, acceptance of the person, and charity should all have a common base. This was evident to St. Vincent.

The following prayer was composed for the feast of Vincent's patronage. It aptly and concisely presents the aims of St. Vincent De Paul.

O glorious Saint Vincent, heavenly patron of all associations of charity, and father of the unfortunate, who during thy life didst never reject anyone who had recourse to thee, behold the multitude of miseries, with which, alas, we are oppressed, and come to our assistance. Obtain from our Lord help for the poor, relief for the sick, consolation for the afflicted, charity for the rich, conversion for sinners, zeal for priests, peace for the Church, tranquillity for nations, and salvation for all. Yes, let all feel the effects of thy compassionate intercession, and may we all, thus assisted by thee in the miseries of this life, be united with thee in heaven, where there will be neither sorrow, nor tears, nor suffering, but joy, gladness and eternal beatitude, Amen.

1 Boudignon, St. Vincent De Paul, 404.

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