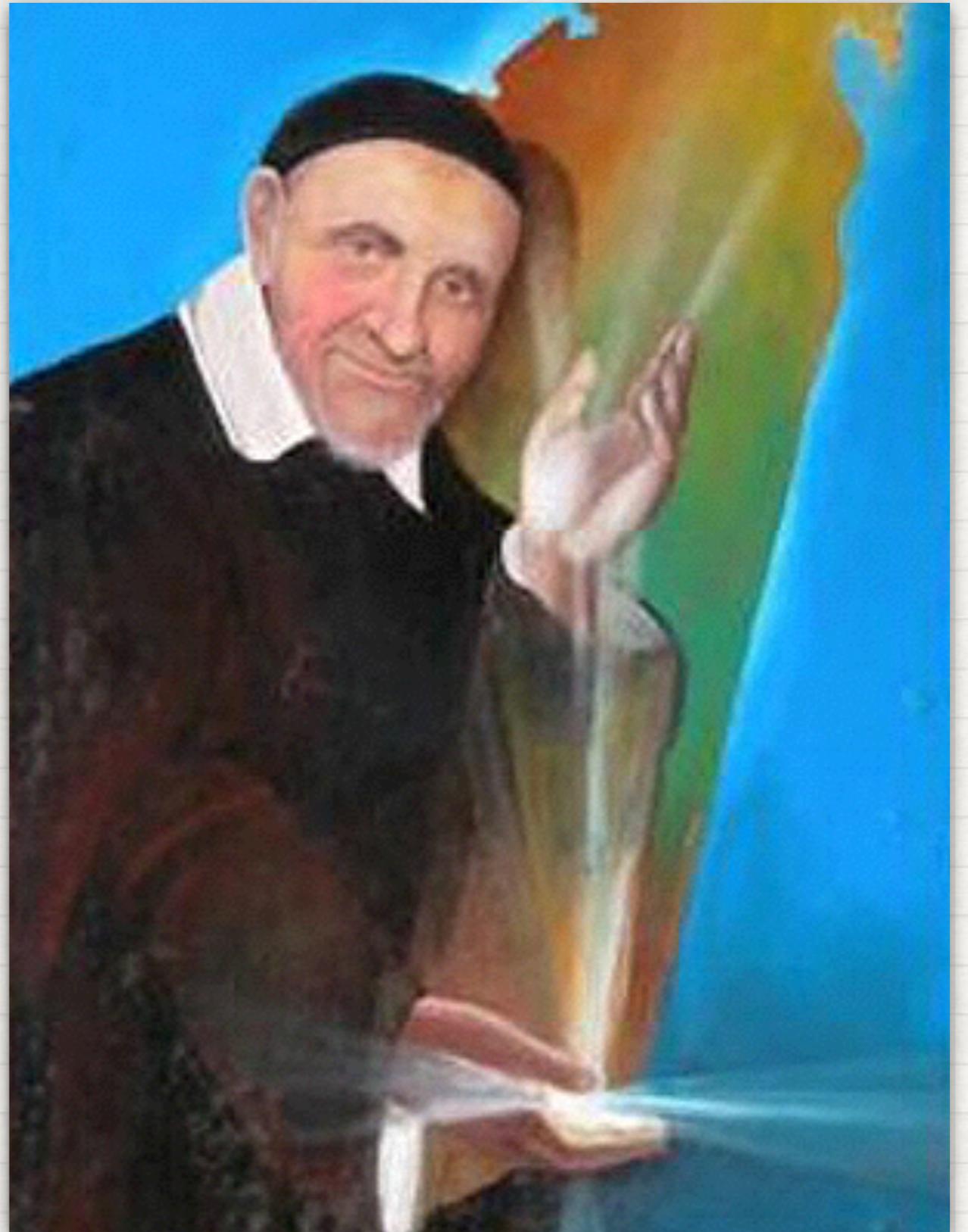


ST. VINCENT DE PAUL &  
CONGREGATION OF THE  
MISSION 17TH CENTURY

# MISSION TO MADAGASCAR

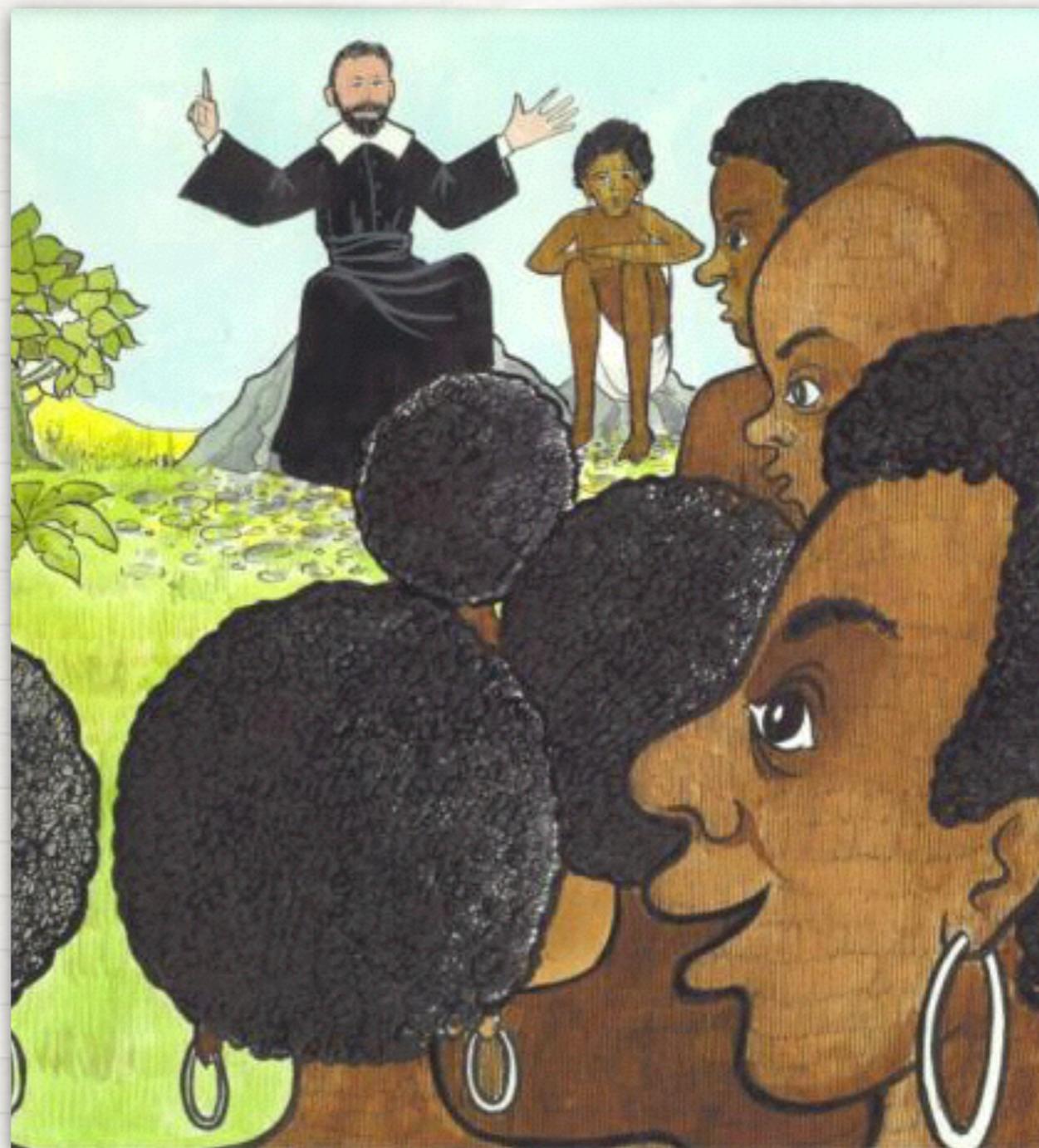


Depiction of St. Vincent bringing the  
light of the gospel to Madagascar

The mission to Madagascar  
"cost [St. Vincent] dearly, and ...  
more than any other, **it made  
manifest his patience, his great  
heart, his constant submission  
to every wish of God** ... It is  
true that his priests put a great  
deal of themselves into this  
mission, but we can say that he  
put in even more."



The first Missionaries to set out were Charles Nacquart (born in 1617) and Nicolas Gondrée (born in 1620). They embarked on May 21, 1648 and arrived in Madagascar the following December 4. In the month of October 1650, M. Vincent received the news of M. Gondrée's death (May 26, 1649).



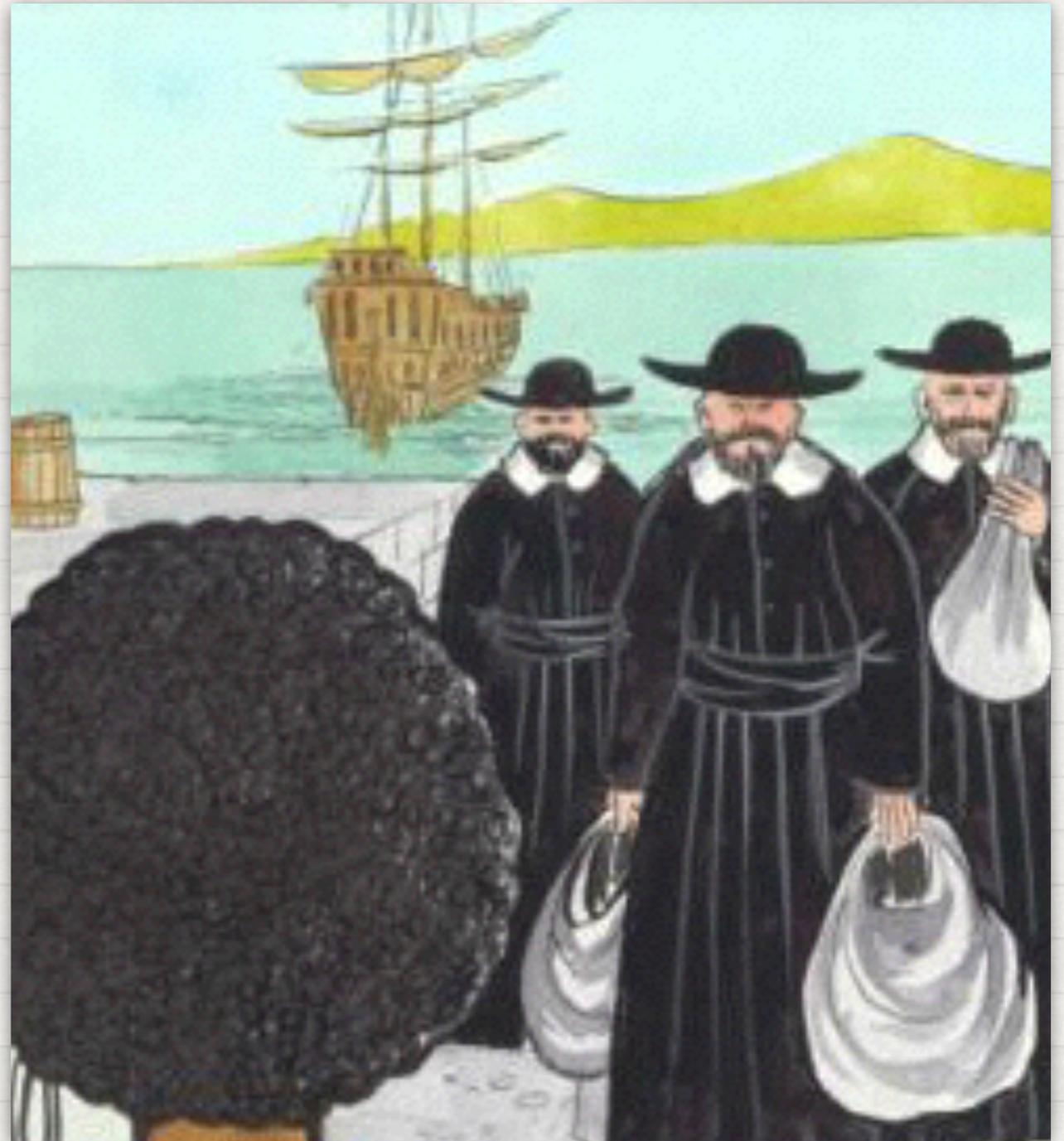
Depiction of preaching, with translator, in Madagascar

A new departure took place ... in 1654. The voyage of François Mousnier (born in 1625) and of Toussaint Bourdaise (born in 1618) lasted from March 8 until August 16, 1654.

They no longer found any confreres in Madagascar. In June 1655, M. Vincent learned of M. Nacquart's death (May 29, 1650).



Three new Missionaries departed: Mathurin de Belleville (born in 1627), Nicolas Prévost (born in 1612) and Claude Dufour (born in 1618). Their trip lasted from November 29, 1655 until June 13, 1656. In July 1656, Saint Vincent learned of M. Mousnier's death (May 24, 1655).



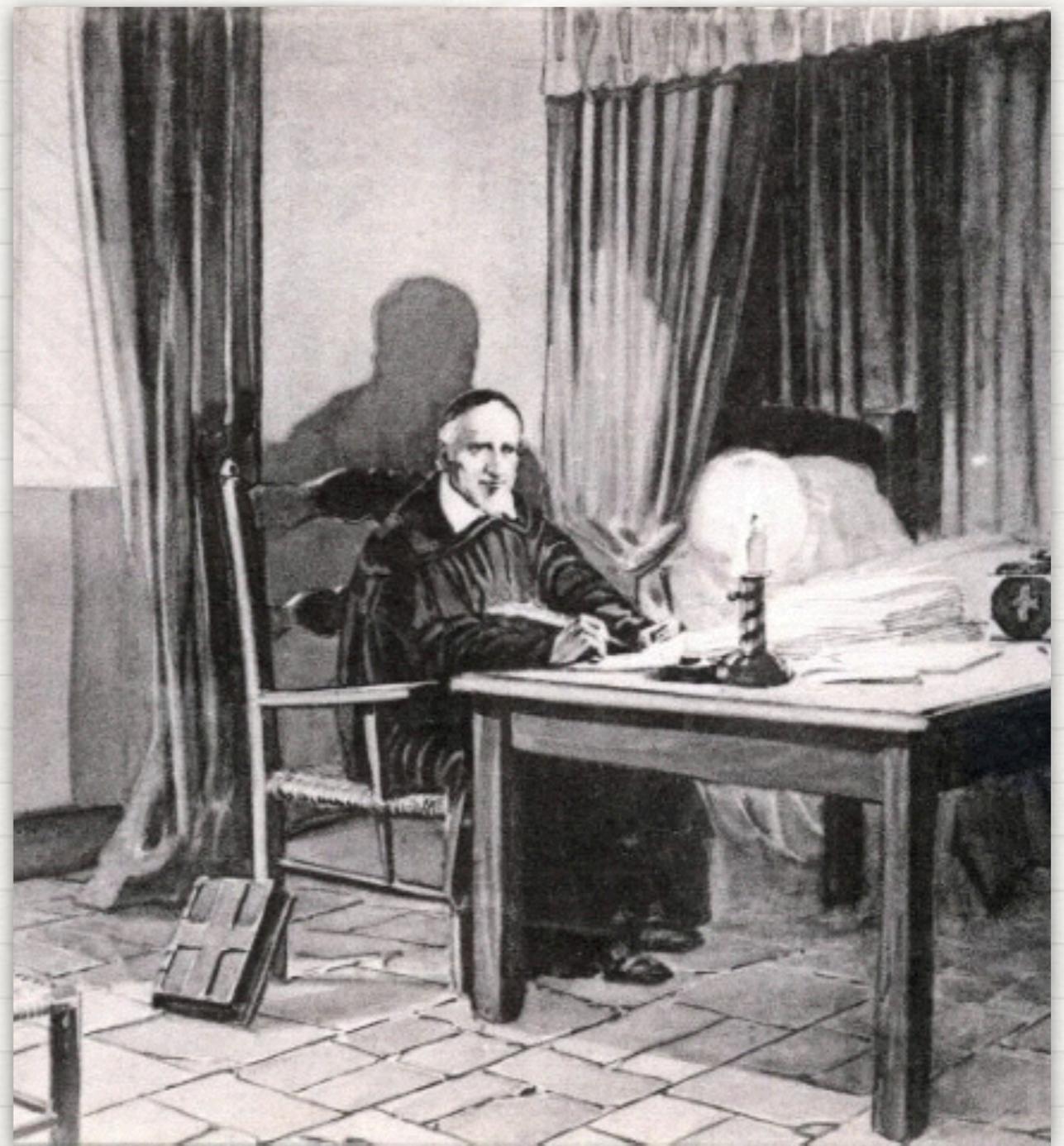
In 1656 Saint Vincent sent Charles Bousourdec (born in 1609), François Herbron (born in 1617) and Brother Christophe Delaunay (born in 1634) to Madagascar, but the vessel was shipwrecked in the harbor of Saint-Nazaire during the night of November 2 to 3. Once again sad news reached France in the month of August 1657. M. de Belleville had died during the voyage (January 18, 1656 ), M. Dufour died in Madagascar (August 18, 1656), and M. Prévost in September of the same year.



Announcing the death of men in Madagascar mission

M. Vincent never knew with certainty whether M. Bourdaise was alive. In actual fact, he had died on June 25, 1657. On November 11, 1658 Saint Vincent uttered these dramatic words:

M. Bourdaise, my brother, M. Bourdaise who is so far away and very much alone, and who, as you are aware, has engendered for Jesus Christ, with so much difficulty and care, a great number of the poor people of the country where he is, let us pray also for him. M. Bourdaise, are you still alive or not? If you are, may God be pleased to preserve your life!

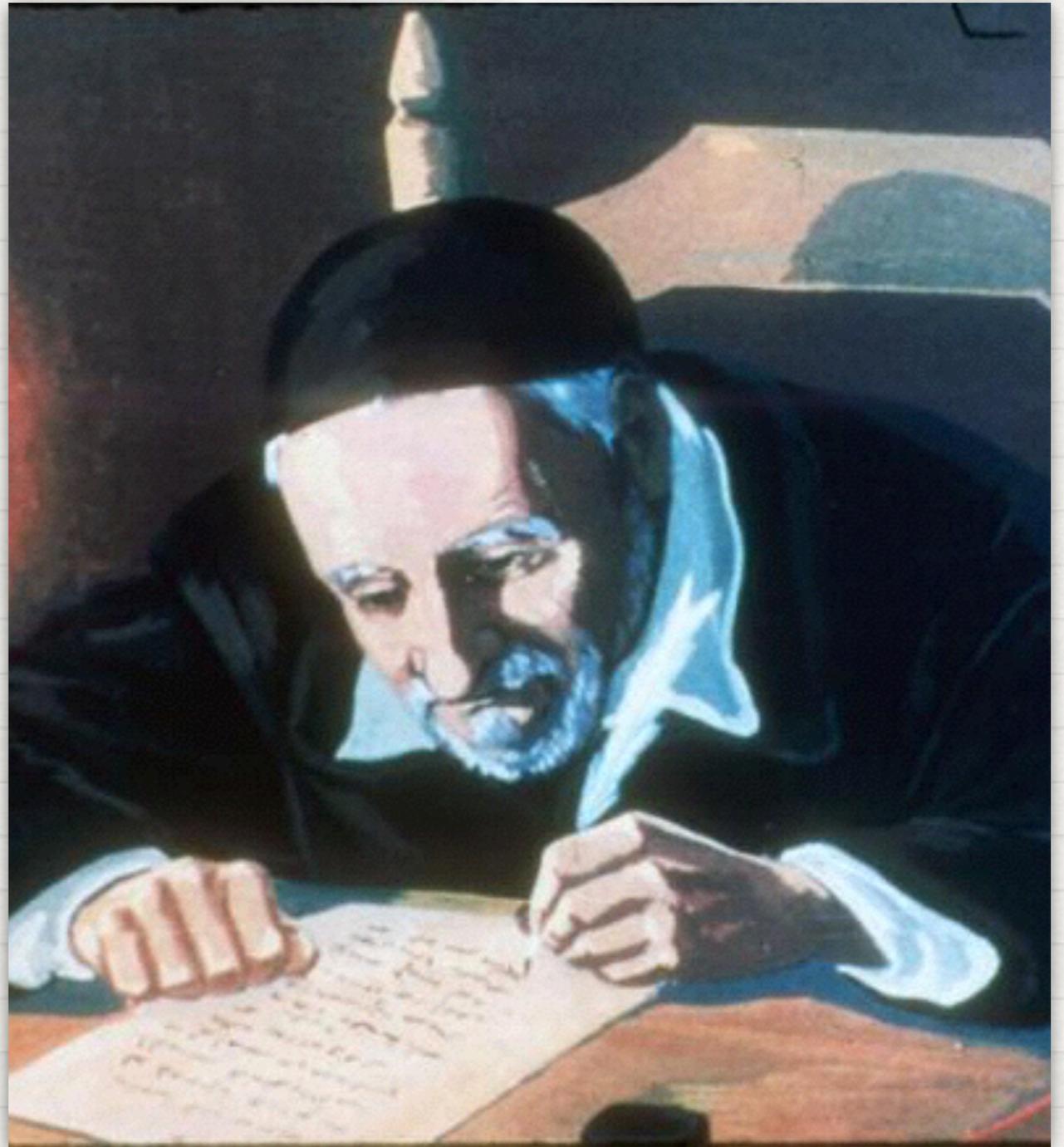


On March 14, 1658, a new group of Missionaries set sail for Madagascar: Charles Le Blanc (born in 1625), Marand Ignace Arnoul (born in 1628), Pasquier de Fontaines (born in 1630), and Brother Christophe Delaunay (2nd time). A storm obliged the captain to dock in Lisbon. After the departure, the vessel was attacked by a Spanish warship and the crew along with the Missionaries were taken to Spain.



Saint Vincent was filled with compassion for his confreres. He wrote on August 25, 1658:

I beg you above all, Gentlemen, to get a good rest and recover your health after having suffered so many hardships, and do not spare anything in that regard. Then come home at an easy pace. It will give me inexpressible joy to see you again and to embrace you.

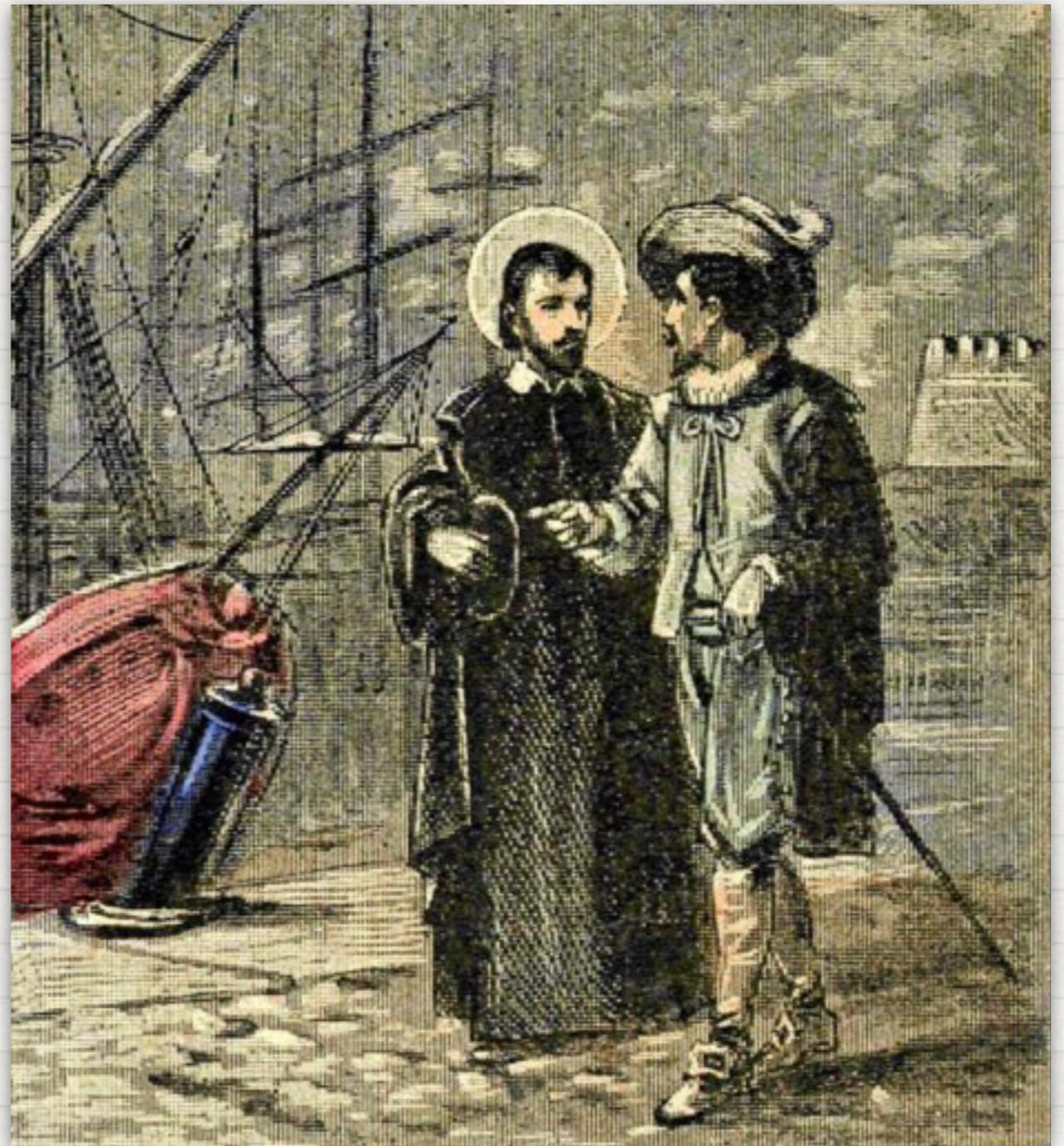


But [the local Superior] did not have the same compassion ... Saint Vincent gives him a strong reprimand on the same August 25:

I beg you to clothe our Brother Christophe. Mon Dieu! Monsieur, why did you not do so at the moment he arrived! You saw his need, you were aware that he was our brother and that you would please us, and yet you left him with his rags. . . . have a little charity for those of the Company who are passing through. . . .when they are destitute of all things as those men are.



In 1659, a new embarkation was considered, but the departure was postponed. Finally, the Missionaries were able to leave on January 18, 1660. There were Pierre Daveroult (2nd time), François Feydin (born in 1620), Pasquier de Fontaines (2nd time), Nicolas Etienne (born in 1634), and Brother Philippe Patte (born in 1620), an excellent surgeon. The Missionaries did not reach Madagascar; after a sojourn of some months at the Cape of Good Hope, they returned to Europe by way of Holland and arrived in Paris on July 20, 1661. But by then Saint Vincent had died.

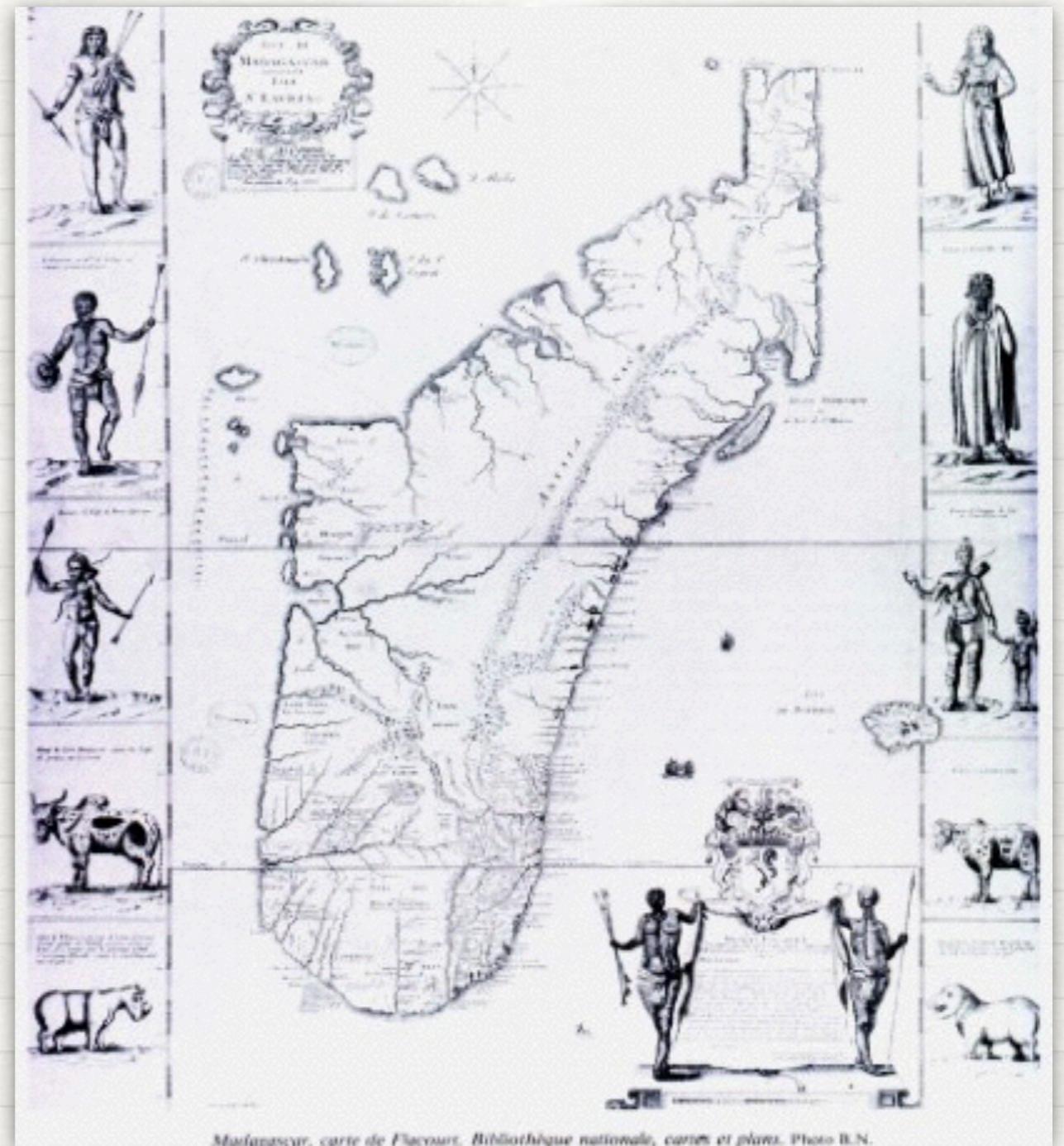


[St. Vincent] had been informed that M. Etienne had drowned while going by launch to the place of embarkation ... Another Missionary was on the point of leaving Saint-Lazare to go embark when some letters arrived from M. Etienne proving that he was still alive. [But St. Vincent died before learning the truth.]



Saint Vincent's attitude in the midst of all these trials is found especially in the conferences of November 15, 1656, and of August 25 and 30, 1657. Abelly speaks of this situation:

Certainly, after all these difficult trials, there was some reason to doubt whether God wanted to make use of him and his men on this terribly distant mission; and it seemed a foolhardy enterprise to wish to pursue it further since the conduct of Divine Providence appeared so opposed to it.



Madagascar map of Étienne Flacourt

But in 1657 he says (and we see his true attitude in these circumstances) :

“Someone from this Company will perhaps say that we must give up Madagascar. Flesh and blood will say that, that we must not send anyone there anymore, but I am certain that the Spirit speaks otherwise.” What was the Saint's motivation? Let us see: “What! Gentlemen, shall we leave our good M. Bourdaise there all alone?”

He could be recalled from Madagascar, but M. Vincent does not think of that because **in the case of Madagascar there is a call from God.**



... Saint Vincent recognized a true missionary call to this island for his confreres: "It is not flesh and blood, as you may well believe, which have brought them to risk their lives as they have done." And later:

Now as for knowing whether the Company has a vocation from God for that place, whether it has been called there, well, Gentlemen, we must not doubt it, for we were not thinking of Madagascar when they came to suggest it to us.



This is a constant line of thinking in the spirituality of [Saint Vincent]: I did not think of it, it is God who did so.

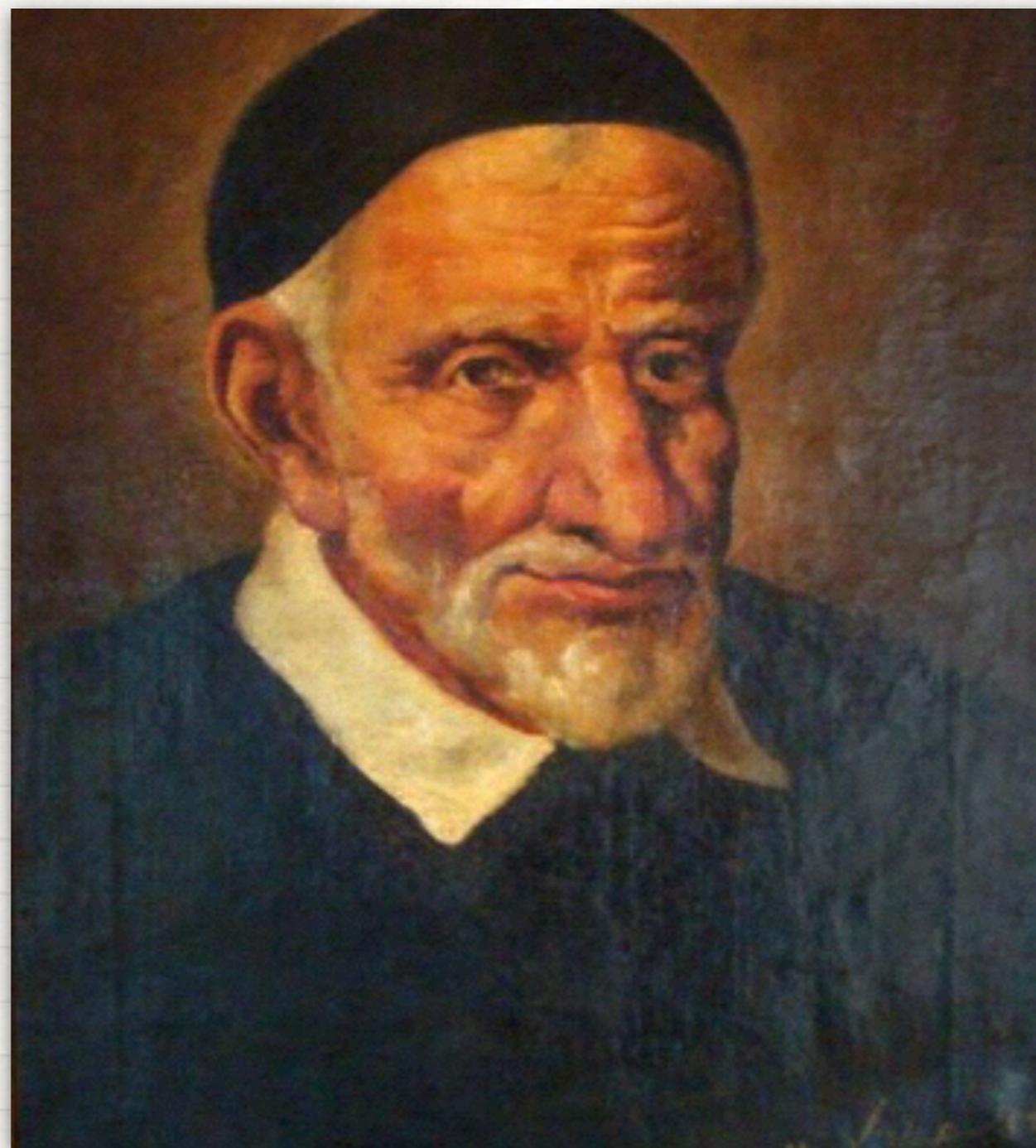


In the existing circumstances he adores the Will of God, recognizing "that the ways of God are incomprehensible and hidden to the eyes of men." But the Saint does not hesitate to give expression to human doubts:

Well, Lord, it seemed that you wanted to establish your kingdom in those far-off countries, in the souls of those poor infidels, and yet you allow what seemed destined to contribute to this to be destroyed and lost in port.



Saint Vincent used to give his Missionaries directives and they would ask his advice. On their part, they furnished information which was important for making the work begun succeed as well as possible and for preserving the health of those sent. It is a pity that we do not know all the directives of Saint Vincent. What did he think of the colonial struggles carried on by the French in Madagascar?



What we have left of his advices gives, nonetheless, a substantial idea of his missionary thinking.

Above all, he inculcates a high idea of the missionary vocation, "a vocation as great and adorable as that of the greatest apostles and saints of God's Church."



*Source:*

*"Saint Vincent and Foreign Missions," by Gerard Van Winsen, C.M.  
Vincentian Heritage Journal: Vol. 3: Iss. 1, Article 6.*

*Read the full article at the [Depaul University Online Library](#)*

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