

FORMATION OF THE  
CLERGY

# PROBLEMS WITHIN THE CLERGY IN ST. VINCENT'S DAY

- ✿ The majority of priests had not been adequately trained for their office.
- ✿ In some instances, they did not give good example to their flocks.
- ✿ The trouble was not so much corruption as it was ignorance.



# PROBLEMS WITHIN THE CLERGY IN ST. VINCENT'S DAY

- ✻ Care of the peasants had been left to their priests.
- ✻ But, due to the often-horrendous state of clerical formation, virtually none of them had any qualification for preaching.



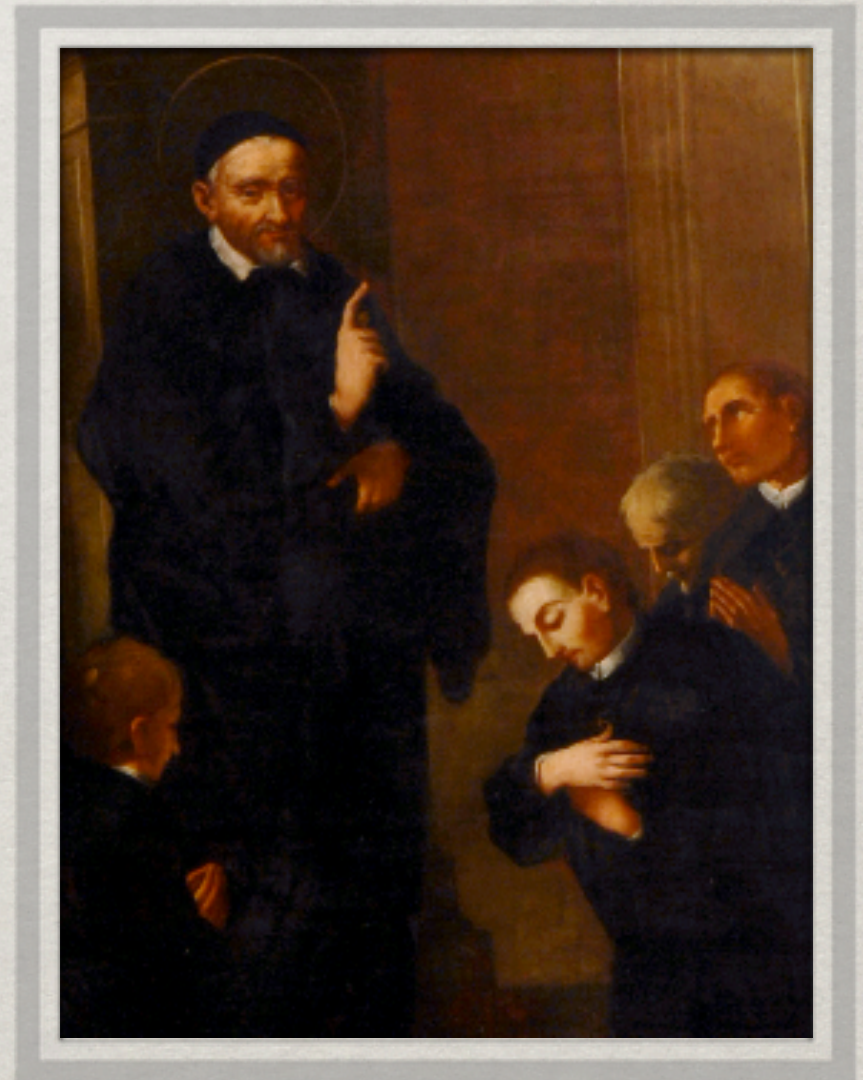
# PROBLEMS WITHIN THE CLERGY IN ST. VINCENT'S DAY

- ✻ Some village priests did not even know the formula for absolution in the confessional.
- ✻ The sacraments were often administered by some priests in what can only be described as a rather slipshod way.



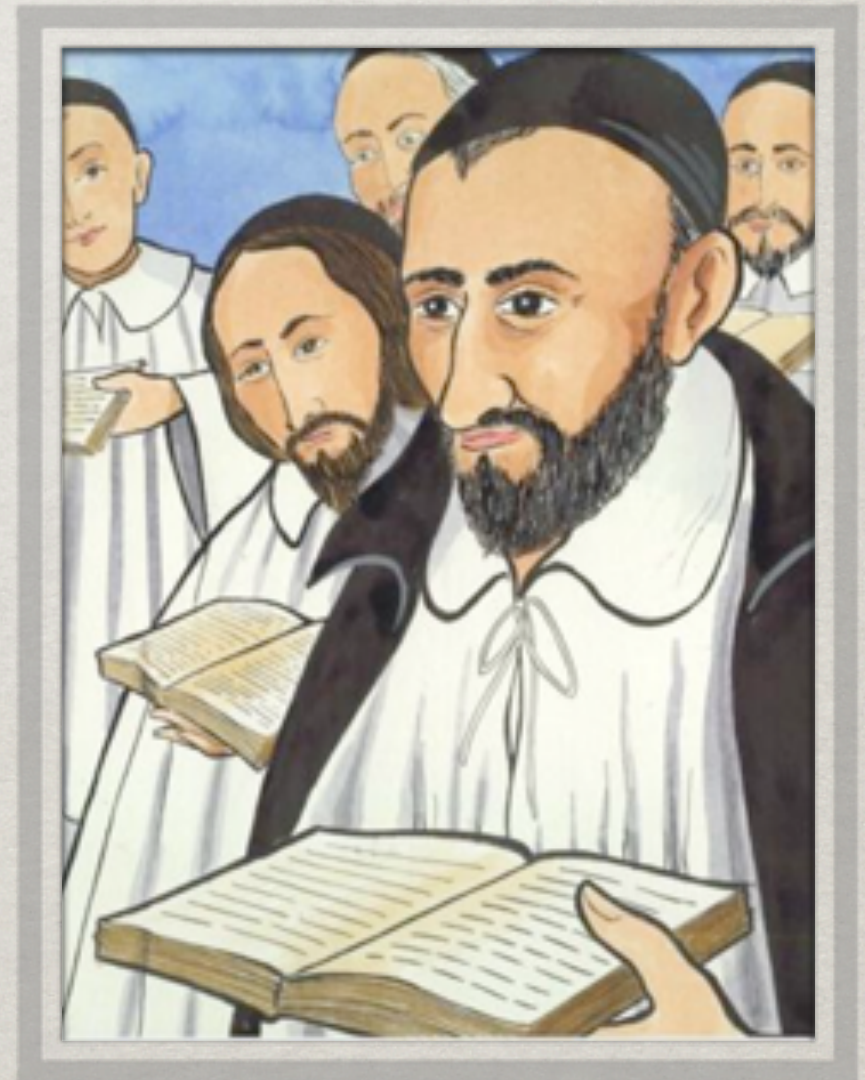
# ST. VINCENT'S INNOVATIONS

- ✿ St. Vincent came to the conclusion that if the spiritual standard among lay folk was to be raised, the clergy had to be “renovated” first.
- ✿ The Holy See was aware of this need, since the Council of Trent had called for the establishment of diocesan seminaries in order to properly train men for the priesthood.
- ✿ Nevertheless, not much was being done by way of reform.



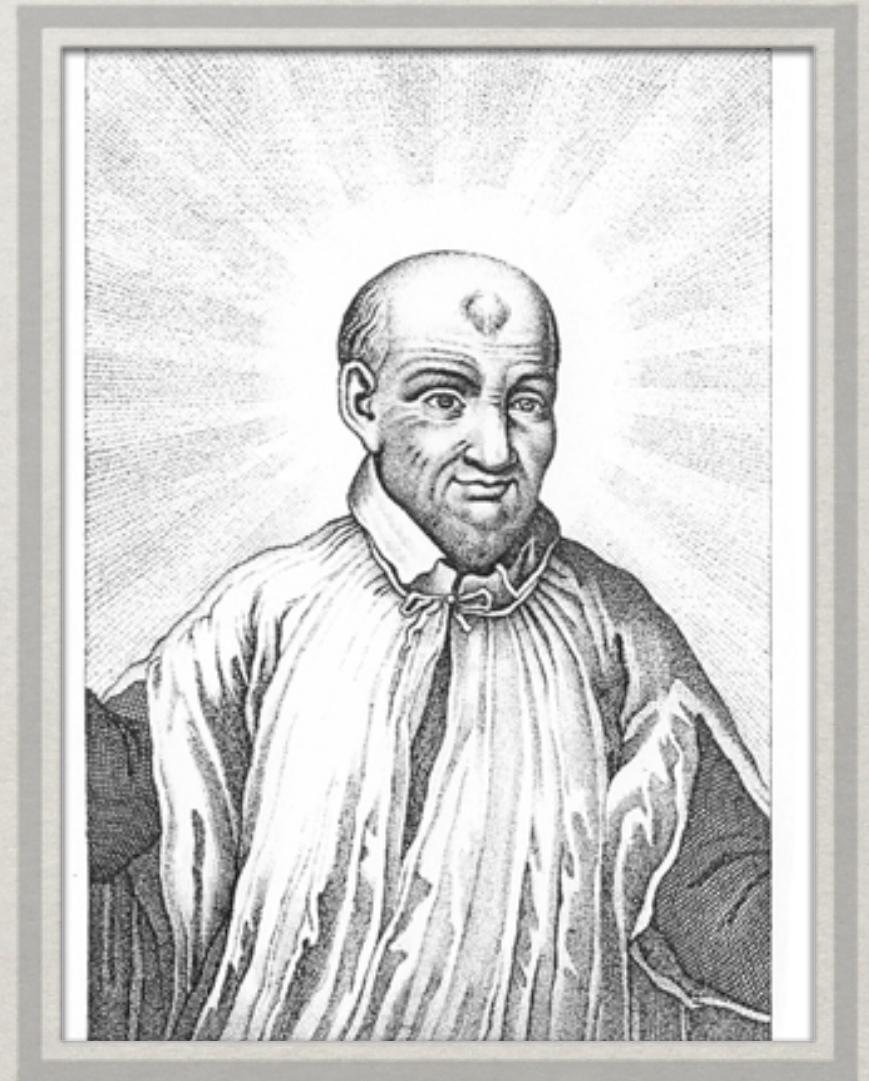
# SEMINARY RETREATS

- ✿ St. Vincent led the way by starting a seminary at the College des Bons Enfants in Paris.
- ✿ He arranged to give retreats to the young men who were about to be ordained.



# ST. VINCENT INITIALLY MET WITH RELUCTANCE & CONFLICT

- ✿ St. Vincent reluctantly accepted these new challenges, complaining that the Congregation of the Mission was intended for preaching in country districts, and could not afford to dissipate its meager resources by taking on these kinds of additional duties.
- ✿ He confessed afterwards, "In the beginning, we did not think at all of serving the clergy; we thought simply of ourselves and the poor."



# DUAL PURPOSE

- ✻ However, after much consideration, St. Vincent reached the conclusion that, by properly educating the clergy, his Congregation would be able to be of great help to the poor, as well.





# TRUST IN PROVIDENCE

- ✻ Without knowing how he would get the money for his clerical retreats, St. Vincent proceeded with his plans in naked trust of Divine Providence.
- ✻ This confidence was rewarded when some of St. Vincent's wealthy benefactors came forward, promising to meet the expenses for the first ten years. After that, his own Ladies of Charity agreed to assume the financial burden.



# TUESDAY CONFERENCES

- ✿ The success of these clerical retreats was such that St. Vincent enlarged their scope by the establishing what he called the “Tuesday Conferences”.
- ✿ They lasted only a day, did not cost much, and probably did more good than the week's retreat for the ordinands.



# NETWORKING & FORMATION

- ✻ In a spirit of humility and simplicity, the Conferences discussed the Christian virtues — in particular, those necessary for the priesthood.



# HUMILITY

- ☼ All magniloquence was discouraged, although among those who attended and sometimes spoke were many men of learning who were famed as orators.



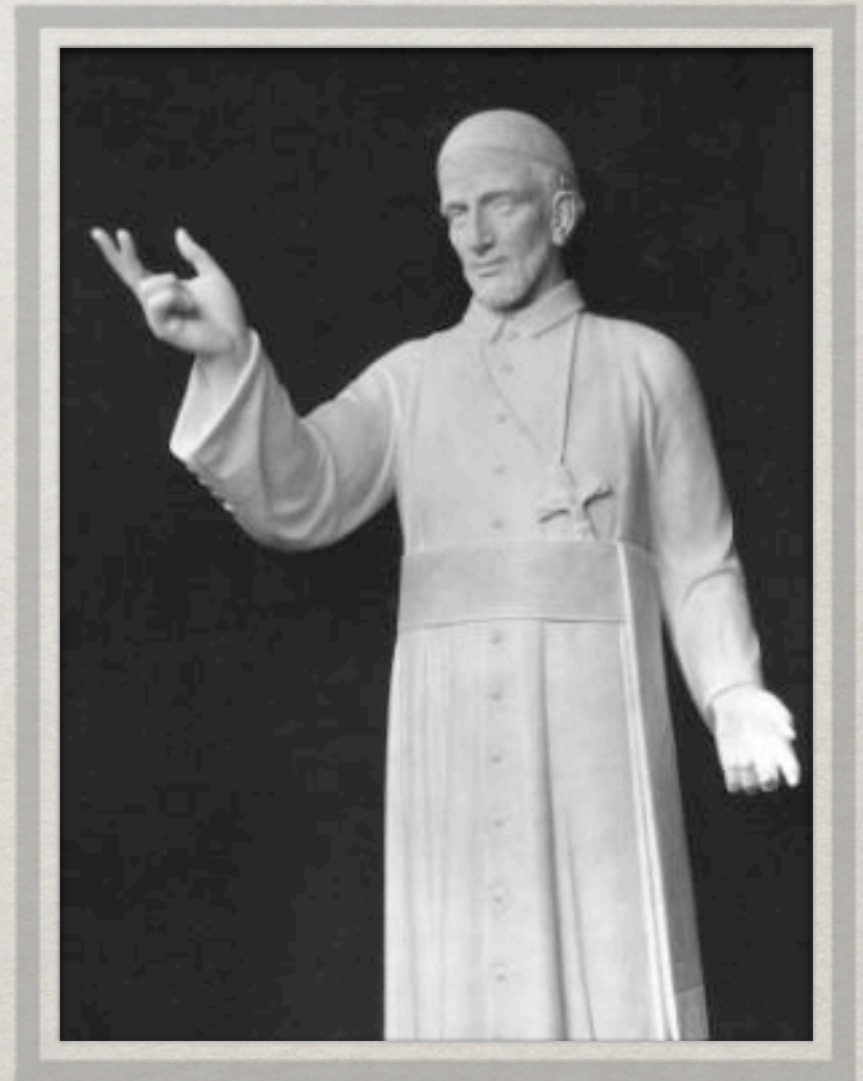
# HUMILITY

- ✻ Because of his humility, St. Vincent wished to avoid taking any part in the proceedings. But, whenever he yielded to the pleadings of others to do so, everyone present recognized that the “soul” of the gatherings was the unassuming priest who was speaking to them.



# THE “LITTLE METHOD”

- ✻ St. Vincent clearly perceived that, if he was going to move the hearts and minds of his rustic audiences, he would have to use the simplest and most direct mode of address. He called his style the "Little Method."



# THE “LITTLE METHOD”

- ✻ Vincent insisted that his priests should, in using the Little Method, not “talk down” to people, but rather, should employ a style which would be “an inch or two above their heads” so that their listeners would be obliged to “stand on their toes” during the sermons.



# SIMPLICITY

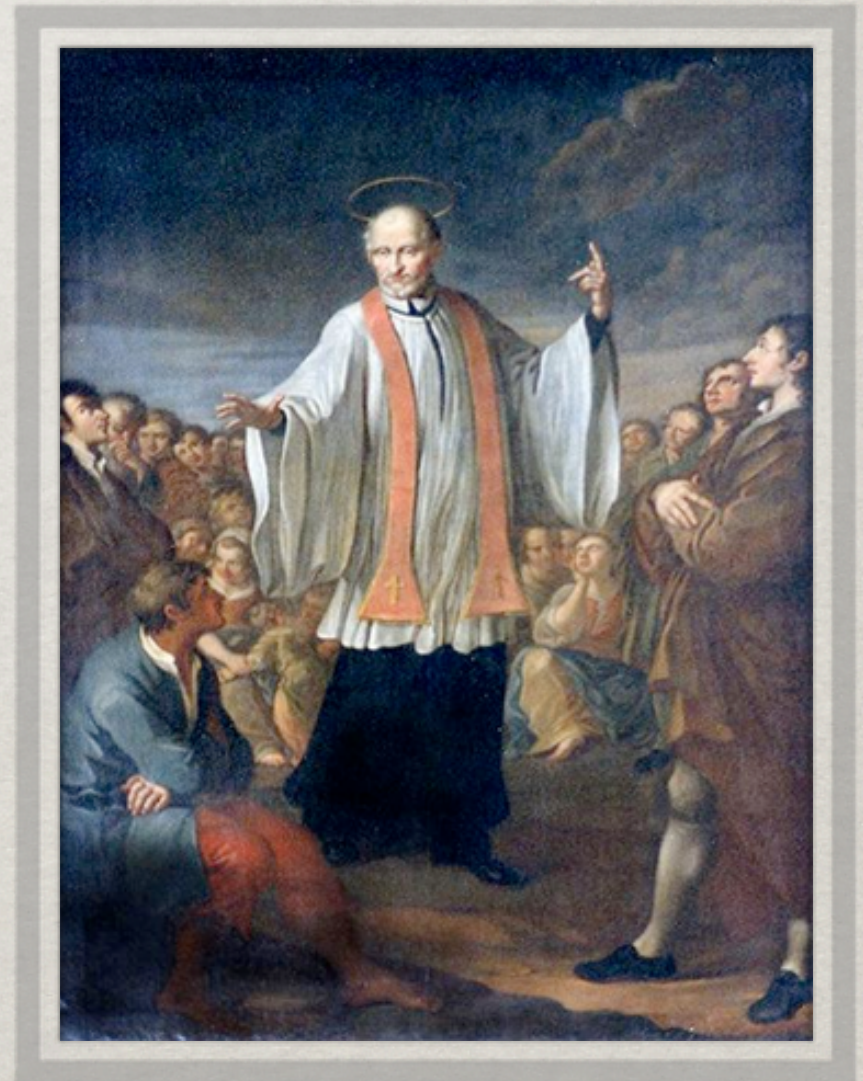
- ☼ St. Vincent had declared that the Fathers of the Mission "will speak to convert and not to be esteemed, and if men are to be converted, they must understand what is said."





# VINCENT THE INITIATOR

- ✿ St. Vincent was a great initiator of clerical reform largely because of his wisdom, the wide scope of his vision and his innovative thinking.



The text of this presentation is based on excerpts from the book *Apostle of Charity: The Life of Saint Vincent de Paul* by Theodore Maynard.