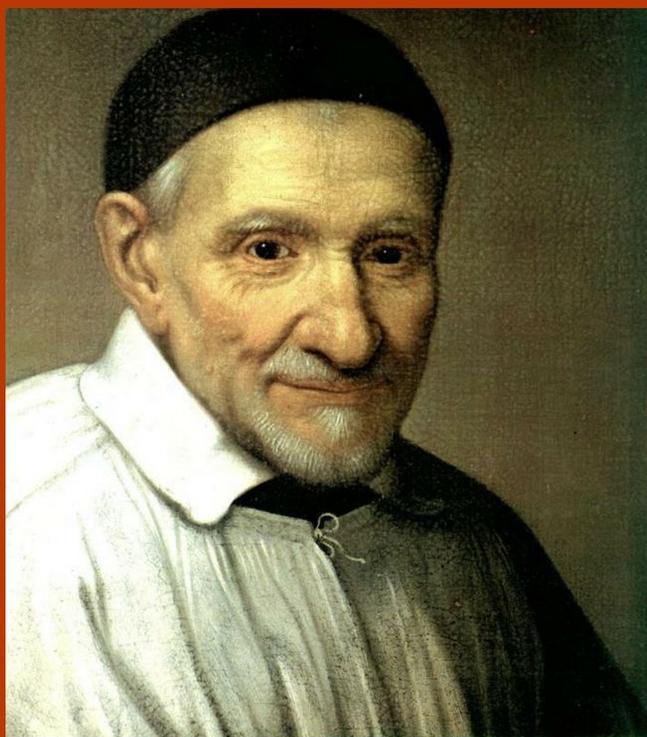


# VINGENTIANA

40th year- N° 6:  
November/December  
1996



**FEATURE:**  
**The canonization of  
John Gabriel Perboyre**

May 30, 1996

Dear brothers and sisters, members of the Vincentian Family,

May the grace and peace of God, Our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you!

When those of us who are responsible for the four principal branches of the Vincentian Family last met, on February 2-3, in Rome, we agreed to proclaim an annual day of common prayer, beginning this September 27, 1996. We write today to provide some further details about organizing that day.

As you know, St. Vincent believed deeply that the practical works of charity that we perform should spring from God's love. He saw prayer as one of the special means by which we come to experience God's love for us and by which God moves us to share it with others. He encouraged all his sons and daughters:

Let us all give ourselves completely to the practice of prayer since it is by it that all good things come to us. If we persevere in our vocation, it is thanks to prayer. If we succeed in our employments, it is thanks to prayer. If we do not fall into sin, it is thanks to prayer. If we remain in charity and if we are saved, all that happens thanks to God and thanks to prayer. Just as God refuses nothing to prayer, so also he grants almost nothing without prayer (SV XI, 407).

So that the celebration on September 27 might be well prepared, we ask you to take the following steps:

1. The heads of the Vincentians, the Daughters of Charity, AIC, and the Vincent de Paul Society in each city or area should meet as soon as possible in order to begin to plan the prayer celebration. After receiving this letter, would you please contact one another by phone or other suitable means as soon as possible. To facilitate this matter, we ask the Vincentian superior in each area to initiate these contacts. If there are no Vincentians in the area, then we ask the superior of the Daughter of Charity to be the initiator.
2. Please invite the other branches of the Vincentian Family in your area to join in this celebration (e.g., the Vincentian Marian Youth Groups, the members of the Miraculous Medal Association, etc.). It is especially important that the young feel at home at our celebrations.
3. We encourage you too to provide for the participation of the poor, who evangelize us by their presence.

4. The prayer could be a common celebration of the Eucharist or some other communal service, according to the circumstances in each area. If a Mass were not possible, one might envision a celebration of the word, with readings, hymns, prayers, sharing of thoughts, etc. In other contexts, one could envision a "Holy Hour," with the usual liturgical actions (processions, exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, readings, etc.).
5. The celebration should be organized on or around September 27, in accord with what date would best promote the participation of the various members of our family. It is important that the celebration be truly communal, with the active participation of members of the various branches. A wise distribution of roles will guarantee that all groups take part.
6. The readings suggested for the Mass of St. Vincent should be used, along with, if you judge it helpful, other appropriate selections from his writings. Much will depend on the kind of celebration that is organized in each area. A prayer of the faithful should be organized with intentions contributed by members of the various branches of the Vincentian Family.

St. Vincent has given us a wonderful heritage. With him, on September 27, we ask that God continue to enkindle in our hearts the charity of Christ so that it might reach out to the poor, through us, in ever more concrete ways.

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Robert P. Maloney, C.M.

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Sr. Juana Elizondo, D.C.

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César Nunes Viana

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Patricia Palacios de Nava

May 31, 1996

*To all the Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission*

My very dear Confreres,

May the grace of Our Lord be always with you!

SIEV, during its annual meeting last July at the General Curia, proposed to the General Council the idea of organizing a VINCENTIAN MONTH for July 1997 on the theme of "Popular Missions." The objective of such a "month" is different than that of CIF because it does not aim at a global formation, but treats a particular theme in the space of four weeks, and there is not an age limit for the participants. Thus, with all the members of the Council, I felt it was opportune to propose to the entire Congregation this formation session centered on a ministry which is so important and significant for us.

Therefore, I invite you to send from one to three confreres, according to the size of your province, to participate in this Vincentian Month which will take place in Paris, from July 7 to August 2, 1997. They should be chosen from among those who have experience in the popular missions. The confreres will be accepted according to the places available.

You will find enclosed a reply form for giving the names of the participants from your province. Please send it, by October 15, 1996, to Fr. Emeric Amyot d'Inville, Curia delegate for SIEV and member of the preparation team for the "Month." When we have received the names, the preparation team will write to them to ask them to describe briefly their mission experience, their specialties, their needs, and their desires. They will also be encouraged to bring missionary materials, videos, etc. to share with the others.

The meeting will employ a largely inductive method which begins with the experiences and the questions of the confreres, while giving appropriate place to theological, scriptural, and Vincentian reflection. This will surely be an extraordinary occasion for fruitful sharing among the confreres engaged in this ministry; each participant will bring his experiences and his ideas, and will learn from those of others. It will also be an opportunity for each one to take stock of his way of living the mission in face of present challenges and to find new strength in service of this particularly Vincentian work.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.  
Superior General

July 4, 1996

*To the Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission*

My very dear Confreres,

May the grace of Our Lord be always with you!

During our meeting in Salamanca, each Visitor received a letter inviting you to send one, two, or three confreres, who serve on the popular missions, to participate in a Vincentian Month on that theme. This meeting would take place in Paris in July 1997.

Since that time, it was suggested that we also invite lay persons and sisters who frequently participate as members of our mission teams. We reflected on this at a recent council meeting and the time seems ripe to us, especially now when we are speaking a lot about collaboration with the laity and with the Vincentian Family. Therefore, I am proposing that you might send to the Vincentian Month, if you judge it appropriate, a lay person or a sister, on condition that they be collaborators, working on the team with our confreres, and regularly participating in the missions which the confreres organize. I believe that their presence will be a great enrichment for this Vincentian Month and could be a stimulus for all the confreres to collaborate more with the laity and the Vincentian Family.

With regard to the participation of the Daughters of Charity, in agreement with their Mother General, I would ask you to speak first to the Visitatrix before inviting a sister.

As in the past, this Vincentian Month must be financed by the participants. Thus, would you please make sure that, like all the other participants, the laity and sisters you might send arrive with their financial contribution. The cost should be about 7000 FF (or US \$1400) per participant. We will write you later to be more specific about this.

As with the last Vincentian Month, I would like to suggest that Visitors who are able might offer a scholarship for confreres from poorer provinces, so that no one will be prevented from participating for financial reasons.

Finally, please send the registrations no later than October 15, 1996 to Fr. Emeric Amyot d'Inville, at the General Curia. If there are too many registered, we will have to make a selection, but, in view of the large number of places available at the Motherhouse, we hope to be able to welcome everyone.

It was wonderful seeing you at Salamanca. I hope that this Vincentian Month will be a stimulus for our mission today. Be assured of my prayer.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.  
Superior General

September 27, 1996

*To the Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission*

My very dear Confreres,

I wish you all a very joyful feast of St. Vincent, as we join in this day of prayer with the members of our extended Vincentian Family.

Thank you very much for your generous participation in the meeting of the Visitors in Salamanca. I deeply appreciate your presence and contributions during those days.

As you recall, Fr. Jack McKenna, who is President of our International Commission on Prayer, presented us with a provisional "Vincentian Book of Prayer" at that time. He pointed out that this book is "simply a sample or model of what you can do in your own language and culture." It is not meant to be an "editio typica," to be translated or followed literally in the various provinces. Rather, each province, or group of provinces, is asked to develop something similar to this resource book, adapted to your own language and culture. Hymns, prayers, celebrations, readings, etc. which are more fitting for your own cultural setting and which are recommended by the members of your province can and should be substituted for those suggested in the resource book.

Neither the book distributed in Salamanca, nor those which you will produce in the various provinces, is meant to replace the Church's Liturgy of the Hours, which remains the framework in which we generally pray. Rather, our aim is to provide another, more specifically Vincentian, option which you might use on occasion; e.g., once a week. When celebrations like the models provided in the book are used for morning and evening prayer, a confrere can consider them as substituting for the breviary's version of lauds and vespers for that day. In so far as a dispensation or commutation is necessary in this regard, I am happy to grant it.

In order to continue the process begun in 1993 with the appointment of the International Commission on Prayer, I ask you at this time to take the following steps:

1. Please appoint, as soon as possible, a commission on prayer in your province (or group of provinces) to develop something similar to the resource book handed out at Salamanca, but adapted to your own language and culture.
2. If it should seem preferable that the resource book be produced by a *group* of provinces sharing a similar language and culture, then I would ask the chairman of the Conference of Visitors for that region to contact the members of the Conference, so that an interprovincial commission might be appointed as soon as possible.
3. The mandate of the provincial or interprovincial commission is to produce a provisional resource book for prayer, adapted to your own language and culture, as described in the introduction of the model distributed in Salamanca.

4. I ask that your commission complete its work by September 1, 1997. At that time, please send a copy of your provisional book to the Secretary General.
5. In September 1997, each house of the province should begin to use such a resource book as an aid in its prayer; e.g., once a week.
6. After a year, i.e., around the time of the General Assembly of 1998, each province or group of provinces will evaluate the use of its own book making suggestions for the future. A copy of the evaluation should be forwarded to the Secretary General, who will send you a reminder at the appropriate time.
7. After receiving the samples and the evaluations from the various provinces and regions, the International Commission on Prayer will convene again and will make recommendations to the Superior General and his Council about the next step to be taken.

I deeply appreciate your help in guiding this process to its conclusion. As I know you understand, the goal is not a book, in any form. That is only an instrument. The goal continues to be to intensify and renew the prayer life of our Community in light of our Constitutions, offering "something beautiful for God" and attractive to the young. I thank you for your assistance in this matter, which is so crucial to the life of the Congregation. I hope that, by supporting one another in this project we can respond more fully to St. Vincent's words: "Give me someone who prays and he will be capable of everything" (SV XI, 83).

Your brother in St. Vincent,

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.  
Superior General

October 1, 1996

*To the Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission*

My very dear Confreres,

May the grace of Our Lord be always with you!

Today, in accord with Article 107, 4\_ of our Constitutions, I am convoking the 39th General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission. It will be held from June 22 until July 18, 1998. We have not yet chosen the place for the Assembly since we await further information on several possibilities suggested by the Visitors during our recent meeting in Salamanca. The theme for the Assembly is:

**The Worldwide Vincentian Family and the Challenges of the Mission in the Third Millennium**

This theme could, as you can imagine, entail the discussion of many sub-topics; e.g.,

- fostering greater unity and closer cooperation among the various branches of our family (Vincentians, Daughters of Charity, AIC, Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Vincentian Marian Youth Groups, the Miraculous Medal Association, and other groups) in carrying out the mission God has given us through St. Vincent,
- prioritizing the fields for our evangelization and service of the poor,
- discerning the causes of poverty and the ways of acting for the promotion of justice and peace,
- forming candidates for the Congregation's mission in the 21st century and assisting the other branches of the family in their formation.

Today, at a meeting of our General Council, we also named five confreres to the Preparatory Commission for the Assembly. They will hold a first meeting here in Rome from December 1-15, 1996. The principal work of the Commission is to assist the Congregation in preparing for the Domestic Assemblies, the Provincial Assemblies, and the General Assembly. On December 30 of this year, after its first session, the Preparatory Commission will send you materials as a help for preparing your Domestic and Provincial Assemblies.

In the meantime, in order to assist the Commission, I would ask that you, with the members of your council, complete the attached brief questionnaire and return it to me so

that it arrives here in Rome by November 15. In addition to the questionnaire, I am also enclosing a timetable of the events leading up to the General Assembly. Feel very free to use this with flexibility, depending on the circumstances of your province. It is imperative, however, that all provinces meet the deadlines in submitting materials to the Preparatory Commission. Otherwise a province's work could go unused as we prepare for the General Assembly.

Assemblies bring all of us a lot of work. But, right from the time of St. Vincent, they have also been moments of significant renewal and decision-making. Our worldwide Vincentian Family has more than 2,000,000 members. It can be a huge force in the service of the poor. I ask you to join with me in praying, over the next two years, that the Lord will give us the wisdom and zeal to channel our energies effectively to that end.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.  
Superior General

## **QUESTIONNAIRE**

To be filled out by the Visitor with his Council.

The completed questionnaire is to arrive in Rome by November 15, 1996.

The theme of the General Assembly of 1998 is:

### **The Worldwide Vincentian Family and the Challenges of the Mission in the Third Millennium**

1. Under this general theme, what are the two or three principal points that you would like to see treated by the General Assembly?
2. How would you judge, at present, the level of unity and cooperation in regard to evangelization and the service of the poor among the various branches of the Vincentian Family within the area of your own province:
  - a) between the Vincentians and the Daughters of Charity,
  - b) between the Vincentians and the AIC (Ladies of Charity),
  - c) between the Vincentians and the Vincent de Paul Society,

- d) between the Vincentians and the Vincentian Marian Youth Groups,
  - e) between the Vincentians and the members of the Miraculous Medal Associations,
  - f) between the Vincentians and other groups in our extended family (e.g., Sisters of Mercy, Daughters of Providence, various lay associations)
  - g) do the various groups listed above cooperate well with one another?
3. What suggestions do you have in regard to the *methodology* to be used during the General Assembly? (It is not necessary at this time to offer your detailed comments on the Directory, since the Preparatory Commission will ask you for your thoughts in that regard at a later date).
4. Do you have any other suggestions in regard to the General Assembly?

## **TIME-TABLE**

### ***October 1, 1996***

Preparatory Commission is named. A brief questionnaire is sent out to the Visitors and their Councils, announcing the theme and asking input, which is to arrive in Rome before *November 15*.

### ***December 1-15, 1996***

Preparatory Commission meets to prepare points for discussion in Domestic and Provincial Assemblies.

### ***December 31, 1996***

Materials for Domestic and Provincial Assemblies are sent to Visitors.

### ***March 1 - May 31, 1997***

Domestic Assemblies are held.

### ***June 1 - November 30, 1997***

Provincial Assemblies are held.

Visitors send results, so that they arrive in Rome *before December 30, 1997*.

***January 30 - February 15, 1998***

Preparatory Commission meets for second time.

***February 15, 1998***

Materials are sent to Visitors and delegates to the General Assembly.

***June 22 - July 18, 1998***

General Assembly is held.

## Appointments and Confirmations by the Superior General

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<b>DATE</b>	<b>NAME</b>	<b>OFFICE</b>	<b>PROVINCE</b>
27/05/96	Ángel Plaza	Responsible Vice-Province	Costa Rica
27/05/96	Bohumír Dungal	Director D.C. 1/6	Slovakia
26/06/96	Maurice Sullivan	Visitor 1/6	Australia
09/07/96	Augustín Slaninka	Visitor 2/3	Slovakia
09/07/96	Benito Enano	Sub-Director D.C. 1/6	Thailand
20/07/96	Francisco Ramos	Director D.C. 1/6	Central America
02/08/96	Jean-François Gaziello	Director D.C. (2nd mand.)	Switzerland
07/08/96	Valeriano Pedro Klidzio	Visitor 1/3	Curitiba
10/09/96	José Maciná	Visitor 2/3	Argentina
01/10/96	Eli Chaves dos Santos	Visitor 1/3	Rio de Janeiro

# The Canonization of St. John Gabriel Perboyre, CM June 2, 1996

by Timoteo Marquina, C.M.

## I. Introduction

This writer is forced to confess \_ has to get it off his chest \_ that he writes this chronicle by devotion above all and also because of luck. Since it is about the canonization of one of our new saints of the Vincentian Family that we can venerate and pray to, devotion is self-explanatory. The luck part can be explained by the Scripture (Prv 16:33): "Men the lot is cast into the lap, its decision depends entirely on the Lord." This and no other is the cause of being the "luck and devotion" writer of the canonization of St. John Gabriel Perboyre, C.M. in Rome, the first martyr from China in the official martyrology of the Church. Praised be the Lord, and gratitude to the Community that such "luck" was granted to me.

## II. All roads lead to Rome.

Continuously, people travel to Rome from all over the world. As the pilgrims have said since the Middle Ages, "all roads lead to Rome". It is Rome itself \_ and all guides agree \_ that is an extraordinary world for the traveler who "knows how to visit it with love and intelligence" (Eugenio Montes). Even better yet, if it is done with faith and devotion, like it is in our case. In a similar vein, the great German poet Goethe describes Rome in one of his *Roman Elegies*, "A world are you, o Rome, and since a world without love is not a world, neither you, o Rome are Rome." Certainly in Rome the Eternal has vested all the love of the world and will keep on doing it even more. Aristotle proclaims in his *Poetics*, for calming the pilgrims and even the tourists, that "learning is the best of pleasures." And back then one "learned," in the same way as today in the twentieth century, mainly by traveling, knowing towns and discussing ethical, religious, and artistic values. This is why so frequently Rome has always been visited not only on study trips, but also on trips of faith and devotion, like in our case. How truthful it is, on the other hand, that "from the golden Rome the globe clarifies itself" (Eugenio D'Ors). Cervantes felt it too and proclaimed it to the four winds of the universe in his famous *Sonnet to Rome*:

*O Rome, o powerful, o sacrosanct  
soul city of Rome! To you I bow,  
devoted, humble and a new pilgrim,  
to whom admits to see such beauty.  
Your sight, that to your fame advances  
the ingenious suspends, although divine,  
to whom by seeing you and to praise you came*

*with tenderness affection and with naked plant.  
The earth from your soil, that I contemplate  
with the martyrs' blood combined,  
it is the universal relic of the ground.  
There is no part in you that does not serve as an example  
of sanctity, therefore drafted  
from the city of God as the grand model.*

All this was foretold fifteen centuries ago by the great Latin poet Horace, in his *Carmen seculare*: "Father sun... could you perhaps be able to see something greater and more glorious than the city of Rome?" To be convinced of all this, once more, has been a graceful dream for all those who have fortunately arrived in Rome.

### **III. Activities celebrated in Rome for the Canonization.**

For the sake of brevity and following the official program of the Canonization, we need to mention the following three: Prayer vigil (June 1), Canonization (June 2) and Mass of Thanksgiving (June 3). Each one of these functions had its own setting, different and yet appropriate, as we shall see. Besides these celebrations, each pilgrim group, of course, had its own agenda and calendar for other visits and activities. This convocation in Rome gave an extraordinary opportunity to the Vincentian Family for other international gatherings. Very significant and helpful was the visit of the members of the Congregation with Father Maloney and the Curia in the Leonine College of the Congregation's house in Rome, where a great number of missionaries visited from all over the world.

#### **1. Welcome Vigil and Prayer Service (June 1st)**

This was celebrated on Saturday, June 1st at 7:00 p.m. in the Major Basilica of St. Paul Outside-the-Walls, third in importance after St. Peter's Basilica and St. John Lateran (the Cathedral of Rome) and second in capacity (more than eight thousand). It was an appropriate setting in all aspects for the great and touching Vincentian gathering, a vigil of welcoming prayer for the extraordinary experience of the following day. Without doubt, the great apostle of the people, St. Paul, was used as an example of missionary activity by our beloved St. John Gabriel Perboyre, C.M.

The Prayer Vigil, during the week after Pentecost, signified and was, in effect, a new Pentecost in 1996 for the entire Vincentian Family, formed in this great cenacle by men and women, mainly by young people of all languages, races and nations. (Acts 2).

The ceremonies were celebrated with perfect detail, a strong rhythm and youthful spirit, appropriate for the occasion. Not in vain did the great Bossuet define the Church with these words: "The youth of the living God spread and spilled over the world." It is difficult to say how many attended this emotional, beautiful and significant event. We were handed a program, beautifully printed in different

languages, and we could follow perfectly the evening of prayer. Since the beginning of the first ceremony, the large number of sick and handicapped persons attracted the attention of the writer (without doubt from centers staffed by the Daughters of Charity in Italy). There were many youth groups, some of them with signs, with their own distinctive insignia prepared for the canonization. A large group of bishops attended, among them three from Taiwan and also the Coptic Patriarch from Egypt, His Beatitude Ghattas Stephanos II (Vincentian).

In the church, large and beautiful because of the richness of the magnificent baldachin, a work by Poletti, there was a large picture of the crucified saint. On both sides and in the center there was a large priest procession preceded by a great Cross covered in red: a Crucified Christ opening the road for the fervent people of God to a crucified St. John Gabriel. "I will feed the victorious from the Tree of Life" (Rv 2:7), words which opened liturgically the solemn Vigil celebration. Every moment in the Celebration of the Word was easily followed, and the multilingual prayer service was celebrated with a profoundness rooted in faith and love. It consisted of two parts: the first part or evocation (condemnation, test, and farewell) and the second part (homily and final song). The texts were composed by the Superior General, Fr. Robert P. Maloney, who also preached the homily. The music was beautiful, reflecting the contemporary taste of the Church.

The Superior General said that St. John Gabriel has a message to communicate to today's youth: The mission of a Church always young and moving. The Vincentian vocation, as the life of the new saint expresses, is eminently missionary, ecclesial, and youthful in its approach like that of Christ's, St. Paul's and St. Vincent de Paul's. It was very meaningful that the liturgy began with a modern musical rendition of the Gloria. It was even more meaningful that Fr. Maloney presided along with five Vincentian missionaries of different races, one for each of the five continents, helping us to understand the universality of the Vincentian mission. There was a hope that all of this was a foretaste of a new missionary vitality in the Vincentian Family, by means of the inspiration and example of St. John Gabriel Perboyre.

Fr. Maloney's homily in Italian was understood by many, even those not knowing Italian: *"My brothers and sisters, Perboyre's view of God is clear. He sees God as good, gentle, loving. The treasures of God's providence are "inexhaustible." He regards his sufferings as "gifts from heaven."*  
*"He believes in the attentive presence of a personal God who walks with us in the daily events of life: in light and darkness, grace and sin, peace and turmoil, health and sickness, life and death.... Perboyre sees suffering as a part of the mystery of God's provident love."*

At the end of such a beautiful Vigil Service, Fr. Maloney, in the name of Christ, called to everyone who wants to follow in the Congregation of the Mission and Daughters of Charity and aspirants to the Double Family. Without a doubt, it was the most powerful moment in the entire Vigil. Before the final hymn, there was the recitation of prayers in many languages, including Chinese and a special prayer for the Church of Silence in China.

## **2. Canonization (June 2nd)**

There was a certain nervousness to be on time and find a good seat. A ticket was necessary. Designed by the great architect Bernini, St. Peter's Square, because of its capacity and greatness, was the perfect setting for the canonization of the three new saints. Their great portraits were hung from the central windows of the facade, designed by Maderno : St. John Gabriel Perboyre, French and Vincentian (in the center), St. Egidio Maria, Italian and Franciscan (on the right side) and St. John Grande, Spanish and from the Order of St. John of God (on the left side). Thousands and thousands of pilgrims were approaching the square from all parts of the city, to the point that it was completely full one hour before the start of the solemn ceremony, which started at 10:00 a.m. with Vatican punctuality.

The ceremony was televised to all parts of the world, and it was followed with special interest, of course, in Spain, France, and Italy, the homelands of the three new saints. On both sides of the platform in the front of the Basilica's facade, the Diplomatic Corps to the Holy See, bishops, cardinals and guests were seated. It was impossible for this writer to estimate the thousands of pilgrims who filled the huge St. Peter's Square. Thousands of those devoted to St. John Gabriel Perboyre stood out, because of the custom to wear a distinctive scarf and other insignias.

The pilgrims to St. Peter's followed the great celebration once again with a liturgical program well printed, even with illustrations, and included all the information regarding our three saints and the various liturgical highlights of the canonization in Italian, French, Spanish, and English. Emotions and silence, piety and veneration were the dominant notes during the lengthy celebration (2 hours and 15 minutes).

The canonization rite consisted of the following parts: Request to the Holy Father by the Cardinal Pro-Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints accompanied by a consistorial lawyer and the postulator, to proceed with the canonization of the three new saints; the Pro-Prefect reads a short biography of each one of them (in their respective languages); Litany of the Saints; the Holy Father pronounces with solemnity the Canonization Formula; Chorus and Assembly's joyful acclamation which represents the Universal Church; the Pro-Prefect, accompanied by the consistorial lawyer and the Postulator, request the Holy Father to confirm the Apostolic Words of canonization and the Holy Father responds "we order it." Everyone congratulates each other with a sign of peace. Following the Liturgy of the Word (in various languages, including Greek), an important moment, naturally, is the Holy Father's homily, in which he referred to each one of the new saints, in French (the first: St. John Gabriel Perboyre), Spanish, and Italian. The Pope's words were frequently interrupted by applause, giving praise to each saint's virtue and each respective town. The homily lasted 20 minutes.

The Eucharist, of course, was in honor of the Holy Trinity. The famous Sistine Choir sang with its usual mastery and beauty. Other choirs, with great and pure voices, accompanied the Sistine Choir. As is the Holy Father's custom, at the end of

the unforgettable liturgical celebration, he greeted all the delegations and groups of pilgrims in their respective languages.

### **3. Mass of Thanksgiving (June 3rd)**

This particular Mass was celebrated by the Vincentian Family in a most appropriate place: St. Peter's Basilica, behind the "Papal Altar" having as background the Cathedral Altar, both made by the great sculptor Bernini. Over five hundred priests concelebrated (most of whom were Vincentians) and more than three or four thousand pilgrims attended. Bishop Gaidon of Cahors (France) presided at the Eucharist and preached the homily. Cahors is close to the city of Montgesty, the area where St. John Gabriel was born on January 6, 1802.

On this occasion we were also given a beautiful program to follow the Eucharist in the respective languages. In the readings and at meaningful moments, representatives from different nations and languages read and prayed. The homily, in French (20 minutes), was translated into English, Italian and Spanish. Some of his ideas were as follows. *The third millennium Church needs to continue having glorious martyrs. St. John Gabriel helps us to open our hearts to the experience of God's love for all the people. Martyrdom is something that we have to desire and not fear (lesson from our saint). The Vatican is the martyrs' Church. In the Eucharist we contemplate and adore Jesus, the first martyr, who was betrayed. The Martyrs are traces of light toward our next life. China is here and the mission starts in our homes and in our communities.*

A delightful surprise for everyone was the presence at the Eucharist of a young Chinese choir, who came to the canonization from Taiwan.

### **4. An Audience with His Holiness, John Paul II (June 3rd noon)**

This audience took place in the Paul VI Hall, which was filled to capacity with approximately 20,000 people. Three large delegations of pilgrims, devoted to the three new saints, were present on this occasion. It is important to note the Spanish speaking delegation because of their distinctive flavor and also the Vincentian delegation. Also present were many bishops and the Coptic Patriarch from Egypt, His Beatitude Ghattas Stephanos II, C.M., whom His Holiness greeted with special affection.

The Pope entered the room exactly at 12: 1 0. The applause and enthusiasm were prolonged for several minutes. Finally, he started his greetings to everyone of the delegations in their respective languages. Then he delivered a short biography about each one of the saints: in French (St. John Gabriel), in Spanish (St. John Grande) and in Italian (St. Egidio Maria). He made a special reference to Fr. Maloney and the Vincentian Family. To die for Christ and for souls, said the Pope in the midst of his talk, was the goal of the daily prayer of St. John Gabriel Perboyre.

#### IV. The Canonization and the Media

The solemnity of the canonization of St. John Gabriel Perboyre has been recorded extensively in the media. It has been said that in many European countries different TV stations televised the most important event, the Mass of Canonization in St. Peter's Square on the bright morning of Sunday June 2nd, the feast of the Holy Trinity.

It is important to mention the two issues of the *Osservatore Romano* (Saturday, June 1 and Sunday-Monday, June 2-3), which made references to this canonization. It is also significant to mention the biographic study-reports included in the *Osservatore Romano: Giovanni Paolo II proclama tre nuovi Santi*, which includes these titles under the general heading of John Gabriel Perboyre, *Presbitero e martire della Congregazione della Missione: Sottoposto a torture e a grandi sofferenze non cesso di incoraggiare i cristiani che condividevano il suo stesso patire* (by Robert P. Maloney, Superiore Generale della Congregazione della Missione); *Offri generosamente la vita per portare il Vangelo nel cuor della Cina* (by Luigi Mezzardi); *Con il coraggio della fede sui sentieri della storia* (by Luigi Novo); *Il desiderio del martirio nell'ideale della santità* (by Giuseppe Guerra)

Besides the general account of the canonization, *Osservatore Romano* of Monday- Tuesday (June 3-4, 1996) under the general title, on the first page, *Giovanni Paolo II Proclama in Piazza San Pietro Tre Nuovi Santi*, included the beautiful homily (a profound synthesis of life in Christ of the three new saints). The homily started with the following words: *In questa domenica della Santissima Trinità la Chiesa desidera rendere gloria al Padre, al Figlio e allo Spirito Santo mediante la canonizzazione dei beati Jean Gabriel Perboyre, Egidio Maria di San Giuseppe e Juan Grande Román. La Città del Vaticano* also presented a timely article : *Tre vite eroiche al servizio dei fratelli* (by Gianfranco Grieco), with the news: *Pellegrine provenienti da Taiwan per onorare il loro martire*, and a detailed account about the canonization. In the article entitled *La preghiera mariana in Piazza San Pietro*, Pope John Paul II made another reference to the canonization of the three new saints and expressed his greetings and appreciation to all the pilgrims who came for this purpose to Rome: *I cordially greet the pilgrims who came to Rome with the purpose of the canonization of John Gabriel Perboyre. I hope that the example of the new saint, who followed Christ by way of his passion and cross to announce the Gospel in China, may help you to serve God and your brothers with a new love, in happiness and fidelity.* At this same event, and in Polish , the Holy Father spoke to the members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society (founded by Ozanam) in these terms: *I cordially greet the pilgrims from Poland who participate in today's canonization, in particular the Priests of the Mission, the Daughters of Charity, and the members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society.*

On the next page of this same issue of the *Osservatore* there was an account of the papal audience given to the thousands of pilgrims from the three delegations, as well as the talk given by His Holiness John Paul II, which was mentioned earlier.

There was also an article by José María Román, entitled *Jean-Gabriel Perboyre primo martire della Chiesa in Cina*.

## V. Conclusion

On one of the tombs in the Roman church of St. Mary of the Angels, this writer read

VIRTUTE VIXIT,  
MEMORIA VIVIT,  
GLORIA VIVET.

*(He lived virtuously, he lives in memory, he will live with glory)*. It is a fitting tribute to our beloved brother St. John Gabriel Perboyre. His life and virtue were recognized at the highest level, by the Church on this joyful day June 2nd, 1996. The glory of Bernini embraced on this occasion anthems, prayers, applause, thanksgiving, and the presence and living memory of a loyal son of the great missionary of Charity, St. Vincent de Paul. Of this we have been a privileged witness. Thousands and thousands of pilgrims gathered in Rome, brought together as the People of God and by their belief in "one Lord, one faith, and one baptism." The Vincentian Family must feel more committed, encouraged, motivated, and at the same time strengthened in its mission of evangelization.

LAUS DEO VIRGINIQUE MATRI.

Translated by Maria Acedo  
and James Garcia Ward, C.M.

## **Homily for the Canonisation of St John Gabriel Perboyre by Pope John Paul II**

John Gabriel Perboyre, a priest of the Congregation of the Mission, wished to follow Christ the evangeliser of the poor, while imitating the example of St Vincent de Paul. Having worked in the ministry of clerical formation, he left France and travelled to China. There he displayed a shining example of the love of Christ for the Chinese people. "I do not know what is reserved for me in the career which is opening up to me. Without doubt a lot of crosses: that is the daily bread of the missionary. And on going to preach a crucified God, what better can one ask for?" (Letter 70). That is what he wrote as he neared China. And it is the Cross of Christ that he found along the roads where he was sent. Through daily imitation of his Lord, in humility and gentleness, he fully identified with him. Following him step by step in his Passion he joined him forever in glory. "One thing alone is necessary: Jesus Christ", he liked to say. His martyrdom is the summit of his engagement to follow Christ the missionary. After torture and condemnation, mirroring in his life an extraordinary resemblance to the Passion of Jesus, he too endured death, death on a cross. John Gabriel had one burning love: Christ and the spread of his gospel. It is through fidelity to this passion that he too was made to join the ranks of the humiliated, of the condemned, and that today the Church can solemnly proclaim his glory in the choir of the saints in heaven.

To the memory of John Gabriel Perboyre whom we are celebrating today we wish to join the memory of all those who have borne witness to the name of Jesus Christ on the soil of China in the course of past centuries. I am thinking particularly of those blessed martyrs whose communal canonisation, desired by so many faithful, could be one day a sign of hope for the Church present in the midst of this nation, to which I remain very near in heart and in prayer.

(Stanislaus Brindley CM, translator)

## **Papal Audience Address for the Canonisation of St John Gabriel Perboyre by Pope John Paul II**

My dear pilgrims, I am happy to welcome you who have come to Rome for the canonisation of St John Gabriel Perboyre. I warmly salute my brothers in the episcopate, especially his Beatitude Patriarch Stephanos II, and the bishops who have come from China, Macao, France and several other countries. I also extend a warm greeting to the Reverend Father Robert Maloney, Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, to his confreres who have come from all of the provinces throughout the world; also to the relatives of the new saint, as well as to the members and the friends of the spiritual family of St Vincent de Paul.

In the person of John Gabriel Perboyre, a native of the diocese of Cahors, we find a perfect example of the Vincentian missionary vocation: to give oneself totally to Christ through the announcing of the Good News to the poor and the formation of the clergy. Throughout almost ten years John Gabriel put to good use his talents as educator of the young in the diocese of Amiens, then in the formation of future diocesan priests at Saint-Flour, and finally of the novices of his Congregation in Paris. But the vocation which he felt from an early age of going to the ends of the earth to announce the Gospel was at last to be fulfilled when he was called upon to leave for China. "Pray God", he said, "that my health will get stronger and that I can go to China so as to preach there and die for him". He set off in the steps of his own brother and those of Blessed Francis Regis Clet, his confrere who was martyred in 1820 in the same region. In this country which he loved John Gabriel heroically lived out his total commitment to the following of Christ. And he was then to crown this witnessing to the faith through a remarkable sharing of the Passion of Christ along a similar way of the cross.

Priests of the Mission and members of the Vincentian family, I strongly encourage you to remain faithful to the love which animated your brother John Gabriel with regard to the Chinese people. Maintain intact within you that same urge to announce to them the Good News of the Lord Jesus which we find so forceful in the martyrdom of John Gabriel and of those who, today as before, are prepared to live out their witness to the full.

In our world which is marked by so much of poverty, distress and despair, the Vincentian Family whom you are representing here, owes it to itself to continue generously with the work commenced by Monsieur Vincent. Priests of the Mission, Daughters of Charity, lay associations which he founded or which are born from his spirit, the conditions of the present day are inviting you to coordinate more and more effectively the various services which you are carrying out. The striking figure of John

Gabriel Perboyre remains a source of missionary inspiration appealing for further and further progress along the road of the Gospel.

(Stanislaus Brindley CM, translator)

# Homily on John Gabriel Perboyre

## St. Paul's outside the walls

### June 1, 1996

Canonizations are for us. Those heroic men and women whose holiness is "certified" already stand in the presence of God. The Church canonizes them in order to strengthen and encourage the rest of us who continue on the journey.

We have all known uncanonized saints. Our own Vincentian Family has seen thousands and thousands of them, I am sure. Is there anyone among us who has not known a heroic priest who labored tirelessly in the service of the most abandoned, or a Daughter of Charity who brought the presence of God to the homes of the sick or who walked the corridors of a hospital bringing God's presence and peace to the dying. Among the uncanonized saints I list a Vincentian brother who shortly before he died talked with me about what the Kingdom of God would be like. I think too of a Vincentian layman, a lawyer \_ wise, self-sacrificing, deeply in touch with God. I think too of the living martyrs: a priest who spent 23 years in prison for professing his faith; a sister who worked for 20 years in a forced-labor camp because she had witnessed to Jesus.

But from time to time the Church canonizes saints, holding them up before us as models. It says to us: look carefully at this man, meditate on this woman, learn from them what it means to be holy.<sup>1</sup>

So it is with John Gabriel Perboyre. Tomorrow he will be declared, officially, a saint. What does he teach us about living God's life?

Let me speak with you this evening about the most common theme in his writings: trust in God's providence.

"I love the mystery of Providence very much," Perboyre wrote to a friend.<sup>2</sup> The depth of this love is very clear. The mystery of providence is a leitmotif that runs through Perboyre's letters. It is a melody that plays in the background as he reflects on life's events. For Perboyre, providence has three different shades of meaning.

First, God's providence is a journey-theme: God walks with him, protecting him. He writes to the Superior General asking him to join in praising "the providence of the heavenly Father" for all the wonderful things that had happened during his trip to China. Perboyre is quite concrete about providence. While attributing everything to God, he

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<sup>1</sup>Apostolic Constitution, *Divinus Perfectionis Magister*, introduction.

<sup>2</sup>*Letters*, p. 119.

clearly recognizes that God works through human persons.<sup>3</sup> While he believed deeply that it was providence which had prepared the way for his whole missionary adventure in China, he also was grateful to his superiors<sup>4</sup> for sending him. While he acknowledges that the missionaries owed their safety to providence during their long sea journey, he is also grateful to the captain! During his journeys on foot within China, he was utterly convinced that God was leading him step by step, but he was also grateful to his guides.<sup>5</sup>

Secondly, Perboyre sees providence as God's hidden plan. He tells his brother Louis, just before Louis' departure for China, that God knows how to achieve his goals and how to obtain his greater glory.<sup>6</sup> Perboyre's letter is all the more poignant in that it was their last contact. Louis died on the way, never reaching China. On hearing of his brother's death, John Gabriel writes to his parents: "The providence of God is very gentle, very admirable in regard to his servants, and infinitely more merciful than we can imagine."<sup>7</sup>

Thirdly, Perboyre sees suffering as a part of the mystery of God's provident love. He states that the life of the missionary is 50% suffering.<sup>8</sup> He writes to the Superior General from China: "I do not know what is in store for me in the career that is opening up before me: without doubt, many crosses \_ that is the daily bread of the missionary. But what better can one hope for, when going to preach a crucified God?"<sup>9</sup> Not long before his capture, he writes, "For the rest, I have no great concern about these matters. It is all up to providence!"<sup>10</sup>

His final letter to his confreres attests to the sufferings he endured during his imprisonment. He was forced to kneel on chains while hanging by his thumbs and hair braid. Besides other tortures which he does not describe, he was struck 110 times. He says discreetly that his readers will find out many other details later, as they surely did when they heard the account of his painful death by strangulation.

My brothers and sisters, Perboyre's view of God is clear. He sees God as good, gentle, loving. The treasures of God's providence are "inexhaustible."<sup>11</sup> He regards his sufferings as "gifts from heaven."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Letters, p. 116.

<sup>4</sup>Letters, p. 211.

<sup>5</sup>Letters, p. 172.

<sup>6</sup>Letters, p. 41.

<sup>7</sup>Letters, p. 53.

<sup>8</sup>Letters, p. 98.

<sup>9</sup>Letters, p. 141.

<sup>10</sup>Letters, p. 284.

<sup>11</sup>Letters, p. 211.

<sup>12</sup>Letters, p. 61.

He believes in the attentive presence of a personal God who walks with us in the daily events of life: in light and darkness, grace and sin, peace and turmoil, health and sickness, life and death. For Perboyre, providence focuses on a God who loves deeply, who accompanies us, who strengthens us, who listens to us, who speaks to us, who comforts us.

What sustained Perboyre during his year of imprisonment? What enabled him to be faithful, even in the face of a painful death, strangled on a cross? He believed that a loving God walked with him and he abandoned himself to God's love.

Is that our belief, my brothers and sisters? Is our faith in the personal, loving presence of God fully alive? Do we believe deeply that God walks with us, listens to us, speaks to us, strengthens us? Do we hear God in the voices of the poor? Do we see him in the faces of the sick and abandoned? Do we sense his presence everywhere in life, and even in death? That is the challenge that Perboyre offers us as we celebrate his canonization.

# Four Themes in the Spirituality of St. John Gabriel Perboyre

*Robert P. Maloney, C.M.*

Canonizations are for us. Those heroic men and women whose holiness is "certified" already stand in the presence of God. The Church canonizes them in order to strengthen and encourage the rest of us who continue on our journey.

We have all known uncanonized saints. Our own Vincentian Family has seen thousands and thousands of them, I am sure. Is there anyone among us who has not known a heroic priest who labored tirelessly and sensitively in the service of the most abandoned, or a Daughter of Charity who brought the presence of God to the homes of the sick or who walked the corridors of a hospital bringing the Lord's peace to the dying. Among the uncanonized saints I list a Vincentian brother who shortly before he died talked with me about what the Kingdom of God would be like and who throughout his life witnessed to its joy. I think too of a Vincentian layman, a lawyer — wise, self-sacrificing, deeply in touch with God. In fact, I am happy to say that, among my brothers and sisters in our family, I have known a number of saints, some of whom are still alive.

But from time to time the Church canonizes saints, holding them up before us as models. It says to us: look carefully at this man, meditate on this woman, learn from them what it means to be holy.<sup>1</sup>

So it is with John Gabriel Perboyre. On June 2, 1996, he was declared, officially, a saint. What does he teach us about living God's life?

Perhaps the most important things have already been said in this regard. In recent months several books and numerous articles have appeared describing Perboyre's years of faithful labor in the formation of priests, his yearning to serve as a missionary in China, his brief, difficult labors there, his sufferings during a year of imprisonment, and his painful death.

Here, I will try not to repeat what others have written. The purpose of this article is modest. It asks: What went on inside this genuinely holy man? How did he see God? How did he look at his mission? What was his attitude toward those around him? What shape did his prayer-life take? The article probes his letters<sup>2</sup> in an attempt to formulate a response, just as many have probed the events of his life and death in order to understand him more fully.<sup>3</sup>

Four themes, especially, stand out in his letters.

## I. Devotion to providence

*"I love the mystery of Providence very much."*

Perboyre writes those words to Pierre Le Go.<sup>4</sup> His letters make the depth of this love very clear. The mystery of providence, in fact, is a leitmotif that runs through them, a melody that plays in the background as Perboyre reflects on life's events. His accent on providence is particularly evident in three different settings.

First, God's providence takes the form of a journey-theme in many of Perboyre's letters: God walks with him, protecting him. He asks the Superior General, Dominique Salhorgne, to join with him and his companions in praising "the providence of the heavenly Father" for all the wonderful things that had happened during their trip from Le Havre to Jakarta.<sup>5</sup> He writes similarly to others from Surabaya<sup>6</sup> and from Macau.<sup>7</sup> But Perboyre is quite concrete about providence. While attributing everything to God, he clearly recognizes that God works through secondary causes.<sup>8</sup> He acknowledges therefore that the missionaries owed their safety not only to providence, but to the captain too! During his journeys on foot within China, he was utterly convinced that God was leading him step by step, but he was also grateful to his guides.<sup>9</sup> Likewise, while he believed deeply that it was providence which had prepared the way for his whole missionary adventure in China, he also was grateful to his superiors<sup>10</sup> for sending him.

Secondly, besides this journey-theme, providence has a further resonance in Perboyre's writings. He sees it as an "order," God's hidden plan. In this sense, like Vincent de Paul, he does not want to "run ahead of it."<sup>11</sup> He tells his brother Louis, just before the latter's departure for China, that God knows how to achieve his goals and how to obtain his greater glory and the sanctification of the elect.<sup>12</sup> Perboyre's letter is all the more poignant in that it was their last contact. Louis died on the way, never reaching the goal that he longed for in China. On hearing of his brother's death, John Gabriel writes to his parents: "The providence of God is very gentle, very admirable in regard to his servants, and infinitely more merciful than we can imagine."<sup>13</sup> Years later he writes similarly from China to his cousin, describing the death of a young man to whom he was ministering. He meditates aloud on "the loving care of providence toward her elect, especially when it is a question of the passage to eternity."<sup>14</sup>

Thirdly, it is evident from Perboyre's letters that he sees suffering as a part of the mystery of God's provident love. He is convinced that "God chastises those whom he loves."<sup>15</sup> He states that the life of the missionary is 50% suffering.<sup>16</sup> He writes to the Superior General from China: "I do not know what is in store for me in the career that is opening up before me: without doubt, many crosses — that is the daily bread of the missionary. But what better can one hope for, when going to preach a crucified God?"<sup>17</sup> This theme deepens as he begins to catch glimpses of the possibility of his own death.

The prospect of martyrdom is not uncommon in his letters. He views it serenely. He tells his father: "If we have to suffer martyrdom, it would be a great grace...."<sup>18</sup> He writes to his cousin, "Our Lord always takes care of those who abandon everything for him. It is when they are the most abandoned of men, above all at the moment of death,

that he gives them more than the promised hundredfold."<sup>19</sup> He yearns that his own heart might be united with the suffering hearts of Jesus and Mary.<sup>20</sup> Not long before his capture, writing to Jean Grappin, Assistant General in Paris, he muses about his own bad health and his future, concluding, "For the rest, I have no great concern about these matters. It is all up to providence!"<sup>21</sup>

Throughout his letters, especially as he speaks of providence, Perboyre's view of God is clear. He sees God as good, gentle, loving. The treasures of God's providence are "inexhaustible."<sup>22</sup> He regards sufferings as "gifts from heaven."<sup>23</sup> In fact, he received many such gifts. His letters attest that he suffered almost continually from bad health in China. Upon his arrival there he was sick for three months and almost died. He often experienced great pain in walking.<sup>24</sup> The difficulties caused by his hernia is a frequent theme.

His final letter to his confreres attests to the sufferings he endured during his imprisonment. He was forced to kneel on chains while hanging by his thumbs and hair braid. Besides other tortures which he does not describe, he was struck 110 times. He says discreetly that his readers will find out many other details later, as they surely did when they heard the account of his painful death by strangulation.

## **II. His love for the mission**

*"How happy I am for such a wonderful vocation."*

This is his exclamation as he announces to his uncle that he is being sent to China.<sup>25</sup> Perboyre's enthusiasm for the missions is evident quite early. It is clear that two missionaries who had gone before him were a source of deep inspiration for him: Francis Regis Clet and his own brother Louis.

He frequently mentions Clet. He says to Pierre Le Go: "Might I resemble to the end that venerable confrere whose long apostolic life was crowned with the glorious palm of martyrdom."<sup>26</sup> His letters from China speak of Clet with much admiration. He hopes that his cause of beatification will be promoted. He is eager to visit his burial place. He talks about Clet's long years of ministry, his difficulties in speaking Chinese, his sufferings, his death by strangulation on a cross.

There is a lovely letter written from Surabaya to his uncle in which he speaks about his brother:

I was not able to make this voyage to China without often thinking about my dear Louis. I loved to consider him walking before me, showing me the road that I should follow. Sad to say, like the star that guided the Magi, he disappeared in the midst of the journey. O what great joy I will experience when I see him once again shining with new brightness and showing me where Jesus, the Divine King, lies!<sup>27</sup>

It is clear as early as February 1832<sup>28</sup> that John Gabriel was eager to take Louis' place as a missionary in China. His brother is often mentioned in his correspondence.

After his arrival on the mainland, Perboyre writes rather striking accounts of his new missionary activities. It is evident that he loved the Chinese people.<sup>29</sup> Today, moreover, when we emphasize inculturation so much, it is interesting to note the various ways in which he tried to adapt to Chinese life. First of all, he took on the grooming and the dress of the Chinese. "If you could only see me now," he writes almost laughingly to his brother Jacques, describing what a spectacle he is with his Chinese outfit, his shaved head, his long pigtail and mustache, and his eating with chopsticks. While surely some of this adaptation was motivated by the missionaries' need to disguise themselves (since the death penalty was meted out to Europeans who entered China illegally<sup>30</sup>), it is also clear that Perboyre wanted to be "all things to all," as he explicitly tells Jacques.<sup>31</sup> He insisted that the missionaries should adapt themselves to Chinese customs and spoke his mind when they did not.<sup>32</sup> He worked hard too to learn the language; in fact, he felt that he did reasonably well with Chinese. He states that he liked studying it. He found the language rather fascinating, with its tones and its script. "For the Chinese," he wrote, "to read or to recite is to sing."<sup>33</sup>

Perboyre was also convinced of the importance of forming lay Chinese missionaries, judging that they could have a very significant impact among their own people.<sup>34</sup> At Houpi he organized dialogue conferences. The methodology was simple. A week ahead of time the subject was announced; e.g., a virtue, or a duty. The following Sunday up to ten lay people preached on that subject. They were young students, catechists, or other "intelligent Christians." At the end, the priest gave some concluding remarks.<sup>35</sup>

A typical mission lasted from eight to fifteen days. Missionary life must have been very busy since, not long before his capture, Perboyre tells Monsieur Aladel, the Assistant General in Paris, that he had given 17 such missions between the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Pentecost. He speaks with great enthusiasm about the first mission in which he preached in Chinese. A native-born confrere, Jean Pe, accompanied him. Perboyre describes Pe with considerable admiration, saying that he bore the burden of the heavy preaching and that he had wonderful pastoral skills.<sup>36</sup>

A mission ordinarily proceeded along these lines. When the missionaries arrived in a community they compiled an exact list of all the Christians "adults and children, good and bad."<sup>37</sup> They then had the Christians recite the catechism publicly beginning with the children and proceeding on to the aged. Perboyre notes that the people did this without embarrassment and that parents did not hesitate to allow themselves to be helped, when they faltered, by their children. Then there were baptisms, confessions, first communions, confirmations, marriages, and admission into various confraternities. Generally, the missionaries stayed right in the homes of the people. They ate what the people ate, usually rice.<sup>38</sup>

Perboyre remarks that there were sometimes huge numbers of confessions. He declares, in fact, that most Chinese Christians loved to go to confession frequently.<sup>39</sup>

He states that the life of the missionaries in China was "completely apostolic,"<sup>40</sup> filled with difficulties and dangers. They spent three-quarters of the year roaming from village to village, preaching, catechizing, offering the sacraments, living frugally in a land where most of the Christians themselves were poor.<sup>41</sup>

### **III. Love for the community**

*"I would give a thousand lives for it."*<sup>42</sup>

The letters make it clear how attached to the Company Perboyre was. He recalls to his cousin Gabriel how much gratitude they both owe the Congregation for all that it had given them.<sup>43</sup>

One of the most frequently recurring themes in his letters is how much God is blessing the Little Company. He sees in the goodness of the novices a sign of God's plans for the Company in the future.<sup>44</sup> He is eager to see others become sons of St. Vincent.<sup>45</sup> He is convinced that St. Vincent continues to attract God's blessings on the Congregation.<sup>46</sup>

His letters show warmth toward friends within the Community,<sup>47</sup> as well as a willingness to criticize, in simplicity, what he saw as wrong in the Congregation.<sup>48</sup> The latter trait got him into some trouble with his superior, Jean-Baptiste Torrette, who was his classmate from the seminary. John Gabriel takes pains to apologize to Torrette, who had written him a rather sharp letter of rebuke. While Perboyre's letter is apologetic, it also gives little ground. He feels that the missionaries in mainland China were misunderstood and that it would be helpful if both at Macau and in Paris there were someone who had some real experience on the mainland. In this, I suspect, he echoed the sentiments of many a missionary!

Even with these misunderstandings, however, he delights in the unity of the missionaries. He tells his cousin Monsieur Caviolle that, though they come from different nations, they work in great harmony, "united by the bonds of the same spirit, at the same time zealous and tireless in carrying on the same works and bearing the same cross."<sup>49</sup>

## IV. Devotion to the blessed virgin mary

*"The whole world is filled with the mercy of Mary."*<sup>50</sup>

In the letter in which he announces to his uncle the good news of his being sent to China, he adds that his superiors told him his assignment on the Feast of the Purification, which led him to believe that he owed much, in this matter, to the Blessed Virgin.<sup>51</sup> In the later years of his life, his love for Mary took on the form of devotion to the Miraculous Medal.

A reading of Perboyre's letters makes it evident that he and others brought the medal to China very soon after the apparitions in Paris and, through it, fostered devotion to Mary.<sup>52</sup> John Gabriel knew Fr. Aladel, St. Catherine Labour's spiritual director, quite well. He writes to him in 1838, recounting with enthusiasm the effects that the medal is having in China.<sup>53</sup>

Already in 1833, while still in Paris, he had written to his uncle: "The medal of which I have spoken with you is the one that in 1830 was revealed by the Blessed Virgin to a seminarist of the Sisters of Charity."<sup>54</sup> He promises to send his uncle some of the medals, saying that thousands have been distributed in France and in Belgium and that numerous miracles, healings, and conversions have been worked. His letters to his brother Antoine and to his uncle over the following two years make frequent references to the medals and to miracles. He often encloses medals for others to distribute and promises to send them a printed account of the miracles.<sup>55</sup>

From Jakarta he writes to the Superior General, Fr. Salhorgne, that during a fierce storm that had taken place during their journey, when the waves were like mountains, the missionaries prayed: "O Mary, conceived without sin." He adds that no sooner had they raised their hands toward the Star of the Sea than the tempest subsided.<sup>56</sup>

In China he was an eager distributor of the Miraculous Medal.<sup>57</sup> In a letter written shortly before his capture<sup>58</sup> he tells of a young woman who had been brought to him from one of the Christian communities and who had been afflicted by a mental disorder for eight months. The people told him that she was anxious to go to confession. Though he doubted the usefulness of hearing her confession, he did so out of compassion. In parting, he gave her a Miraculous Medal. From that day on she began to be healed. Within four or five days she was completely changed.

### A final thought

It is surely not by chance that these four themes are so prominent in Perboyre's surviving letters. They are all important elements in the tradition that he received as a member of the Vincentian Family and which he handed on to others both as seminary director in France and as a missionary in China. All of the themes are found in the rules<sup>59</sup> that St. Vincent gave to his priests and brothers as well as in the contemporary Constitutions of the Vincentians.<sup>60</sup>

Devotion to providence is, at root, belief in the attentive presence of a personal God who walks with us in the dramatically varied experiences of human existence: light and darkness, grace and sin, plan and disruption, peace and turmoil, health and sickness, life and death.

Love for the mission lies at the heart of the Vincentian experience: a deep yearning to follow Christ, Evangelizer and Servant of the Poor, in reaching out effectively to the most abandoned: ministering to them "spiritually and corporally,"<sup>61</sup> "in word and in work."<sup>62</sup>

Love for the Community shows itself, basically, in fidelity to our commitments and in our living and working with one another "as friends who love one another deeply."<sup>63</sup> One of its clearest expressions is a spirit of thanksgiving for all that God has given us in and through the Company, thus avoiding the perennial temptation to ingratitude, "the crime of crimes," as St. Vincent calls it.<sup>64</sup>

Devotion to Mary expresses itself today in a wide variety of ways — the celebration of her feasts, the rosary, the Miraculous Medal — but especially, as St. Vincent urged, in our being united with her as listeners to the word of God. "Better than anyone else," Vincent states, "she penetrated its substance and showed how it should be lived."<sup>65</sup>

If canonizations are for us, then surely these four themes, so striking in the letters of John Gabriel Perboyre, offer us much to reflect on.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Apostolic Constitution, *Divinus Perfectionis Magister*, introduction.

<sup>2</sup>Let me thank Fr. Emeric Amyot d'Inville, Sr. Ann Mary Dougherty, Sr. Alicia MuZoz, and Mrs. Anna Carletti, who helped me analyze the themes in Perboyre's letters. Without their assistance this article would not have been written.

<sup>3</sup>A total of 102 letters were annotated and published by Joseph Van Den Brandt in a very limited edition at Beijing in 1940.

<sup>4</sup>*Letters*, p. 119.

<sup>5</sup>*Letters*, p. 101.

<sup>6</sup>*Letters*, p. 107.

<sup>7</sup>*Letters*, p. 116.

<sup>8</sup>*Letters*, p. 116.

<sup>9</sup>*Letters*, p. 172.

<sup>10</sup>*Letters*, p. 211.

<sup>11</sup>*Letters*, p. 23.

<sup>12</sup>*Letters*, p. 41.

<sup>13</sup>*Letters*, p. 53.

<sup>14</sup>*Letters*, p. 258.

<sup>15</sup>*Letters*, p. 61.

<sup>16</sup>*Letters*, p. 98.

<sup>17</sup>*Letters*, p. 141.

<sup>18</sup>*Letters*, p. 214.

<sup>19</sup>*Letters*, p. 259.

<sup>20</sup>*Letters*, p. 260.

<sup>21</sup>*Letters*, p. 284.

<sup>22</sup>*Letters*, p. 211.

<sup>23</sup>*Letters*, p. 61.

<sup>24</sup>*Letters*, p. 185.

<sup>25</sup>*Letters*, p. 95.

<sup>26</sup>*Letters*, p. 119.

<sup>27</sup>*Letters*, p. 110.

<sup>28</sup>*Letters*, pp. 54-55.

<sup>29</sup>*Letters*, p. 138; also, p. 150.

<sup>30</sup>*Letters*, pp. 171-172.

<sup>31</sup>*Letters*, p. 145.

<sup>32</sup>*Letters*, pp. 203-204.

<sup>33</sup>*Letters*, p. 223.

<sup>34</sup>*Letters*, p. 175.

<sup>35</sup>*Letters*, pp. 255-256.

<sup>36</sup>*Letters*, pp. 217-218.

<sup>37</sup>*Letters*, p. 237.

<sup>38</sup>*Letters*, p. 225.

<sup>39</sup>*Letters*, p. 282.

<sup>40</sup>*Letters*, p. 224.

<sup>41</sup>*Letters*, pp. 224-225; cf. p. 175.

<sup>42</sup>*Letters*, p. 123.

<sup>43</sup>*Letters*, p. 73.

<sup>44</sup>*Letters*, p. 81; also, pp. 88-89.

<sup>45</sup>*Letters*, p. 23.

<sup>46</sup>*Letters*, p. 81.

<sup>47</sup>Cf. *Letters*, pp. 127, 133, 155, 209, 230, 241.

<sup>48</sup>*Letters*, p. 269.

<sup>49</sup>*Letters*, p. 254.

<sup>50</sup>*Letters*, p. 281.

<sup>51</sup>*Letters*, p. 95.

<sup>52</sup>When I visited continental China several years ago I was surprised that, almost fifty years after the Communist takeover, so many visible signs of devotion to Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal remained. It is now clear to me, from reading Perboyre, how quickly the medal got there and how rapidly it spread.

<sup>53</sup>*Letters*, p. 281.

<sup>54</sup>*Letters*, p. 69.

<sup>55</sup>*Letters*, pp. 76, 79, 83, 85, 89, and 94.

<sup>56</sup>*Letters*, p. 100.

<sup>57</sup>*Letters*, pp. 165, 198.

<sup>58</sup>*Letters*, p. 281.

<sup>59</sup>*Common Rules* II, 3; I, 1 and XI, 10; VIII, 1-2; X, 4.

<sup>60</sup>*Constitutions* 6, 10, 19-25, 49.

<sup>61</sup>SV IX, 59; IX, 593; XI, 364; XI, 592.

<sup>62</sup>SV XII, 87.

<sup>63</sup>*Common Rules*, VIII, 2.

<sup>64</sup>SV III, 37.

<sup>65</sup>SV XII, 129.

## A call to prophetic witness

*Robert P. Maloney, C.M*

*Union of Superiors General Assembly*

Have you met any prophets lately? I met one recently. Let me tell you my story.

I rose at four o'clock in the morning and walked through the dark streets of a Chinese city. I stayed about 50 yards behind my guide, since we did not want to be seen together. After about a mile, I saw a door open suddenly. The guide entered quickly. When I arrived at the same door, it opened and I entered too. Inside, the curtains were drawn so that no one would see us, and we spoke in whispers so that no one would hear. There, we met an elderly woman about 85 years of age. She was delighted to see me, the Superior General of her Vincentian Family. She had remained behind in China when all the foreign sisters were expelled 46 years ago. In that period she had surely felt abandoned many times, but she had remained faithful, filled with trust in the Lord while spending 20 years in prison and in a forced labor camp. Five young women arrived in the same apartment a few minutes after me. They want to be Daughters of Charity like her. They come secretly to receive formation from her.

I ask myself: what did this sister, who is nearly blind and deaf, do to attract them? The answer I come up with is this: really, she did almost nothing, but she lived with enormous fidelity, joy, and peace, filled with faith in the presence of the Lord. She was, and continues to be, a prophetic witness to the gospels.

### The vowed life as prophecy

The leitmotif of *Vita Consecrata* is that the vows are prophetic witness.

Prophets speak for God. They interpret history. They bring God's word to bear on present-day reality and often judge it lacking in light of the Kingdom of God. Jesus is the culmination of the prophets. In him the reign of God dawns. He proclaims incessantly: The Kingdom of God is at hand. He calls his followers to announce the same good news.

The vowed life too is prophecy. It says to the world that the Kingdom of God is here. It is in the service of the Kingdom that we vow chastity, poverty, and obedience. It is only because of our faith and hope in the Kingdom that we believe that our vows are worthwhile.

To speak more concretely, the vows proclaim that the Kingdom of God sets us free. Believe in the power of the Kingdom, the vows say.

- Be free to go wherever in the world the needs of the poor call you, rather than to hold on tightly to the security of your own home or a job you like.

- Be free to share your own material possessions with the poor, rather than to store them up for your own comfort.
- Be free to stand with the poor in their struggle for justice, rather than to stand with the "powers that be" who often insulate themselves from the problems of the poor.
- Be free to speak the truth in the face of the social problems of our times, rather than to be concerned about your own image or tranquility.
- Be free to live together in community as friends who love one another, rather than to isolate those who are different because of nationality, race, class, sex, or other factors that create prejudices.
- Be free to spend time in prayer, rather than to feel that you must always be "doing something."
- Be free to discern the will of God with others, to listen well, rather than to dominate or claim a personal monopoly on knowing God's will.
- Be free to renounce immediate gratification for the sake of more important goals, rather than to seek solely what pleases you in the here and now.
- Be free to witness to forms of love that are more lasting than sexual union, rather than to focus on sexual relations as if they were the only way of loving.

If we live the vowed life genuinely, it is a prophetic word in the world. It challenges tendencies that continually reassert themselves in human history:<sup>1</sup>

- the imperative that I *must* have more.

- the drive toward uncommitted or abusive sexual relations.

- the hunger to do whatever I want, even when my own will works harm in the lives of others.

A striking thing about the vowed life as prophecy is that it need not even use words. Almost nothing has to be said. The prophecy is proclaimed by our lives. The message is strikingly clear, even if mysterious - the reign of God is at hand. The vowed life says to others: surely these women and men who live chastity, poverty, obedience, and give their lives in the service of the poor believe in the Kingdom of God deeply!

### **The truth of the prophecy**

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. 1 Jn 2:16.

The power of prophecies lies in the truth they teach. They catch the listener's attention because they jar him. The truth they proclaim on the one hand does not seem immediately evident ("The Kingdom of God is at hand!"), but on the other hand it cries out to be believed ("Look at the signs! Look at the deep faith, hope, and love of those who vow their whole lives to God in the service of the Kingdom").

Our vows will be a credible prophecy only if we live them truthfully. Fidelity is the key to the prophecy. The vows are prophetic signs if lived out genuinely to the end. Otherwise they become a scandal, a lie, the story of one who gave but then took back.

### **A new context**

The mission of every group must be "actualized" in every place and every era; otherwise, the group remains static, and eventually it withers and dies.<sup>2</sup>

Changing circumstances in society make it necessary for communities to adjust their life and mission continually. Recent popes, particularly Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio*, and now in *Vita Consecrata*, have reminded us of the new challenges that face those engaged in an evangelizing mission. They speak of:

- the "new areopagi";<sup>3</sup> that is, new sectors in which the gospel must be proclaimed - such as the world of communication, science, and international relations - particularly as the Church seeks to promote peace, human development, and the liberation of peoples.<sup>4</sup>
- new forms of poverty, different from those of other eras, which challenge missionaries as they attempt to give flesh to the Church's preferential option for the poor.<sup>5</sup>
- a new evangelization: new in its ardor, its methods, and its expression.<sup>6</sup>
- new means of communication which are available to the evangelizer in catechizing, preaching, and teaching, but which also form part of a new "information culture" which is itself badly in need of evangelization.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>A number of business corporations are learning this lesson the hard way. Even some which were once thriving concerns are now experiencing death pangs because they did not adjust to rapidly changing economic circumstances.

<sup>3</sup>*Vita Consecrata*, 96f; *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 57.

<sup>4</sup>*Redemptoris Missio*, 37.

<sup>5</sup>*Vita Consecrata*, 73, 82, 89; *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 51; *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 42.

<sup>6</sup>John Paul II, Discourse at the 19th ordinary assembly of CELAM, Haiti, March 9, 1983: discourse given in Santo Domingo, October 12, 1984; cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 63; *Centesimus Annus*, 5; *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 45; *Vita Consecrata*, 81.

<sup>7</sup>*Vita Consecrata*, 99; *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 45; *Redemptoris Missio*, 47.

## Living the vows in north america

In light of these new challenges which are emphasized repeatedly in a whole series of Church documents, allow me to suggest five priorities for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life in North America.

1. *A clear preferential option for the poorest of the poor* - These are in large proportion women and small children. They are more likely to be black, native American, or Hispanic. The future of religious life depends on its ministering to the deepest human needs, not only those of the USA but also global needs.<sup>8</sup>

2. *Contact with youth. Organizing groups, especially the young, to join in your experience of God and your service of the poor.* - Ministry to young people is extremely important today. The young are the Church of the future. Yet, like the rest of us, they too breathe the air of individualism that pervades North American society. But several recent studies point out that young people in North America seek:<sup>9</sup>

- an experience of God
- intense community and solidarity with others
- explicit and worldwide service to the most needy.

I want to encourage North American religious to gather young people together to pray, to support one another in living the gospels, and to share in the Church's preferential option for the poor. Youth groups can take many forms, depending on the local culture and its possibilities, but I urge all to make this one of the priorities in mission.

3. *Solidarity with women in their struggle for justice* - Women are discriminated against in almost all parts of the world. In North America the struggle for their rights is strong, articulate, and sometimes even bitter. As in all struggles, there can be extreme reactions on all sides. The real issues are at times confused with false ones. Sometimes we lack the proper categories, the correct distinctions, even the right vocabulary to deal with the problem (as is the case with English possessive pronouns!). The document urges us to take "concrete steps, beginning by *providing room for women to participate* in different fields and at all levels, including decision-making processes, above all in matters which concern women themselves."<sup>10</sup> Implementing this recommendation concretely will be no small task.

4. *Promotion of vocations to Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life* - The lack of vocations to communities in the United States and Canada is critical. And like any critical malady it can develop into a life and death issue for the Church in those countries.

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<sup>8</sup>D. Nygren and M. Ukeritis, *The Future of Religious Orders in the United States* (Connecticut: Praeger Press, 1993) 235, 244, 251.

<sup>9</sup>Cf. Albert di Ianni, "Religious Vocations: New Signs of the Times," *Review for Religious* 52 (# 5; September-October 1993) 745-763. Also, Nygren and Ukeritis, *op. cit.*, 251.

<sup>10</sup>*Vita Consecrata*, 58.

One of the signs of our love for and our happiness in our vocation is the encouragement of others to join in our common life and mission.

The world has seen dramatic changes in the last 40 years. Formerly a Catholic culture and closely-knit stable Catholic families strongly supported vocations to the vowed life. Today, on the contrary, many of the structures that were formerly supportive of vocations have disappeared. Families are very small and are often broken. A "Catholic" culture has given way to an "information" culture in which the media often flood young people with a proclamation of values that have little to do with the gospel. We cannot remain passive in such a context. Vocations will not just come along by themselves.

5. *Penetrating the world of the media* - Have you seen "Dead Man Walking"? The film is, by and large, the conversation between a prisoner and a sister. Both Susan Sarandon, who won the Academy Award, and Sean Penn, who was nominated for one, speak in glowing terms of their contact with Sr. Helen Prejean, C.S.I., who was the actual sister who visited the prisoner on death row in Louisiana. Both the actress and the actor confess that she had a powerful impact on their lives. The media can be a powerful force for good, but unfortunately they sometimes promote values that are hostile to the gospels: unrestrained violence, irresponsible or "dream-like" sex, the need always to have more and to have it immediately, the right to do what I want to do even if my own desires conflict with the rights, or at times the lives, of others.

*Vita Consecrata* suggests, as have many other recent Church documents, that we must learn the language of the media, that we must know how to influence it and change it, that we must be capable of channeling the power of the media toward genuine human values. The United States is, in a sense, the media capital of the world. Nowhere is this challenge more imperative than there.

## **The signs of the prophet**

How will we recognize the prophets? What are the signs that they are fully alive among us? Let me list five briefly.

1. *The prophets radiate transcendence* - If the prophet is one who speaks for God, then surely the clearest sign of prophetic authenticity is that we see God in him or her.
2. *They have vital contact with dire human need* - "The blind see, the lame walk, the poor have the good news preached to them." Prophets not only cry out for justice, they walk alongside the poor in the journey toward liberation.
3. *They live in solidarity with others* - In a world where there is so much individualism, the prophet proclaims co-responsibility, family, integration, the unity of humankind.

4. *They witness to simplicity of life* - Prophets know what is important in life. Their values are clear. They seek the "one thing necessary." Everything else is secondary. For that reason there is a beautiful simplicity in their lives.

5. *They communicate joy* - The joy, the peace of the Lord shines out through the prophets. They sing a new song. The Risen Lord rings in their words and in their actions. They are resurrection people with alleluia as their song.

My brothers and sisters, the center of consecrated life is prophetic witness to the Kingdom. "Jesus is alive," the prophet says, "he is here." The prophet's life challenges the world to see the Risen Lord.

Ariccia, Italy, 22-25 May 1996

# Vincentian Mission Team in Ireland

*Michael McCullagh, C.M.*

## ***The Church in which we work***

In order to understand better our apostolate of parish mission it is important that we situate it in the context of the Church in which we work.

The Catholic Church in Ireland holds a place in the culture and history of the people that is unique in Europe. For almost eight hundred years the island of Ireland was colonised. After the Reformation the Catholic religion became an integral part of Irish identity. Large numbers of Protestants (notably Scottish Presbyterians) were ""planted" in Ireland, given the best lands in return for their loyalty (notably true in Northern Ireland where the ""plantation" began in 1609). The effect of these policies was probably the opposite of what was intended and it served only to enforce the link between being Irish and being Catholic. Gradually the pressure was lessened, and in 1829 an Act of Parliament provided for Catholic Emancipation. This enabled the hierarchy to become established, and a tremendous era of development, organization and growth began in the Irish Church.

## ***The Vincentian community***

The Vincentian community, founded independently from the Congregation on the continent in 1833, gave its first parish mission in 1842. From the 1840s to about 1880 the Vincentians and Jesuits (later joined by the Redemptorists and others) were engaged in a very successful campaign of parish missions. These really established the parish structures throughout the country, countered the proselytizing campaigns of Protestant denominations, regularized marriages and established a sacramental life for the people. Later the community concentrated on education, formation of clergy, yet without abandoning missions. By 1859 there were central missions houses, two in Ireland and one each in England and Scotland, the latter two catering for Irish emigrants.

## ***The decline of the mission teams***

As Church structures were established parish missions tended to become more devotional and less directly evangelical and catechetical, and the leading place of the Vincentians was taken over by the Jesuits, Redemptorists, Passionists and others.

## ***The centrality of the Catholic Church***

By the time of Irish independence from the United Kingdom in 1921 the Church had taken a very central place in the life of the country. The new constitution of 1937 enshrined the

""special" place of the Catholic Church ""as the religion of the vast majority of the Irish population." Virtually every town had schools (primary and secondary, for boys and girls) run by large communities of religious. Most of the health care was also in their hands. In both cases they had become involved long before the government had any such concern. (It was an era of large numbers of priestly and religious vocations, sodalities and confraternities, and the era of the establishment of the St Vincent de Paul Society and the Legion of Mary).

### ***The emerging secular state***

It could be that the Church remained in positions of power and influence for too long. Gradually there was pressure from government and trade unions for control, and more recently, with a dramatic reduction in vocations, religious in particular have had little option but to hand over control of both educational and medical institutions. (In some instances religious, prompted by their own charism and thrust, took the initiative in handing over control, and engaged in a servant role once more).

### ***Present-day political and social reality***

In the 1990s there is considerable opposition to the institutional Church coming from a variety of directions, government, media, the European Union, and the impact of materialist-secular thinking. In a country with a well-educated population, but also a high level of unemployment, there is considerable disillusionment. In recent years much of this anger has been directed at the Church, which many regard as part of their problem rather than a sign of hope. The Church, in the main, is fighting a rearguard action to protect its place in society. A series of scandals among the clergy has greatly damaged the credibility of the Church, and despite relatively large church attendances, there is a rapid deserting of the Church. The schools \_ so long the central means of "control" \_ are no longer effective in this role. There is a sad lack of any means of getting "Vatican Two" thinking to the people, so many of whom, though well-educated and professionally trained, remain very poorly informed about their religion. Some will say that parishes provide little more than masses and sacraments \_ very little in terms of reading, education, formation, or prayer.

It is in this environment that our missions are taking place.

### ***New images of Church***

It is only in the past fifteen years or so that a special need for evangelization has arisen in this country. Our Mission Team sees itself as playing a part in this work. We strive not to *revive the Church*, nor even to reform it, but somehow to play our part in bringing to birth, if not a *New Church*, then at least a very new model of Church, with a different style than before.

### ***Increased alienation***

The Church of the 1950s is becoming increasingly alien to Irish culture and society. The Church which is more and more middle-class seems to have lost much of its confidence and

has tended to turn in on itself, and is withering. Changes seem to be made only because they have to be, and as a last resort, rather than with a sense of excitement and being led by a creative Spirit. There is widespread alienation in Irish society, and by and large those people are also alienated from the Church.

### ***New emerging voices***

Reflective women are not attracted to a Church which brooks no criticism. Groups of people who cannot fit their lives into the officially sanctioned patterns of sexual behaviour feel excluded from the Church. There is a yawning gulf between the youth pop-culture and the experience of boredom in Christian worship.

### ***Church as community rather than institution***

The new Church will be more community based, and less dependent on institutions or education as vehicles of control and order. There will be a greater sense of people choosing to belong. There will be far more participation, and less clerical domination. It will be a Church more concerned with the needs and problems of society, rather than being preoccupied with its own preservation as something separate \_ a sort of "perfect society". It will be more prayerful and less dogmatic, more scripturally nourished and less centred on the sacraments, more trusting of women and the young, and much more given to listening than dictating.

These are the images which support our efforts as a Mission Team.

### ***A call to a new model of mission***

There is a call to a new evangelization in a society such as ours, Western and European in terms of culture, economic policy and future legislation. People are now enlightened; traditional devotions have waned or disappeared; people are informing their own consciences; the God of retribution has fallen into disfavour. Since Vatican Two we have been trying to adapt.

### ***A time of re-founding***

Since 1980 a new team has been formed with people specifically qualified for popular parish missions, and that team, with changes in personnel, has been fully operational to the present day.

### ***A call by the whole Congregation to a new model of mission***

1. Provincials' meeting, Bogotá, 1983: The Superior General calls for a renewal of the traditional mission and a Congregation which would reflect a pilgrim theology in our willingness to go from place to place in the work of evangelization.
2. Constitution 1:3 calls us to collaboration with clergy and laity.
3. We have been called to serve the "more abandoned" (Cons. par. 1). (Designated in the Provincial Plan as the "urban poor").
4. The call to the work of justice. The General Assembly of 1992 called us to study the root causes of poverty and to carry out a social analysis of the lives of the people among whom we work.

### ***Pre-mission, mission-event, and post-mission***

The majority of Mission Teams in Provinces around the world are now working on a three-fold approach to missions which recognizes the on-going mission of the parish.

### ***Proclamation Sunday and first public meeting***

A member of the Mission Team preaches at all the masses, announces the mission and calls the people to a public meeting at which there is a random survey of the needs of the parish. This first public meeting is chaired by *a lay person* from the parish. At this meeting also there is a call from various committees who will undertake the task of the mission. (Further reflections on this later).

### ***Mission and ministry weekends***

We run two separate weekends in January each year here in All Hallows for the adults and young adults of the parishes to which we have been invited. (We expect at least six representatives from each parish). The purpose of these weekends is to help the parishioners to clarify their vision for their parish mission, acquire the skills to do a social analysis of their community and to draw up a tentative plan for the task ahead.

The Pastoral Ministry Team in All Hallows is the primary contributor at these weekends, together with other students from the All Hallows Institute.

### ***On-going formation of mission teams in the parish***

Each member of the Vincentian Mission Team takes responsibility for the formation of the parish teams in the time leading up to the mission event. Other parishes who have experienced a parish mission help the parishes in their preparations also.

### ***Mission event: The community and the institution***

In many instances there would be 50% or less attendance at church services. (We have observed that many of the upper classes and almost all of the lower classes no longer attend church). To address this we run two weeks of a mission event, the first week being in the community reaching those who, for a variety of reasons, no longer worship in their local churches. This is the week of *outreach*. The events of this week are concentrated, not in the church, but in halls, homes, even pubs \_ wherever people meet. A range of activities will be held throughout this week, trying to reach the young, the elderly, the unemployed, all sorts of people, without expecting them to come to church. There would be prayer gatherings, scripture-sharing sessions, educational sessions on aspects of faith, music sessions \_ all depending on the work the groups set up in advance. We simply give them ideas, tell them of what others did, and encourage them. It is their community, their Church, and their mission

### ***Mission event: Commissioning Sunday***

The parishioners are missioned to bring the good news of the mission to each home in the parish one week before the mission-event begins.

### ***Mission-event: The gathering week***

This week is celebrated in church, concentrating on good preaching and a quality of liturgical expression for the sacramental lives of the people. Drama, mime, a variety of speakers and voices from various sectors of the community feature this week, in addition to the missionaries.

*The role of the parish community in mission (Presented by Maureen, a parishioner and member of the mission team).*

### ***From passivity to activity***

In recent times there is a growing awareness of the need within communities to come together and help shape their future. A more active participation will be demanded from many if their parish is to grow and develop. It is a call from passivity to activity. A mission can be a great opportunity in a parish to get people involved and to help them to discover their gifts and opportunities for ministry.

For most people in Ireland it is within their parish that they experience what it means to be part of the Church. For them there is little difference between the local and the universal Church. It is the local Church which touches their reality in a very real and tangible way, particularly in the "Key Life Moments" and celebrations, such as births, marriages and deaths.

### ***A call to live our baptismal vocation***

The Second Vatican Council gave us a new vision of the Church as the People of God where each and every person has a part to play. Yet many people in the Church have still not fully assimilated its message and meaning into their lives. Pope John XXIII spoke of the parish as the "village fountain" to which all would have recourse in their thirst. In the document *Christifideles laici* the role of the laity is clearly defined:

It is necessary that in the life of the faith *all rediscover the true meaning of the parish*, that is, the place where the very "mystery" of the Church is present and at work.... The parish is not principally a structure, a territory, or a building, but rather "the family of God, a fellowship afire with the unifying spirit", a familial and welcoming home, the community of the faithful.

As a lay person I can explain my own experience of parish, of my own experiences as a wife and mother bringing up a family and trying to live a life of faith in today's world. For many people it is a new experience to see a lay person and a woman speaking to them about Faith and Parish and the Church.

In the lead up to mission we are helping people to become aware of the gift of their baptism and what they have to offer to the building up of the community. We stress that this is their mission and that they will have a big part to play in the final shape of it. For many people this may be the first time they have ever been invited to get involved in Parish. So, following the Proclamation Sunday as mentioned above, all are invited to a public meeting.

The function of this initial public meeting is to try to bring people to explore their vision of Parish and mission. This first meeting is important in that it helps people to focus on the needs of the parish and it gives them a place to voice those needs. Mission is not just about a team of people coming to a parish for a short time. Rather it is about a life-long journey of faith, and the mission-event is just a small step on that journey. It can be a very important step, one which can affect the future of individuals and communities.

### ***The mission of "'Like-to-like'***

In many communities there is a growing number of support-type groups where people minister to one another, and in such an atmosphere of care and compassion, healing takes place. The mission-event can help to develop this *like-to-like* ministry in a parish setting. In the preparation for mission many will have a chance to discover that they do have something to share with others in their community. The mission-event can be a celebration of all that is taking place in a parish community.

### ***Post-mission***

Many of the following are taking place or are in process as follow-up to the mission-event.

1. An evaluation by an outside facilitator of the work of the mission, in the presence of the Vincentian Mission Team and the parish-based team.

2. The formation of a Pastoral Council.
3. Lay ministry educational programmes in the parish.
4. Further study of lay ministry, or a degree in theology at All Hallows.

(Much of the above is facilitated by the All Hallows Institute for Mission and Ministry).

### ***Future developments***

1. Concentrating on the urban poor as requested by our Provincial Plan.
2. Continue to collaborate with other agencies of parish renewal.
3. Invite diocesan clergy, and others in lay ministry, to join us on missions.
4. Have a Social Justice element in our missions resulting in some concrete action for the materially poor.

### ***Conclusions***

The problems which we are facing in the Church in Ireland today were faced in many European countries during the 1960s and 1970s. This is a significant advantage to us. We have possibilities which were not readily available to others then, both in terms of theology and an increasing number of lay people interested in, and trained in, theology and related skills. Many people have a strong basic faith, and while we might complain about the inactivity of the institutional Church there are many competent people to fill the roles of leadership in all of this. It is an exciting time in the Irish Church, and Vincentians as missionaries have a part to play with a lot of others, in the age-old task begun by Him who came to bring the Good News to the poor.

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## **APPENDIX ONE**

### ***Major points from the Provincials' meeting in Rio de Janeiro in 1989***

These were their main conclusions regarding the evangelizing of the poor.

1. All of our apostolic activity must be realized in union with Christ, in contact with the poor, and in fidelity to the Church.
2. We need to be inserted in the local Church and participate in the life of the local community.

3. Every missionary (sic) should feel the need to be a professional in the work of evangelization.
4. There must be a greater commitment to the poor, in order to re-evangelize the Church and missionaries through the poor.
5. Encourage on-going formation for clergy and laity.
6. There must be a commitment to social justice. Investigate seriously the "root causes of poverty" (NB the words of Pope John Paul II, cited above).
7. For the evangelization of the poor, use should be made of the best means of social communication.

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## APPENDIX TWO

### *Provincial Plan of the Irish Province, 1992*

#### Target One: Mission Teams.

To develop strategies for evangelization, especially in urban parishes in Ireland and Britain.

#### Why?

- a) It is a practical expression of the kind of missions for which we were founded.
- b) Today the lapsed and unchurched and the poor are found in great number mainly in urban areas.

#### How?

- a) Form a working party composed of members of the current mission team, parish priests of designated parishes, designated staff from All Hallows, Damascus House, and Strawberry Hill, and members of the Provincial Council to research and draw up clear models of parish mission.
- b) Focus the work of teams on the urban poor, and highlight priority areas for missions (e.g. North Dublin, South London, Cork, Glasgow).
- c) Collaborate, where possible, with Daughters of Charity, Society of St Vincent de Paul, clergy and laity.
- d) Dialogue with priest in the highlighted areas, with the hope that we are invited to work with him.
- e) Investigate financial implications of (c).

Who?

- a) Directors of Mission Teams.
- b) Designated confreres.

Where?

Damascus House, London; All Hallows, Dublin.

When?

- a) Initiated by Directors of Teams by December 1991.
- b) Teams to develop so that the new direction is more clearly visible by Autumn 1993.

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### APPENDIX THREE

The major points which emerged from the presentations of confreres engaged in parish missions, at CIF, Paris, Autumn 1994:

1. Today our work in parish missions is almost a case of going after the 99!
2. Young people must be encountered - they have a new image of Church.
3. There was a strong emphasis on ministry to priests.
4. New ways are being sought for mission - the old are obsolete.
5. The mission is on-going, hence pre-mission, mission-event, post-mission.
6. A wide chasm is evolving between priests and people.
7. Missions must be collaborative in character.
8. The mission must operate within the pastoral plan of the parish.

## **Fr. James Richardson, C.M. \_ A profile with a human perspective**

*By Rafael Sáinz, C.M.*

On February 5, 1909, in Dallas, Texas, James W. Richardson was born into a very large and deeply religious family. The Richardson family would gift the Church with a Daughter of Charity, an Ursuline sister and two Vincentian missionaries, James W. and John T., younger than James by 14 years and currently Chancellor of De Paul University in Chicago. On September 30, 1925, James entered the Novitiate of the Congregation of the Mission in Perryville, Missouri and was ordained a priest on October 10, 1933. After receiving his doctorate in Canon Law in Rome, he returned to the United States and dedicated himself to the ministry of teaching and forming candidates for the Congregation.

In 1958, Fr. Richardson became the first Vice-Provincial of the newly-created Vice-Province of Los Angeles. In 1968, he was elected Superior General, the 21st successor of St. Vincent de Paul. The General Assembly of 1974 re-elected him for another term of six years.

In 1980, at the age of 71, animated by a love for the poor and for the foreign missions, he volunteered for and was sent to the Major Seminary of the Good Shepherd in Maralal in the northern part of Kenya. This area, inhabited by semi-nomadic tribes of shepherds, is one of the poorest regions of Africa.

Fr. Richardson's vision was, in great part, responsible for the fact that the Congregation was working in Maralal. Near the end of his second term as Superior General, Fr. Richardson was visited by a priest from the Diocese of Treviso, in Veneto, working as a missionary "donum fidei" with the Consolata Fathers of Turin. The bishop of Maralal, Bishop Cavallera, also a Consolata missionary, told this priest, "Do not leave Italy without a firm commitment that the Congregation of the Mission will come to Maralal and take charge of the formation of our seminarians. The work of formation, especially for serving the poor, is the charism of the Priests of the Mission. We need their help with the intellectual as well as the spiritual and pastoral formation of our seminarians." Up to this time Bishop Cavallera sent his seminarians to the National Seminary in Nairobi, a modern seminary with an international faculty that seemed to have everything. When the seminarians, however, returned to Maralal as priests, their heads were filled with many ideas, yet they found it difficult to adapt to the life and the pastoral needs of the people. Like St. Vincent before him, Fr. Richardson heard the Voice of God in the words of the Bishop. Faithful to the true spirit of the Congregation, he sent a group of Vincentian missionaries to Maralal.

In Kenya, Fr. Richardson taught in the seminary and involved himself in the formation of a small group of seminarians. They traveled with him to surrounding

villages when he celebrated weekend liturgies. He returned from Maralal in 1987 to the major seminary in Denver, Colorado. When he became ill, he was moved to the infirmary. He returned to the Father on July 8, 1996.

His funeral was celebrated in the Church of St. Vincent de Paul in St. Louis, Missouri, on Friday, July 12. Fr. Robert P. Maloney, C.M., Superior General and Fr. Richard McCullen C.M., former Superior General joined the many confreres present. Sr. Juana Elizondo, D.C., Superioress General, participated with the large group of Daughters of Charity who had come. The body had been brought from Perryville to St. Vincent's Church and late that night his body was returned to Perryville. Fr. Richardson's body was laid to rest in the Vincentian cemetery beside the remains of those first Vincentian missionaries who came to the United States in the 19th Century.

Fr. Maloney presided at the Eucharist and preached the homily. Fr. McCullen led the assembly in the final commendation and farewell and Fr. John T. Richardson presided over the brief burial ceremony. It was a simple, prayerful celebration.

I lived with Fr. Richardson for twelve years, (1968 to 1980) in Rome. When he was elected Superior General in 1968, I was elected Vicar-General.

During those years we developed a close friendship and became steady collaborators. Without doubt, others will speak about what he has done and what he said during the years of his leadership of the Congregation. These were difficult years: difficult because of the changing circumstances and experiences, difficult because the General Assemblies (which are considered "constitutive" for the Congregation) called us to adapt our original charism to the conditions of the contemporary world and the contemporary Church. It could be said that the entire period of Fr. Richardson's term as Superior General was characterized by renovation and renewal in faithfulness to the spirit of St. Vincent.

Others will record their interpretations of those times. I would like to share something of my perspective on the real human person I knew.

What most impressed me about Fr. Richardson was his humanity: he was a complete man, his mind and spirit were focused on that which was true, loyal, and responsible. He committed himself to doing what should be done. He never tried to make himself "look good," to be a "very important person." He always tried to make things better. Sometimes he could be demanding on others, but he asked more of himself first.

He was humble to the depths of his heart. He never sought to place himself on a pedestal. A short time after his election, at common recreation, we were talking about the Pope's suppression of some of the honorary titles which the Holy See had granted to our Superior General. Afterwards, we noticed that the name plate on Fr. Richardson's door had changed — the title "*Most Honored*" had disappeared, leaving only "*Fr. James W. Richardson, C.M.*"

During a concelebration in the chapel at the Leonianum, just a few weeks after his election, before a select group of priests and sisters, he delivered the homily, which he wrote himself, in Italian. As might be expected, the homily was no model of linguistic perfection. It was, however, a model of courageous humility. When he had finished, I affirmed his courage, to which he responded: *"What did you expect? Sometimes I show myself to others like a stammering baby."*

When Fr. Richardson was convinced that the truth was in what others proposed, he fully embraced it. I recall many occasions on which Fr. Richardson called me to his room to speak to me about what was on his mind and to get my reaction. On one of these occasions, after listening to him respond to my observations and my objections to a decision which he was proposing, I told him, *"Look, Fr. Richardson, you have asked for my opinion, and I have given it with total honesty. I have nothing more to add. Now you must decide. I want you to know that from the outset, I accept whatever you decide. You will have my complete support in this decision."* In this way we ended a friendly, and a very lengthy conversation. The following day he said to me: *"I have thought about what you told me and I see that you are right; but it is better not to think about that right now."* He did the same thing in meetings and conversations with me or with Provincials or with groups of confreres. He would change his own observations or insights to those of the Assistants on the spot.

He was a hard worker. Neither long meetings nor long trips seemed to tire him. In fact he seemed to rejoice in the long meetings, hour after hour, of the General Council, meetings which he prepared for in great detail. He filled many notebooks with his distinctive handwriting.

And his austerity! He was very austere in everything. He was never known to have a special fondness for any food. Once, I was visiting one of the Latin American Provinces. Fr. Richardson had traveled on to Cuba to visit and greet the confreres and the Daughters. While awaiting the arrival of his plane from Cuba, a Visitatrix of the Daughters told me that while in Rome she had met a man who worked for Air France. This man claimed to be a good friend of Fr. Richardson, so much so that Father frequently visited his house, and dined with him and his wife. This woman would always prepare Father's favorite dish. The Daughter must have seen in my expression such a total skepticism that she asked me: *"What do you think of this?"* *"It seems to me, Sister,"* I responded, *"that you are speaking about some other Superior General, not ours."* The fact of the matter is, Fr. Richardson had no "favorite" dish. He ate everything and anything. He did not go out to dine unless it was with some confreres who were visiting from the United States and this he did only a few times during his twelve years in Rome. The man, who was supposed to be a friend of Fr. Richardson turned out to be a nameless and vulgar swindler.

Fr. Richardson had a great love for the Little Company, for the Daughters of Charity, for the whole Vincentian Family. Every day he dedicated long hours of work to them and their mission. He constantly thought of them.

He was a temperate man, profoundly pious, faithful to all the practices learned and internally assimilated during the years of his formation.

In summary: he was a man devoted to God, to his brothers and sisters, to the poor. Now, may this good and faithful servant rest in the peace of the Lord.

Translated by Charles T. Plock, C.M.

## **Bibliography**

**MIGUEL PEREZ FLORES, C.M.**

**Revestirse c/el Espfritu de Jesucristo**

**Expresión de Identidad vicenciana. Temas de estudio**

**Editorial CEME, Apdo. 353, 37080 Salamanca, Spain, 1996**

**(441 pages.)**

Coinciding with the awakening of nature in the spring of 1996, Fr. Miguel Perez Flores offers us one of his best works. The book is a large-scale project for which the author employed innumerable hours of patient and laborious work. It proves his exhaustive knowledge of the material treated.

The work is divided into four parts. The first tackles five basic themes of Vincentian spirituality; the second, the five characteristic virtues of the missionary; the third, the itinerary followed by St. Vincent for introducing vows into the Congregation; the fourth, a study of each of the four vows. Finally, the author, in his 22nd theme, the last of the book, gathers together the recommendations of the Superiors General on the vows.

Each chapter contains the following points: an objective, an ordered exposition of the material, and a final questionnaire. The reader will also find citations from the Magisterium of the Church, the writings of St. Vincent, the Superiors General, and the Constitutions, as well as from various spiritual masters.

As Fr. Miguel Perez Flores says in the prologue, the work is destined above all for aspirants to the missionary life in the Congregation of the Mission: seminarians and students. But also, an attentive study of this book will be very profitable for all the members of the Congregation. It is a work in which the reader will find the most characteristic points of Vincentian spirituality, presented in a systematic manner. Moreover, each chapter combines fidelity to the past of the Congregation and post-conciliar spirituality. Once this book has been translated into other languages, it could become a basic manual for houses of formation in the various provinces of the Congregation of the Mission.

Our congratulations and thanks to Fr. Miguel Perez Flores for the valuable service he gives to the members of the Congregation of the Mission through the publication of this book. (J. Ignacio Fernández de Mendoza, C.M.).

**RICHARD J. DEVINE, C.M.**

**Good Care, Painful Chokes**

**Medical Ethics for Ordinary People**

**Paulist Press, New York / Mahwah, NJ, U.S.A. 1996 (242 pages)**

The media abound with anecdotes about moral dilemmas (test-tube babies, surrogate mothers, difficult pregnancies, genetic manipulations, organ transplants, AIDS, euthanasia,

assisted suicide). This book offers an introduction to these key medical ethics questions for ordinary people who ask varied questions. Students of all ages, adult discussion groups, priests and pastoral assistants, health professionals, and the general public will find in Richard Devine a master and accessible guide for medical ethics questions today.

**JEAN DUCOURNEAU, C.M.**

**Una semi/la de eternidad**

**Saint Jean-Gabriel Perboyre**

**Editions Mediaspaul, Paris, France, 1996 (157 pages)**

The author is a young priest of the Congregation who ministers in the pastoral sector of Cams, where Mongesty, the native village of J.G. Perboyre, is located. He writes a biography of the saint in a lively style which has the advantage of citing abundantly from Perboyre's letters in which he reveals himself in depth. This little book, with numerous illustrations, offers a good, simple, and vivid presentation of St. John Gabriel, destined for the general public.

**PHILIP WALSH, C.M.**

**John Gabriel Perboyre CM**

**1996 (52 pages)**

This is a small biography of John Gabriel Perboyre, written in lively and vivid English, which situates our missionary in the context of the epoch and recounts in an evocative manner the history of the Catholic missions of China.

**LUGI NUOVO, C.M.**

**San Giovanni Gabriele Perboyre**

**Missionario e martire sulk croce con Cristo**

**Edizioni San Paolo, Mba (Cuneo), Italy, 1996 (87 pages)**

The author, who teaches Church History in two institutes of theology at Genoa and Piacenza, puts his competence to good use in writing, with an historian's precision and a confrere's passion, a short and compact biography of J.G. Perboyre. One finds here also an interesting spiritual profile of the new saint and some letters written from China.

**LUIGI CHIEROTTI, C.M.**

**Suor Gabriel/a Borgarino**

**"Provvidenza Divina..."**

**Cooperazione Vincenziana, Genoa, Italy, 1996 (69 pages)**

This is a short biography of an Italian Daughter of Charity, born in 1880 and died in the odor of sanctity in 1949. She seems to have been favored by special communications and manifestations from heaven, but, above all, she gave an example of great holiness of life in humble, devoted service.

**GIOVANNI BURDESE, C.M.**

**Educare, servizio divino**

**Contributo all'opera educativa nello spirito vincenziano**

**Quaderni Vincenziani 2**

**C.L.V. - Edizioni Vincenziane, Rome, Italy, 1996 (58 pages)**

This booklet collects four conferences of the author, a professor of religion and humanities for many years. They were given in various circumstances to teachers and educators, including Daughters of Charity and their collaborators. The conferences tackle successively: education, first duty of culture; Vincent and Louise, models of educators; the educative responsibility in the Vincentian Catholic school; and the educational responsibility of the Daughters of Charity with respect to young people.

**GIOVANNI BURDESE, C.M.**

**Incontro a Cristo verso il terzo Millennio**

**Traccia per una inculturazione del carisma della carità**

**Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City, 1996 (110 pages)**

The pages of this volume offer a particularly interesting perspective for those looking at the people of our times 'with the eyes and heart of St. Vincent de Paul.' The prominent place given to some essential ideas indicates how they can become fruitful guides for reflection on the reality of the Vincentian charism and the means by which it can be understood and can respond to the expectations of contemporary society.

The words "culture," "inculturation," and "new evangelization" indicate the key points to develop and assimilate in order to be at the service of the Church today. (Cardinal Eduardo Martinez Somalo, in the book's presentation).

**CARLO BRAGA, C.M. - GIOVANNI BURDESE, C.M.**

**Servire è regnare**

**Obbedienza, Autorità, Corresponsabilità nel pensiero**

**e nell'esperienza dei Fondatori**

### **Quaderni Vincenziani 3**

**C.L.V. - Edizioni Vincenziane, Rome, Italy, 1996 (92 pages)**

This booklet collects and juxtaposes two studies addressed to the Daughters of Charity on the occasion of two sessions for Sister Servants.

In fact, the issues interest all those who belong to the Vincentian Family, including the laity, some of whom are called even more so to exercise authority and others to live obedience, and all to be co-responsible in the search, fundamentally missionary, to affirm and expand the Reign of God.

Translating this for today is facilitated by an outline of a directory for superiors, as well as by practical advice and suggestions which the authors offer to help their readers live in fidelity to the thought and experience of the Founders.