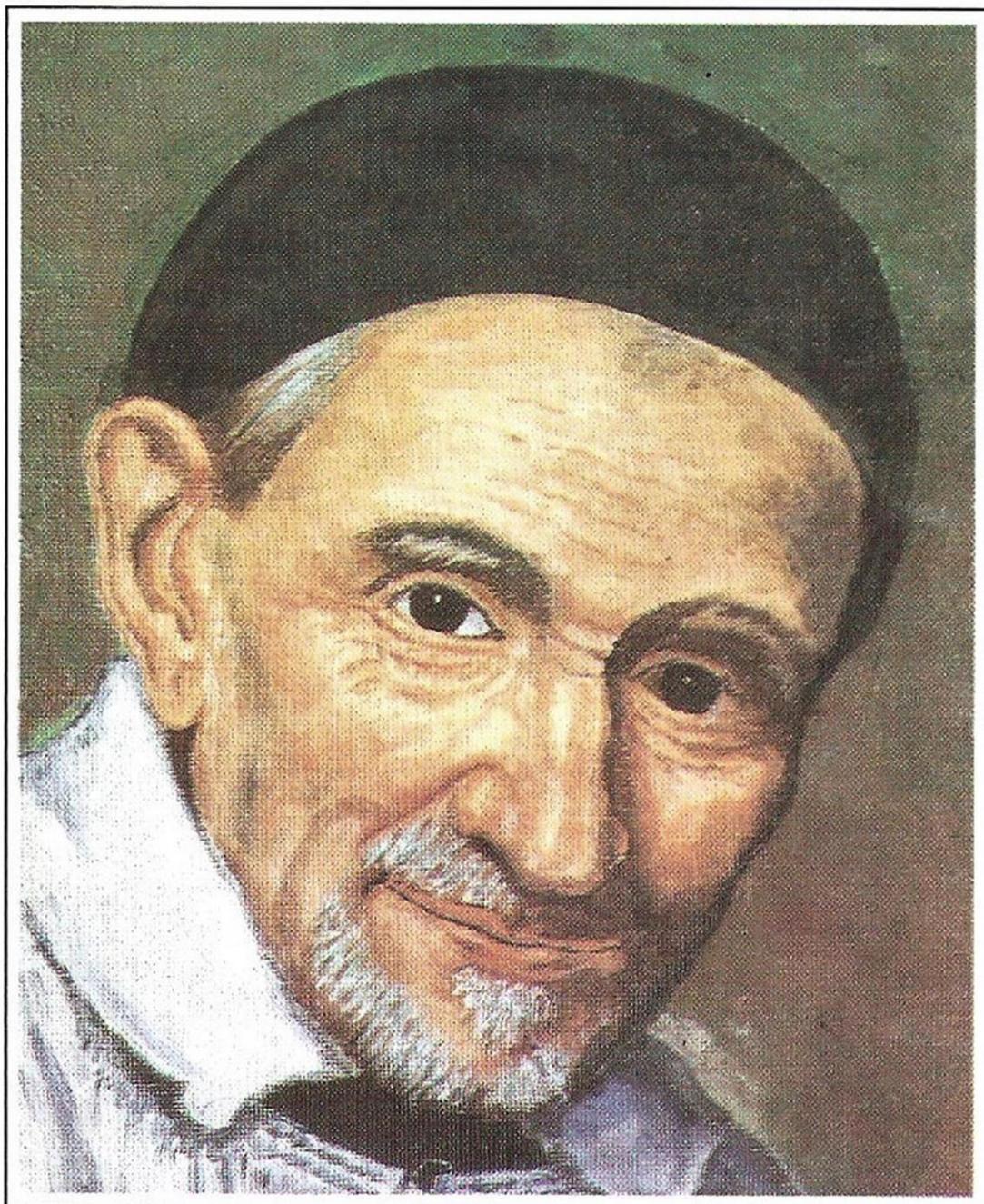


# VINCENTIANA

43rd YEAR, N° 3

MAY-JUNE 1999



FEATURE:

*The Challenges Presented by GA '98*

CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION

GENERAL CURIA

April 12, 1999

*To the members of the European Conference of Visitors (CEVIM)*

My very dear Confreres,

May the grace of Our Lord be always with you!

When I came to the General Curia in 1986, I would never have envisioned the changes that would soon take place in Europe. Few did. Since then the Iron Curtain has fallen with dramatic suddenness. The European Community has moved ahead in forging stronger political and economic bonds. At the beginning of this year the euro burst upon the world market. Though it remains largely hidden from those of us who still hold lira, francs, pesetas, and marks in our hands, all our treasurers know that these are now just euros in disguise! A few weeks ago, NATO extended its borders eastward, something unthinkable at the beginning of the decade.

Of course, not all the signs point toward unification. As one looks at the continued violence in Kosovo, where the extermination of thousands of Albanians has provoked outside intervention by NATO, one fears that deep-seated attitudes have not really changed significantly since 1914. Immigrants pour into European countries at a rate never equaled in the history of the world. The growing presence of Islam in so many nations presents new challenges for evangelization. Centuries ago, Christians raised armies to combat "the invasion of Muslim hordes." Today, as even greater numbers of Muslims live relatively peacefully within our midst, we must ask how best to relate with them pastorally. More than a decade and a half ago, Karl Rahner challenged Europe to grapple with the problem of Islam in a theological and pastoral way and not just politically and polemically.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, centrifugal and centripetal forces have existed for millennia in Europe. The Romans dreamed of its unity and the "Pax Romana." But even in the best of times, it was an uneasy peace. The Holy Roman Empire projected the same hope, with Christianity as the unifying element. But an increasingly divided Christendom saw the rise of nationalism, competing individual states, and imperial powers.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. "Aspects of European Theology" in *Theological Investigations XXI* (New York: Crossroad, 1988) 78-98.

It has never been easy to define "Europe." In fact, it is a relatively modern idea that gradually replaced the earlier concept of "Christendom." Its eastern boundary especially has had a fluid history. The present convention marks it at the Ural Mountains, almost precisely where our confreres have their new mission in Ni\_nij Tagil. But there is nothing sacred about this boundary which, in fact, has been often disputed. Even today it is evident that the "European Community" does not embrace many parts of "Europe." Russia's credentials for belonging to Europe have often been contested; from time to time, Britain's have been questioned too, even by her own citizens, many of whom still refer to Europe as "the Continent"! Some prefer to define Europe by cultural criteria rather than geographical ones. T. S. Eliot placed the emphasis on the Christian tradition as the unifying factor. He wrote: "The dominant feature in creating a common culture between peoples, each of which has its own distinct culture, is religion ... I'm talking about the common tradition of Christianity which has made Europe what it is, and about the common cultural elements which this common Christianity has brought with it..."

Some note, in contrast with Eliot's view, that a number of key elements in modern European history have come from outside religious circles and have even met considerable resistance therein: the movement toward democratic government, scientific methodology and its consequences, freedom of the press and cultural pluralism. Others remark how strikingly religious practice has declined in recent decades, particularly in Western Europe. Still others observe an increasing polarization within contemporary Christianity with extreme groups on both ends of the ideological spectrum denying key elements in traditional Christian teaching. In some European countries women are beginning to share in the alienation from the Catholic Church that large numbers of their counterparts in the United States and Australia have been experiencing over the past decade. Beyond religious controversy, and perhaps even more significant, is the glaring indifference many show toward religion today in previously Christian lands. Some proclaim openly that it is irrelevant in their lives; others manifest silently that they simply have no interest in it at all.

The European Episcopal Conference and the 1998 Synod for Europe have attempted to address the breakdown of "Christian culture" and many of the related questions described above. This has proved no easy task.

Diversity has been one of Europe's most enduring characteristics. The European Community has 11 official languages, not to mention the numerous native tongues of significant minority groups. There are striking differences among Europe's states and cultures; multiplicity underlies its civilization as a whole. This variety, which has stimulated rich traditions in literature, music, art, philosophy, theology, and other fields, has been the source of great richness. It will undoubtedly continue to exist even as the European nations take steps toward political unification.

What is most evident in the contemporary setting is that economic motives have played a key role, perhaps even a dominant one, in pushing the political process forward.

The question "What is Europe?" has relevance when we speak about the European Visitors' Conference (CEVIM). At times some ask: "Should there not be two or three conferences, since our economic-cultural-political-religious situations are so different?" Others state, on the contrary: "How can we think of breaking up the conference precisely at a time when the 'European Community' is moving toward greater unity?"

Today I suggest to you some points for discussion. I intend them as an encouragement toward common reflection at this meeting and common action in the future and as rallying points around which greater unity can be promoted, while at the same time preserving the rich diversity that has characterized the many provinces that make up the conference.

The changes contemporary Europe is experiencing have affected the life and ministry of the Congregation very significantly. Vocations have declined dramatically in Western Europe. The work of the popular missions has undergone a significant critique. In some places the traditional form of mission remains effective. In others, provinces seek for new methods for the integral evangelization and upbuilding of parish communities. Our work in the formation of the diocesan clergy has shrunk, and even disappeared, in a number of countries. The post-Vatican II era has challenged the Congregation to take a more active role in helping form lay men and women to participate more fully in the evangelization of the poor (C 1, 3\_).

Here are my suggestions for your reflection:

1. In our most recent *tempo forte* General Council meeting, we decided to ask CLAPVI, ASPAC, and COVIAM to set up regional centers for the formation of formators, using as a model something like this:
  - a. The formators of that particular region (those presently engaged as formators and those whom the Visitors foresee for that service) would gather once a year
  - b. during the summer (i.e., the time of the long vacation in the northern or southern hemisphere),
  - c. for two or three weeks.
  - d. Someone, or a committee, would be responsible for organizing a program of Vincentian formation over that period. This program would

involve: 1) study, 2) sharing of experiences and concerns as formators, 3) community life and prayer together during that two- or three-week period.

e. This program would be offered every summer, but the topics treated and the concerns discussed would change each summer so that the same formators could participate in an ongoing way in these sessions (as, for example, the topics change each year for the Salamanca week in Spain).

We did not think that this approach would be suitable for CEVIM because of the very different lived reality within the many countries that make up your conference. My question to you is this: Seeing what the General Council is asking of CLAPVI, ASPAC, and COVIAM, what does CEVIM propose for the formation of its formators, particularly in light of the *Final Document* of the General Assembly of 1998, III, 3, B, 3a ("The Superior General and his council should study the possibility of creating in one or more places: a) an international center for the formation of our formators")?

2. Never in the history of the world have there been more refugees than today. You see them flooding, I am sure, into most of your countries. They are usually very poor and very abandoned. Can the mission of the Congregation in Europe place a special emphasis on these refugees, as is already the case in some of our countries? Can that be a uniting focus for the ministry of the Congregation in Europe? Can there be interprovincial and even international works that reach out to these refugees?
3. The European Community has its center in Brussels. AIC has placed its Permanent Secretariat there in order to influence policy within the European Union. Is there something that we can do to make the "European voice" of the Congregation of the Mission express itself more clearly in Brussels? (As you know, we have recently begun to send a representative to the United Nations in New York.)
4. At our last *tempo forte* session of the General Council, we examined the results of the evaluation that each of the provinces made on its use of the "Resource Book for Vincentian Morning and Evening Prayer" and other materials for fostering our Vincentian common prayer. Though some provinces reported quite positive results, the overall response was somewhat disappointing. Several of the provinces within CEVIM worked very hard on this matter and produced some very good materials for promoting common prayer with a Vincentian tone, but actually only one Visitor in CEVIM reported an enthusiastic reception on the part of the confreres of his province. As you recall, the goal of the whole process in which we have been engaging 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 the Congregation in light of our Constitutions, offering "something beautiful for God"

and attractive to the young. Why, in your judgment, has there not been a more energetic, enthusiastic engagement on the part of the confreres in this process? What do you suggest as a next step in the process of encouraging renewal in our common prayer?

5. The euro is here! Even though the currency is not in our hands, all bank transfers and investments are already taking place in euros. Would it be good for CEVIM (the Visitors and Economes) to begin thinking about common investment strategies for the future? Since investments will be basically within the same currency and economic framework, are there people within CEVIM who are knowledgeable about investments and who can assist all of the provinces by offering good counsel?
6. Given the new reality of Europe, perhaps the moment has arrived for CEVIM to reexamine its statutes in order to create a more effective structure for ongoing communication during the course of the year and for better preparation of its annual meetings.

Those are my thoughts. I regret very much that I am not able to be with you during your meeting. I have very happy memories of my visit to Lebanon two years ago. I am about to depart, as perhaps you know, for the ASPAC meeting and then for a visit to Continental China. I will be returning to Rome via Chicago where I will be giving a conference at the 100th anniversary of DePaul University. I will be thinking of you all in these days, asking the Lord to pour out his Spirit on you as you gather in this meeting.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.  
Superior General



**International Association of  
MISEVI  
(Lay vincentian missionaries)**

Congregation  
for Institutes of Consecrated Life  
and Societies of Apostolic Life

Prot. n. P. 53 - 2/99

**DECREE**

The work called "**Lay Vincentian Missionaries**" (MISEVI) is a public international Association of Faithful who desire to share in the charism and spirituality of St. Vincent de Paul, Founder of the Congregation of the Mission and of the Daughters of Charity, adapting them to the lifestyle of the members of this Association.

The principal aim of the Association is the basic moral or spiritual support and coordination of the adult lay missionaries. Obtaining funds to realize missionary projects is a secondary aim.

This Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, recognizing that the Association of "Lay Vincentian Missionaries" has full juridical personality and autonomy and that, at the same time, is linked to the Vincentian charism and spirituality and accepts in the said context the supreme authority of the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and of the Daughters of Charity, after having carefully examined the text of the International Statutes presented in the Spanish language, of which a copy is preserved in its archives, by the present Decree approves and confirms them.

Notwithstanding anything to the contrary.

The Vatican, 7 April 1999.

Eduardo Cardinal Martínez Somalo  
Prefect

+ Piergiorgio Silvano Nesti, C.P.  
Secretary

# International Statutes of MISEVI

## 0. Basic principles

0.1. The Association of Lay Vincentian Missionaries (MISEVI) sets out to develop an organized presence of lay people within the Church's missionary role "ad gentes" (to the peoples), especially in missions attached to the Vincentian Family. Juridical links are being established between the lay branches; bonds with the Congregation of the Mission and the Company of the Daughters of Charity are spiritual, charismatic, and collaborative in character.

0.2. The principal aim of this Association is the basic moral or spiritual support and coordination of the lay missionaries. Obtaining funds to realize missionary projects is a secondary aim.

0.3. The Association will have a missionary Vincentian spirituality which will take direction from the present social teaching of the Church, and will be founded upon the specific virtues that St. Vincent entrusted to his missionaries. This will be elaborated in a special document.

0.4. This Association comes into being as a development of the missionary dimension of the Vincentian Marian Youth, previously the Association of the Children of Mary Immaculate.<sup>1</sup>

0.5. The Association will link together the members of Vincentian groups and movements who have been sent on mission; the members of MISEVI will continue to belong to their original associations which would remain committed to their support.

0.6. Contact and collaboration will be sought with the Vincentian Family, especially on the local level, whether at the point of origin of the missionary enterprises, or at the locations of missionary service and within the possibilities of each concrete situation.

## 1. Nature

1.1. The International Association of Lay Vincentian Missionaries (MISEVI) is canonically erected as a Public Association of Faithful with an autonomous, full juridical personality, and consequently it can possess, administer, and dispose of every class of goods and rights; it can take on all kinds of obligations and take action in defense of its interests, before every class of persons, authorities, and jurisdictions.

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<sup>1</sup> This Association was approved by the rescripts of His Holiness Pius IX of 20 June 1847 and 19 July 1850.

## **2. Ends**

2.1. The Association is formed to promote, facilitate, support, and coordinate the presence and missionary work of the laity on missions "ad gentes" entrusted to the Vincentian Family or animated by it.<sup>2</sup>

2.2. Among the ends of the Association are the following:

2.2.1. to offer human, moral, spiritual, formative, and economic backing to missions linked to the Vincentian Family, by sending lay people to work in the missions and by material assistance to the different projects;

2.2.2. to be a channel of communion and exchange among the lay missionaries who form part of the Association;

2.2.3. to promote the spiritual life and communal sharing among the lay members who are engaged in missions "ad gentes";

2.2.4. to facilitate the involvement and presence of the Vincentian laity who work within the coordinating structures of Vincentian associations according to their specific norms;

2.2.5. to support the bonds between the lay missionaries and the communities of origin which have sent them on mission;

2.2.6. to welcome the missionaries on return from their labors "ad gentes" and to offer them human, formative, spiritual, and economic support according to what is set down in their Internal Rule.

## **3. Extent**

3.1. The Association is international in scope. In agreement with its aim, it extends to other mission countries.

## **4. Seat**

4.1. The international seat of the Association and its Permanent Secretariat are based in Madrid.

## **5. Members**

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<sup>2</sup> Thus, it is included in the context of Non-Governmental Organizations dedicated to human development (NGO).

5.1. The Association is comprised of lay Vincentians, whether preparing to live, living, or having lived in missions "ad gentes," or are linked in some way to the missionary work of the Vincentian Family in their communities of origin.

5.2. The members of the Association can be:

5.2.1. **Members in Formation:** youth or adults of different Vincentian Associations:

- whether they are in preparation to undertake missionary activities in different Vincentian associations and wish to learn more of the character of our Association with a view to become a part of it;

- or they are in the first years on missions "ad gentes."

5.2.2. **Collaborative Members:** all persons who desire to collaborate with the Association by taking on concrete commitments of service.

5.2.3. **Honorary Members:** those who had been full members but now have not been incorporated in a mission for more than five years and wish to maintain a bond with this Association within their country of origin.

5.2.4. **Members with full right:** those laity, with a minimum of a previous two years missionary work "ad gentes," who renew their commitment to this Association every three years, without any limit to their renewals.

5.3. Enrollment and Withdrawal from Membership:

5.3.1. Those who aspire to be members with full right should be accepted in writing by the Coordinating Team after completing two years of lay ministry on the missions, and having come to know sufficiently the proper character of this Association and with a prior written application.

5.3.2. The members with full right on mission will renew their commitment to belong to the Association every three years in writing. They rescind that missionary commitment, when they consider it suitable and following dialogue concerning the reasons for their decision with some member of the Coordinating Team. In each case, in order to facilitate the organization of the ongoing missionary responsibilities, notice will be given six months in advance.

5.3.3. Members with full right lose this status if they pass more than five successive years without going on mission "ad gentes" work for at least one year's duration. To become honorary members they must make a request in writing.

5.3.4. The expulsion of members, with full right following dialogue with the person concerned, requires the agreement of an absolute majority of the Coordinating Team and the confirmation of the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and of the Daughters of Charity, or of his Delegate.

## **6. Commitments of the members**

6.1. **The members in formation** will endeavor to attain the attitudes and content proper to an integral missionary preparation. Also, they will be formed in a lifestyle proper to members with full right. MISEVI will help to coordinate and set the minimum requirements for this initial formation with the highest possible quality.

6.2. **Collaborative members** will have available to them needed information on the projects of the Association and will support the mission's well-being by way of prayer, management of projects, fund-raising, social awareness, help with formation, and payment of dues.

6.3. **Honorary members** will be informed in detail about the Association's projects and will cooperate with their own means to bring them to completion in the best possible manner. They will try to:

6.3.1. live a concrete commitment of service/evangelization of the poor;

6.3.2. be in communion with the mission by their prayer;

6.3.3. be concerned about permanent formation and collaborate in the preparation of the formation of members;

6.3.4. live out the sharing of goods with economic contributions according to the Internal Rule.

6.4. **Members with Full Right** will offer their highest interest by collaborating in the ends of the Association. More concretely, they will endeavor to:

6.4.1. give themselves generously to the missionary tasks defined in their mission commitment and in the communal pastoral projects;

6.4.2. try and deepen their Vincentian spirituality by a life of prayer, to bring their service into prayer along with a knowledge of Vincentian doctrine and witnesses;

6.4.3. offer suggestions and initiatives for the progress of the Association's identity;

6.4.4. be ready to join the Coordinating Team of the Association;

6.4.5. offer to the common fund the economic rewards of their mission according to the Internal Rule and the Common Project of each community.

## **7. Organization**

7.1. The **General Assembly** is the highest level of the Association's participation and government. All the members have the right of voice and vote.

7.1.1. Ordinarily it will meet every four years; its role is to review the Association's progress, give guidelines on a program for future activity, and review the financial accounts and the budget.

7.1.2. An extraordinary gathering will take place by agreement of the Coordinating Team, or by request of a third of the members with full right.

7.1.3. The General Assembly is validly constituted when it has been convoked by the Coordinating Team and two-thirds of the members are present. Decisions will be reached by an absolute majority on the first vote, or by a simple majority on the second, the exception being those for which the present Statutes indicate the need for another form of majority.

7.1.4. Members of the General Assembly:

- Ex Officio, the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and of the Company of the Daughters of Charity or his Delegate, and members of the Coordinating Team.

- By election, a representative of the members with full right, who work in each missionary district/diocese, elected by all the lay missionaries of the same district/diocese by secret vote and by simple majority.

- By election, once the results of the previous elections are known, five members with full right chosen as a slate from among all the members of full right not previously elected, by mail and by a simple majority.

- By election, a representation of one of the honorary members, another of the collaborative members, and another of the members in formation, elected among each category of members by internal secret ballot by mail and simple majority; the number of delegates for each representation will be decided by the Coordinating Team so that the total of the representatives does not exceed 25% of all members of the Assembly.

7.2. The **President** of the Association has the duty to:

- animate and coordinate the Association's life;
- represent it in civil and ecclesial situations;

- convoke the meetings of the Coordinating Team and plan the agenda;
- determine the distribution of functions of secretary, treasurer, and committee members on the Coordinating Team, after having consulted the members of this team;
- maintain contact with and accompany the missionary communities;
- maintain relations with the other branches of the Vincentian Family and other missionary movements.

7.2.1. The President will be chosen by the General Assembly in a secret ballot by the members with full right. An absolute majority is needed in the first two ballots; in case no one receives it, a third ballot is taken of the two who have obtained the highest vote, the one receiving the majority of votes is then elected.<sup>3</sup>

7.2.2. The election of the *President* must be confirmed by the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and of the Company of the Daughters of Charity.

7.3. The direction of the Association will involve a **Coordinating Team**.<sup>4</sup> It will act in accordance with the Statutes, the Internal Rule, the Spirituality Document, and the guidelines of the General Assemblies. Special attention will be given to the pastoral and community projects of the missionary communities.

7.3.1. The Coordinating Team will apply internally the functions of secretary, treasurer, and committee members in accordance with the decision made by the President.

7.3.2. The Coordinating Team will meet at least three times a year according to the plan established by the President and with the assurance of the presence of two-thirds of the members at the first convocation, and half at the second. Decisions will be made by an absolute majority.

7.3.3. This team will be composed of the President, three lay members, a Daughter of Charity, a Priest of the Congregation of the Mission, and two representatives of the Vincentian Family lay Associations who have members in MISEVI. At least three of them will reside geographically near the Permanent Secretariat.

7.3.4. The General Assembly, after the presentation of the possible candidates, will elect in three successive ballots the three lay members of the Coordinating Team. Any member of the Association with full right or any member of the General Assembly are eligible to be elected. These elections will be by secret ballot and will require an absolute majority on the first two ballots and a simple majority on the third.

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Canon 119.

<sup>4</sup> The members of the Coordinating Team are the "Major Officials" of the International Association; cf. Canon 318.

7.3.5. The Priest of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughter of Charity are nominated by the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and of the Daughters of Charity after prior consultation with the Visitors and Visitatrices of the interested provinces.

7.3.6. The two representatives of the Vincentian Associations will be nominated according to their own directional procedures and the guidelines of the Coordinating Team.

7.3.7. All the members of the Coordinating Team are elected or nominated for four years and can be renewed for a maximum of two more terms. The time given to this service will not be so reckoned as to forfeit the status of member with full right. The duration of the nominations of the Daughter of Charity and Vincentian Priest will be flexible, adapted to times set for other functions of coordination liable to unfold in the Vincentian Family, and for a maximum length of 12 consecutive years.

#### 7.4 **National Associations**

7.4.1. The consent of the International Coordinating Team is required to erect a **National Association**. The juridical erection of the said National Association and the approbation of its Statutes pertains to the competent ecclesial authority.<sup>5</sup>

7.4.2 The National Association has its own Statutes in conformity with universal Canon Law and the present International Statutes.

7.4.3 The National Statutes establish the particular norms which are considered appropriate for the country with regard to the organization of members, their rights and obligations, and the missionary work which the Association proposes to do.

7.4.4 The National President and the two Vincentian councillors (a priest of the Congregation of the Mission and a Daughter of Charity) will be elected or appointed according to the determination of the proper Statutes. The election or appointment must be confirmed by the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and of the Daughters of Charity.

7.4.5. The other appointments for the different offices of the Association will be made in conformity with the Common Law of the universal Church and the proper Statutes. The duration of the charge of the said offices is determined in the proper Statutes.

7.4.6 The National President informs the Permanent International Secretariat of the appointments made in his/her country.

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Canons 303 and 312.

## 8. Finances

8.1. The Association is a non-profit organization; its goods are for the poor. The usual way of collaboration will be voluntary and without remuneration, except in those special cases approved by the General Assembly. No members become employees of the Association.

8.2. The Association will help to generate among the different social groups and institutions with whom they collaborate sufficient financial backing to enable each one of the missionaries to provide for basic needs such as room and board, clothing, travel, and recreation according to the local circumstances of the mission where he/she is working.

8.3. Funding for the Association can come from:

- contributions and gifts from well-wishers or institutions,
- dues from Association members,
- revenue obtained from any stipends received for the work of lay missionaries,
- contributions from institutions for services rendered,
- other appropriate means.

8.4. An account will be set up with the primary purpose of reserving and investing some resources to help defray the insurance costs and for the return to the country of origin of those members with more than three years duration as members with full right.

8.5. The Coordinating Team has the duty of determining the criteria for and keeping account of all expenditures. The Treasurer will present an annual report of the accounts for the approval of the Coordinating Team. The Coordinating Team has the task of drawing up and approving the proposed budget, balance, and reports of the Association which will be sent annually to the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and of the Company of the Daughters of Charity.

## 9. Relations with the Vincentian family

9.1. The Association, with the independence of its full juridical personality and autonomy, is linked to the Vincentian charism and its spirituality; therefore, in the context mentioned, it recognizes the supreme authority of the **Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and of the Company of Daughters of Charity**.<sup>6</sup> It is for him to:

9.1.1. give guidelines for living the Vincentian charism,

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<sup>6</sup> In virtue of the pontifical rescripts conceded by His Holiness Pius IX on 20 June 1847 and 19 July 1850, the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity is the Director General of the Association of the Children of Mary Immaculate, presently known as the Association of Vincentian Marian Youth. In an analogous way, MISEVI asks that he exercise a similar mission, since it has common historical and charismatic roots.

9.1.2. see to the integrity of missionary expertise,

9.1.3. name the Priest of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughter of Charity who form part of the Coordinating Team,

9.1.4. confirm the Presidents elected by the General Assembly and by the National Assemblies,

9.1.5. propose possible commitments, mission areas, and themes for study.

9.2. The follow-up and formation in the Vincentian charism of all Association members requires collaboration with the Daughters of Charity and the Priests of the Congregation of the Mission, as among the members of the Vincentian lay Associations, or persons and institutions reflecting Vincentian charism; this spiritual accompaniment will be animated chiefly by the Priest of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughter of Charity on the Coordinating Team.

## **10. Reform of the statutes, amalgamation, and dissolution of the association**

10.1. The reform of the Statutes and the amalgamation of the Association with others who pursue the same ends must be agreed at the General Assembly and will require a majority of two-thirds of the valid votes as well as approval by the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and of the Company of the Daughters of Charity before being presented to the Holy See for its approbation.

10.2. The General Assembly may request of the Holy See the dissolution of the Association with the agreement of two-thirds of the valid votes accepted in extraordinary session, and ratified by the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and of the Daughters of Charity.

10.3. With the dissolution of the Association, the remaining financial holdings coming from the liquidation will be handed over to a non-profit making cause, as designated by the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and of the Company of Daughters of Charity, as proposed the General Assembly from among those who follow similar ends to those of the defunct Association and which have provided in their Statutes for a like disposal of their goods in case of dissolution.

# Appointments and Confirmations by the Superior General

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DATE	NAME	OFFICE	PROVINCE
20/05/99	Juan J. Díaz Catalán	CIF member	
20/05/99	José María Nieto	Curia Representative to SIEV	
30/05/99	Władysław Jankowicz	Director D.C. (+ 1 year)	Cracow
31/05/99	Geraldo Barbosa	Director D.C. 2/3	Belo Horizonte
31/05/99	Silvio Batista Martins	Director D.C. 2/3	Recife
03/06/99	Christian Sens	Visitor 3/3	Toulouse
03/06/99	Aurelio Londoño	Director D.C.	Cali
03/06/99	James Smith	Director D.C. (2° mandate)	New York
04/06/99	Luis María Laborda	National Director JMV	Spain
04/06/99	José Eugenio López García	Member Secr. Int. JMV	
04/06/99	José María Nieto	Secretary General	General Curia
12/06/99	Francisco Xavier Silva	Director D.C. 2/3	Fortaleza
16/06/99	Imre Sebestyén	Director D.C. 2/3	Hungary
30/06/99	Elmer Bauer	Treasurer General	General Curia

## **Feature**

### ***The Challenges Presented by GA '98***

#### ***Foreword***

Almost a year after the 39th General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission, *Vincentiana* wishes to invite its readers to reflect again on the Assembly in order to bring back its memory and to stimulate its applications. To this end, five members of the Congregation, who have specific competencies, were asked to write articles on each of the five commitments of the *Final Document* of our Assembly. These articles offer a reflection on those commitments by situating them in the reality of our world and by showing how they are pertinent today and are already, to a certain degree, in the process of application.

These articles, which were written freely by their authors, are not an "official commentary" on the *Final Document* but simply personal reflections offered by some members of the Congregation to the readers of *Vincentiana*.

The Editorial Board of *Vincentiana*

# **To Collaborate with the other members of the Vincentian Family**

## **Final Document, Commitment NE 1**

*By Benjamin Romo, C.M.  
Delegate of the Superior General  
for the Vincentian Family*

### **I. Introduction**

The General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission of 1998, which had as its theme: *The Vincentian Family in the world and the challenges for its mission on the threshold of the third millennium*, arrived at five commitments for each one of us, for our local communities and for our provinces. The first one speaks to us about collaboration with the other members of the Vincentian Family. We will treat that theme in this article.

These commitments are already concrete, but I think it's important that we raise a few questions, above all if we are thinking of putting them into practice: Why talk about collaboration with others? What is the goal of this collaboration? How can we collaborate? In practice what would be the actions that manifest this collaboration?

I will try to highlight some answers to these queries. I do that starting from the experience of collaboration which has already gone on and certain possibilities that can be seen on the horizon. All of this presents itself as a challenge for our mission as it faces the third millennium.

I will present four short sections: the first, on the goal of collaboration; the second, on some concrete ways of collaborating; the third, a word about the creation of structures for collaboration; lastly, a short conclusion.

### **II. Why Collaboration?**

A reading of the first commitment will tell us that collaboration has a very concrete goal which is to join forces, resources, possibilities and means in order to achieve together and more efficiently our evangelizing service of the poor, taking as a given that all of the Vincentian Family has been called to this end: Evangelizing and serving the poor in whatever time, circumstances or situation.

It is both healthy and Christian, moreover, to begin by recognizing our limitations, capabilities and possibilities and, because of that, we seek to join with others to become a

common force and a witness of the Church and Vincentian Family that make present the love of God for the unprotected of this world.

We seek unity with others, that is with lay Christians who have also assumed the Vincentian charism as a concrete way of living their faith and following Jesus , evangelizer of the poor. In the poor they find Jesus and serve him. We know, then, that by joining our forces we will have an immense potential for the evangelization and service of the poor.

When we recognize our limitations, we are called to change our hearts; or better, to let God=s grace change them. We are familiar with St. Vincent=s words: *The poor evangelize us*. This was not only a phrase for him, but a profound belief in God=s presence and voice manifested in the poor.

The final document of our last General Assembly says: *As members of the Congregation of the Mission we recognize the need for a change of heart in order to collaborate generously with the other members of the Vincentian Family*. This leads us to be humble and accept that our heart needs a change in order to understand how to serve the poor. The call to conversion is in knowing how to listen to the poor and the laity with whom we share our vocation and our service. They evangelize us and give us lights for the journey.

Christian conversion brings us to live and proclaim God=s Kingdom. Like Jesus and with Jesus, we have been called to extend the Kingdom of God in this world. Living and proclaiming this Kingdom means spreading our charism to others. It means extending the arms and the hearts of many so that they can manifest to the poor that God loves them and that this love becomes real in the works of justice and mercy which we undertake.

In short, collaboration with other members of the Vincentian Family brings us to serve the poor better, to renew our Vincentian vocation and charism, joining forces to go further and more efficiently in the effective construction of God=s Kingdom.

### **III. Concrete forms of collaboration**

There are many possibilities for collaboration in the interaction among the different branches of the Vincentian Family. The assembly document itself gives us four concrete actions that are the basis or foundation for achieving an effective coordination with others. They are:

- mutual listening
- knowledge of the other branches of the Vincentian Family
- sharing experiences of service of the poor
- common prayer and reflection

We might ask ourselves: What have we done as a Congregation, as provinces, as local communities and as individuals in these four areas mentioned above? What still needs to be done? Without a doubt it's worthwhile to reflect seriously on our own experience and the experience of others who in different circumstances have taken the road of the Vincentian Family and can serve us as a guide and a stimulus.

The experiences of collaboration and the possibilities which still exist have begun and can begin on the different levels of our community, from the international to the local and individual levels.

### **The International Level**

The Congregation of the Mission on the international level has taken some very concrete steps in showing an interest and collaborating in our growth as a family, both in formation and searching for works that might be a response to the urgent cries of the poor.

The doors of our last General Assembly were opened to allow lay people to enter and to introduce ourselves to them, giving them the floor with an receptive, listening attitude. Undoubtedly this was not only a new experience, but also a strong moment which helped us to know each other and pushed many delegates to look for this support and collaboration in their own countries.

At the beginning of this year, there took place in our general curia the Fifth Encounter of the heads of the different branches of the Vincentian Family. There were three days of work, in which there were moments of common prayer, time to share common concerns, plans and projects; finally ending with taking concrete commitments such as: a common Internet page, a book about Vincentian lay spirituality, maintaining communication...

*When we share our projects of service of the poor and the experience of working with them; when we listen together to each others testimonies of service and commitment, we enrich each other, we enlighten each other and we are disposed to find and follow new roads in the face of the new poor and the new poverties which emerge in our society. Sharing ideas, plans and projects is the best way to be open and disposed to grow as persons in fidelity to our charism.*

### **On the Provincial Level**

Our provinces have also made a great effort to collaborate with lay people, especially with those who share our charism. The visitors in some provinces have organized courses in the seminaries about knowing the Vincentian Family. National Commissions of the Vincentian Family have been formed by the heads of each of the branches of the Vincentian Family with periodic meetings for information as well as formation. There have also been

projects of promotion in coordination with lay Vincentians for the service of the poor.

In some provinces they have created a center of Vincentian animation. In others they've formed a Vincentian formation team made up of members of the different branches whose mission is the animation and promotion of the charism. In some situations they've done acts of solidarity by economically supporting a project.

There are also some provinces where they have taken the initiative of inviting each other to their respective national assemblies; the same has been done on the international level through congresses and meetings with specific themes of common interest.

Service, whether in missions or houses for attending the poor, have been formed and reinforced with support from other branches of the Vincentian Family. There was a house of the Daughters of Charity which was about to close, but, thanks to information and dialogue between the different branches of the Vincentian Family, it was possible for that work to continue. The poor definitely make out better this way.

*When we listen to one another, we are capable of discovering our riches as well as our weaknesses and faults; we can enrich the projects that we implement and organize for the poor. Some times one group will have the resources and others the need. On other occasions it will be the other way around. In this way a web of solidarity is established which ends up benefiting those who give and those who receive.*

## **The Local Level**

The initiative of praying as a united family has brought about many good results in different countries, regions and communities. The preparation and celebration of this common prayer has favored getting to know each other, formation and integration, including even the poor who have begun to participate in it. The common sharing of these moments has fostered mutual knowledge of the persons, the works and the services.

The consequences of this common prayer have been gestures of support and collaboration in a simple and everyday manner; mutual aid in assemblies and meetings for formation; formation material and resources for serving the poor have been shared and new lay people have been brought into the Vincentian Family. The list of these results would be very long. Everything flows from common knowledge, fraternal love and seeking after unity. St. Vincent's recommendation continues to be valid today: *Live in unity and God will bless you.*

The spiritual experience and the practice of Christian prayer sustain and give meaning to our commitment with the poor. People today look for guides and masters of prayer. On this level what do we offer the laity? What do they offer us? We need to find methods of prayer

that respond to the expectations of people today, especially young people; ways that lead us to an encounter with the God of the poor, the simple and the humble, the God who suffers the passion of Jesus, the God who invites us to an intimate, but not self-centered, prayer, the God who in the encounter moves us to express our entire life as love for the poor.

*The moments of prayer have greatly fostered the strengthening of our vocation and the growing numbers of them, not only in our community, but also in the rest of the Vincentian Family. It's urgent and convenient that we open our local communities to share our prayer with the members of the Vincentian Family, especially with young people.*

## **The Personal Level**

The accompaniment and formation of the laity is an important part of our vocation as a Congregation. Therefore, the different branches of the Vincentian Family cannot be a reality apart or foreign to our priestly ministry, neither on the missions, nor in secondary schools and universities, nor the parishes. In this way our ministry as Vincentian missionaries will be touched by the reality of the laity.

St. Vincent used to say: *It's not enough for me to love God if my neighbor does not love him.* This was a conviction that dynamized his commitment. Paraphrasing him, we might say: *It's not enough to serve and evangelize the poor if my neighbor doesn't evangelize as well.*

Today the branches of the Vincentian Family have abundant documents about organization, spirituality, etc. A first step we might take is being interested in knowing the reality of these Vincentian lay people. Only in that way can we be prepared to love and serve them. Only in this way will we be able to work together for the needy.

*A systematic and experiential knowledge of each branch of the Vincentian Family will lead us to live in an attitude of openness and frank collaboration with the other branches of the Vincentian Family. This knowledge will bring us to an awareness that we are, together with them, a richness and a transforming force capable of committing ourselves to the poor.*

## **IV. Creating structures of collaboration**

The General Assembly of 1998 had for its central theme collaboration with the Vincentian Family on the threshold of the third millennium, and in the line of creating structures to coordinate the mutual collaboration which is already going on or which will happen in the future. The Superior General, with his council, taking into account all of this, has thought it a good idea to have a delegate to the Vincentian Family. He will have as his mission sharing and respectfully promoting collaboration among the different branches of the Vincentian Family.

To continue, and bring to a close this section, I would like to mention possible actions which might be undertaken at the provincial and local levels:

**1E** Creating projects of initial and permanent formation with the other branches of the Vincentian Family, which will lead us to an updating of the Vincentian charism, e.g.: Vincentian spirituality, social documents of the Church, etc.

**2E** Creating or enabling webs of communication which will lead us to establish possibilities for mutual support, especially in times of emergency.

**3E** Fostering common projects which are destined for the service of the poor and mutual collaboration in the different works of the apostolate and service.

Could we do anything more? What other concrete collaborative actions could we take in our provinces and local houses? Our updated Vincentian charism is very valuable and urgently needed, what more can we do so that others can participate in it?

## V. Conclusion

The laity have much to teach us from their own journey of faith and testimony of life. With the same attitude that Jesus had, we should approach them to listen humbly. They also possess the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth and light.

Two Convictions:

**First.** Ministry with lay people at the end of this second millennium is not something optional for us, but rather something urgent among our ministerial priorities. It pertains to the end of the Congregation of the Mission (C 1). It is an urgent task which requires not only an affective conviction, but also effective commitment.

**Second.** The third millennium will be the era of the laity. They will be the protagonists of announcing the evangelizing and missionary message. We have the great and beautiful mission of forming, animating and urging them to take on a role in society, building up the Kingdom of God in the world. Sharing our charism with them is the best way to reaffirm it and make it grow in ourselves.

Today we are no longer an isolated Congregation, but rather a united family which, as such, has no other goal than making itself present among the poor to discover together with them God's love, seeking roads of justice and love which will generate life.

(John P. Prager, C. M. translator)

## **Responding together to the Cry of the Poor. Final Document, Commitment N° 2**

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### **The Cry of the Poor**

"The history of all societies which have existed until today is a history of class struggle" stated the Communist Manifesto in 1848. In a note to the English edition of the Manifesto in 1888, Engels clarified that the written history of class struggles was possible only after the investigations of Haxfausen about Russia, of Maurer about Teutonic tribes and of Morgan about the *gens* and the tribe in diverse parts of the world had shown that the predominant social organization in the non-written prehistory of humanity, "from India to Ireland," had been based for centuries on the socialized property of land and flocks of domesticated animals.

The dissolution of these forms of community social organization through diverse systems of private appropriation of the basic means of production resulted progressively in the differentiation of classes, above all in the fundamental differentiation, which depended on the possession or non-possession of the means of production. Beginning with this fact, history has been written always by those who possess, and by their comrades behind and on the backs of those who do not possess.

Effectively, history books studied in schools and universities in the last one hundred fifty years are full of high-sounding names of kings, counts, bankers, great industrialists, conquerors, artists at the service of the powerful, intellectuals.... not even the written history of the Church is free of this. Where in these books are the immense masses of those who possess nothing more than their own arms in order to produce ? It would seem they were born mute.

But they were not born mute. They also knew how to speak and shout because they were human beings, though at times it would not seem so. They cried out after their own fashion. For example, for sixteen years of the adult life of Vincent de Paul, from 1631 to 1647, there was in practically all the great cities and regions of France very violent and numerous local upheavals of farmers and city workers, enraged by the exploitations to which they were subjected.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See the maps at the end of the book, "*Les soulèvements populaires en France au XVIIe siècle*", Boris Porshnev. Flammarion, Paris, 1972 (trans. Spanish, "*Los levantamientos populares...*", ed. Siglo XXI, Madrid, 1978). Not only in France; also, for example, in Russia and in China during the same years. See R. Mousnier, "*Fureurs paysannes...*", Calmann-Levy, Paris, 1967 (trans. Spanish: "*Furores campesinos...*" ed. Siglo XXI, Madrid, 1976).

What the dispossessed wanted to say with their violent outbreak was to Richelieu, prime minister of the king and cardinal of the Church, little more than a problem of public order which he tried to resolve with bloody repression. For Richelieu the outcasts had nothing to say; they were better silent and submissive, working for others as though they were mules. He himself classifies them as mules in his memoirs.

For a man such as Vincent de Paul, his contemporary, the poor were far from passive mules who ought to suffer with resignation the games and whims of the powerful. For Vincent de Paul the poor person is, though at times he does not appear human, the living image of Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup> To work for them is a sure road which arrives at nothing less than the true God, summit of all human life, because *"to serve the poor is to go to God"*<sup>3</sup>.

But to think so, it is necessary to have faith, a real faith which can never seem to anyone like an "opium of the people". To see in the poor the living image of Jesus Christ did not impede Vincent de Paul from having a very subversive vision of 'profane' history (*"we live off the sweat of the poor"*) and also of 'sacred' history (*"among the poor is found true religion, the living faith"*)<sup>4</sup>.

For he who has faith, the outcry of the poor cannot be before all *"a ghost which threatens Europe"*, against which *"...the pope and the czar..., the French radicals and the German spy police"* have entered *"a holy alliance"*, as the Manifesto so provocatively states. For he who has faith the outcry of the poor cannot be anything else but a call of grace, an echo of the words of Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth who invites those who believe in Him to dedicate themselves, as He does, to the evangelization and redemption of the poor. They are the true *"masters and lords"* who teach us what is the meaning of true history, the history of salvation. Salvation history has as its own object the salvation of humanity which ought to be realized already on the Earth. Final salvation, eternal life, the pure grace and gift of the God of Jesus Christ, is no longer history but rather the final consummation of history, post-history, the definitive end of history.

He who announces the Good News of salvation to the poor is an infallible sign that the Savior (the only savior) is acting already in history (Mt 11.5). A Daughter of Charity of the first generation saw it with total clarity, inspired no doubt by her founder<sup>5</sup>. The salvation of the poor is the vehicle of historical earthly salvation for the rest of humanity, though perhaps not as Marx and Engles expected from the salvation of the proletariat class. Also the poor are certainly the bearers of eternal salvation for those who work for their redemption and liberation, as Vincent de Paul so firmly believed<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> XI, 32 / XI, 725 ed. in Spanish.

<sup>3</sup> IX, 5 / IX, 25

<sup>4</sup> XI, 201 / XI, 120-121.

<sup>5</sup> IX, 61 / IX, 74

<sup>6</sup> IX, 235 / IX, 241.

With great reason, the document of the General Assembly qualifies its vision as a "*prophetic teaching of Saint Vincent*", a teaching which joins with and continues the best of the ancient prophets and the best of the best, the greatest and last of them all, Jesus Christ, the one sent by God the Father to evangelize and redeem the poor without voice who do not seem to make history and certainly do not write it.

## **Responding to the Cry of the Poor**

Responding to the cry of the poor is responding to the Spirit of God the Father who spoke first through the prophets and then definitively through His own Son on behalf of those whose cry does not appear in history books, though at times it does so appear as a subversive cry rejected by the Powerful of this world who want to control history.

To Saint Vincent de Paul this cry never seemed subversive and he did not reject it. All was just the opposite: hearing this outcry and trying to respond to it as a servant of those who cry out became the inspiring principle of his life from 1617 until his death in 1660. The General Assembly document states correctly, "*He has responded prophetically and creatively to the outcry of the outcasts of his time*"<sup>7</sup>. This evangelical model "*questions us once again at the beginning of the new millennium*"<sup>8</sup>.

The outcry of the poor does not just question the Vincentian Family. The entire Church of Jesus Christ will give proof of its fidelity to the Spirit which ought to inspire it always if it gives evidence not only of a concern for the poor but also of its "preferential option" for them. This is the best proof of its fidelity. "*What a blessing for us to show that the Holy Spirit guides its Church working for the poor!*"<sup>9</sup>.

Even with ups and downs and serious deficiencies, the Church of Jesus Christ has never stopped evangelizing the poor. It could not have done so without ceasing to be the Church of Jesus Christ, because evangelization of the poor is one of the 'marks' that, together with the four marks of classical theology, ought to define and characterize at all times the historical profile of the true Church.

Some years before the Communist Manifesto was presented to the world with the purpose of being the answer to the outcry of the impoverished, some voices within the Church itself had arisen to remind it (in light of an official policy geared to defend itself from other apparently more fundamental and urgent challenges) that the fundamental challenge to the Gospel and to the Church continues to be, as it had always been, the proclamation of the Good News in the world of the poor, a world which was, certainly, infinitely more encompassing than that held in mind by the authors of the Manifesto. This was defined as a sub-world of the industrial proletariat, above all in Europe. One of the voices; though not the only one, that defined the

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<sup>7</sup> Convictions, 2.

<sup>8</sup> Commitments, 2.

<sup>9</sup> XI, 37 / XI, 730.

problem with greater richness and decision was a voice with pure Vincentian tones, the voice of Frederic Ozanam.

Still the 'official' Church delayed some fifty years in fully owning the idea. But when it finally did so in 1891, it did so with clarity and courage in the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*: "*It is urgent to provide for the good of peoples of humble condition, because the majority battle in miserable and calamitous conditions*"<sup>10</sup>. Leo XIII does not make this declaration motivated by politically strategic reasons in order to, for example, wrest support from leftist movements in the struggle on behalf of the poor. He does it motivated by his pastoral obligations as Vicar of Christ ("*the conscience of our apostolic office*")<sup>11</sup> to "*be watchful of common salvation*"<sup>12</sup>, that is, for the salvation of all humanity.

Also, the encyclical of Leo XIII seemed designed to try to redeem above all poverty in the industrial world. Later documents until this very day, however, have widened the horizon, making it clear that the so-called Social Doctrine of the Church is intended to focus on the redemption not only of poor industrial workers exploited by their bosses and contractors<sup>13</sup>, but of the poor in the entire world.

### **Responding together to the cry of the poor**

The Vincentian Family wants to participate fully in the vision of the Church. By doing so, it thinks it not only does not betray or distort the vision of its inspirer, but rather that it does so precisely to be faithful to that vision, adapting it to what evangelization of the poor in the next millennium demands of the Family itself and of the Church. It wishes to do so also precisely as a Family. Well then, will there be found among the ideas of Saint Vincent some base to speak today with a solid foundation about 'Vincentian Family'? Or will this be a concept motivated, for example, by a lack of vocations in some of its branches? Or will it have arisen from an obvious need to join forces in order to confront with greater pastoral efficacy the challenges presented today to the Mission, or those which will be presented in the now approaching new millennium?

The last two reasons, lack of vocations and pastoral efficacy, have also influenced without a doubt, the creation of the expression 'Vincentian Family' and the growing enthusiasm which is felt for it in many parts of the world. Yet Saint Vincent would also have supported without doubt some of this expression and enthusiasm. In fact he saw various foundations which depended on him (Congregation of the Mission, Confraternities of Charity, Daughters of Charity, Ladies of Charity) as institutions which, though diverse, ought to develop **in collaboration** one unified program of integral evangelization of the poor. So he expressed it with total brightness and clarity

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<sup>10</sup> *Rerum Novarum*, 1.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>13</sup> "Handed over the workers, each alone and defenseless, to the inhumanity of employers and the unbridled greed of competitors" (op. cit., 1).

in one of his letters:

*"Our small company has given itself to God for the bodily and spiritual service of the poor people..., in such a way that at the same time it has worked on the missions for the salvation of souls, it has sought a means to alleviate the sick through the Confraternities of Charity...The Ladies of Charity are another witness still of the grace of our vocation...The Daughters of Charity have entered into the plan of Providence as a means which God has given us to do through their hands that which we cannot do through our own...; they dedicate themselves, **just as we do**, to save and help the neighbor. And if I would say '**with us**', I would not say anything contrary to the Gospel, but rather something in conformity with the practice of the Primitive Church since Our Lord was served by some women who followed Him"<sup>14</sup>.*

The letter was written by Saint Vincent well toward the end of his life, in February 1660, seven months before his death. This implies that the text which we have cited should be seen as his definitive vision, a type of spiritual will for all the institutions which appeal to Saint Vincent de Paul as their founder and inspirer. The shortage of vocations in one or another of his institutions and the motive of greater pastoral efficacy can be very good legitimate reasons which bring the members of the Vincentian institutions to respond together to the cry of the poor. The letter cited demonstrates clearly that the Vincentian institutions experience something more fundamental in this theme: fidelity today to the true intention and to the true spiritual and pastoral vision of its original inspirer.

In conclusion let us add a final observation about some lines from the document of the General Assembly which directly affect the theme of this article. The text of the Assembly says (in III. Commitments, 2. Responding together to the cry of the poor, a):

*"Collaborate with other members of the Vincentian Family dedicating more people, more time and more economic means to the evangelization of the poor, with the purpose of impelling their human and spiritual promotion".*

The Vincentian institutions cannot be asked --- as these lines would seem to do upon first reading them--- to dedicate **more** people, **more** time and **more** economic means to the evangelization of the poor, because all of them have been founded to dedicate to this evangelization **all** their people, **all** their time and **all** their economic means. We do not think we make a false reading of this brief text if we think that the true intention, in the general context of the document, is not that more people, etc., be dedicated to the evangelization of the poor, but rather that the different Vincentian institutions ought to intensify in personnel and economic collaboration that which they are already doing in distinct parts of the world to respond together to the outcry of the poor.

(John Carney, C.M., translator)

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<sup>14</sup> VIII, 238-239 / VIII, 226-227.

## **Collaboration in Formation** **- Final document, engagement n°3 -**

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### **In line with our times**

The post-conciliar documents of the Church which refer to the formation of aspirants to the priesthood and religious life usually refer to four elements of formation: human, spiritual, intellectual and apostolic. The same can be said of the Ratio Formationis for the Internal Seminary and Major Seminary of the Congregation of the Mission. The latter, due to proper conditions, also mentions community and Vincentian formation. In the Congregation of the Mission Vincentian formation colors all aspects of formation. In correct proportion, *salvatis salvandis*, this also concerns the Daughters of Charity and lay Vincentians inasmuch as the Magisterium of the Church examines in greater or lesser degree the formation plans of the various groups in the Vincentian Family.

We will refer, often briefly, to different elements of formation, pointing out in each those parts which follow the Vincentian vision of formation.

Human formation has as its end not only a high degree of personal maturity, but a final goal of enablement for apostolic activity. The members of the Vincentian Family must develop in this area of formation above all certain values, such as: respect for persons, compassion, acceptance, and generosity. Spiritual formation leads to personal and group resemblance to Jesus Christ. Although it is common to all the faithful, the use of certain means to achieve spiritual formation such as hearing the word of God, sacramental life and prayer, in the case of a Vincentian, spiritual formation demands a quality which reflects the charism received from its founder and shared with the institution to which each one belongs. This presupposes then, that the members of the Vincentian Family, as they receive an adequate spiritual formation, will attempt above all to direct their energies to the service of charity, in order to develop an effective and practical love of the poor. Intellectual formation aims at achieving a sufficiently solid understanding of the Christian message in order to be sure of one's faith and announce the Gospel. Granted that the Vincentian knows, to a great degree, the contents of the Creed, he must also assimilate the social doctrine of the Church, the causes of poverty, and whatever refers to inculturation in the faith. Apostolic formation for the different branches of the family attempts to direct personal and group energies toward the

evangelization of the poor, especially through service and proclamation. To achieve an adequate apostolic formation reflection and study are required, faced with practical pastoral problems of poor social environments. In the same way, all Vincentians, following these norms, must develop a personal as well as communitarian missionary conscience.

Vincentian formation must be considered fundamental and absolutely necessary. Its purpose is to make all members of the Vincentian Family, following their own charism, followers of Jesus Christ, Evangelizer of the Poor. Vincentian formation is not limited to a particular moment in a person's life, but must be cultivated during a lifetime. It involves reflection, study, and in no small way the practical and concrete practice of charity. Vincentian formation, must impregnate and penetrate the entire personal and group formative process so that the entire Vincentian Family may live intensely the experience of St. Vincent. It must make sense of and unify all aspects of formation. To this end, not only theoretic knowledge, but experiences and practical love of the poor, also contribute.

Also, it is incumbent on all members of the Vincentian Family, to discover and analyze with special attention the past and present history of the institution to which they belong.

### **Prelude to The 1998 Assembly**

Interest in the Vincentian Family greatly increased in the period between the General Assemblies of the Congregation of the Mission of 1992 and 1998, but especially during this last Assembly. The Superior General and his council, have promoted this new dynamism on a universal level. For a great number of missionaries of course this was nothing new. Many others, on the contrary, with the help of newer circumstances, have discovered a world unknown to them: that of the Vincentian Family. Both have realized that the concept and reality of the Vincentian Family have reached a level previously unknown.

Practice and subsequent reflection on the Vincentian Family in recent years have proceeded in complementary directions. Some studies have referred to criteria such as membership, description of each group, signs of post-conciliar renewal, identity of each branch and, in particular, impulse given to the life and apostolate of the Vincentian Family. In the present decade, on the threshold of the third millennium, concepts of mutual acquaintance and communion, of unity in the diversity of charism, of collaboration and of its proper mission, have circulated within the Vincentian Family. One area which has aroused much interest has been that of formation. And that is the subject of this paper.

## **Responsibility of The Congregation of The Mission**

The three most significant communities founded by St. Vincent for apostolic purposes were the Confraternity of Charity, the Congregation of the Mission, and the Company of the Daughters of Charity. Owing to its foundation and also to historical practice, we may rightly affirm that the Congregation of the Mission always assumed the responsibility of contributing to the Vincentian spiritual animation and formation of the other two groups. With the passage of the years the identical or similar role would be exercised in relation to other Vincentian lay groups which appeared from time to time. It is true that the degree of intimacy and involvement with each one of these was, in practice, unequal, due not only to the juridical bases on which these relationships were established, but also to the greater or lesser degree of empathy between the C. M. and other Vincentian groups.

Today the C. M., in its Constitutions, Statutes, and documents emanating from General Assemblies, openly manifests its convictions on its responsibilities in regard to offering a good Vincentian formation to the associations founded by St. Vincent or which manifest his spirit (C. 17; S. 7, 1; Final Document, G.A. 1992 & 1998).

## **Collaboration in Formation**

According to the dictionary, collaboration means: working with others in a common task, helping to achieve a determined goal. Collaboration is seen, therefore, in the realization of a project, undertaken by several persons with the intention of carrying it through. There are two elements: plurality of persons or institutions, and an end or goal to be reached, which in our case is simply achieving a good specific formation for the benefit of the members of the Vincentian Family.

It is not our intention to go into excessive detail in regard to formation. But nevertheless we would like to mention a few notions, since we are treating of a complex, necessary, and urgent matter.

Formation has general and specific elements. It is a process in which a person or group grows in resemblance to Christ, realizing at the same time conformity to the charism of the institution to which each one belongs. Certain Christian values, both general and specific, are sought, at the same time respecting the multiple variety of social and cultural expressions of each locale.

On the other hand formation seeks the integral development of the person. This nevertheless, is not limited to individual aspects, but to developing the capacity to live and act as a member of a body. At the same time it tries to offer to each person a specified, solid plan, open to a society in profound transformation, always in agreement with one's vocation. Formation advances through information, through knowledge of the

founder and the history of the association, through corresponding apostolic experiences. The development of a historical and experiential sense of its particular mission is today a considerable part of formation in Vincentian institutes.

### **Declaration of the General Assembly**

The General Assembly met in Rome from 6 to 31 July 1998. From 9 to 14 representatives of different Vincentian Family units participated in the sessions. This turned out to be a novel and very valuable tactic. The Final Document bears the title: "With the Vincentian Family we face the challenges of the Mission at the threshold of the new Millennium." The approved text contains many contributions which refer to the Vincentian Family, all based on studies undertaken during the last decade. It contains several sections: introduction, challenges, convictions, commitments, and conclusion. It is addressed directly to the Congregation of the Mission, but also, by way of a guide, and with a marked tone of invitation, to the different components of the Vincentian Family.

The Congregation of the Mission, after two or three months of relative calm following the Assembly, is now hurrying to disseminate and apply the Document in many different places and cultures within the Vincentian Family. Putting into practice a mandate of a General Assembly takes time, an adequate methodology, but above all, a political vision and a great sense of responsibility.

### **Making Decisions Effective**

The challenges indicated in the Final Document synthesize some of the actual signs of the times which the Congregation of the Mission must keep in mind as it undertakes its missionary activities: the poor, new cultural horizons, and the new evangelization. Convictions attempt to individualize some of the evangelical and Vincentian motivations which nourish the life and apostolate of the Congregation of the Mission: the Lord sends apostles, the vitality of the Vincentian charism, fidelity in following Jesus Christ, and pastoral charity.

The commitments adopted by the General Assembly, five in all, place the Congregation in predetermined attitudes as it faces the future: collaboration with the Vincentian Family, response to the poverties of our time, collaboration in formation, international missions, and the use of mass media for evangelization. The General Assembly, through the decisions adopted and stated in the Final Document, has designed a new evangelization project for the Congregation which now it intends to actualize together with the other components of the Vincentian Family. For this reason it is no exaggeration to call the present moment a time of hope. The responsibility of putting into practice these five commitments now rests upon all the missionaries of the Congregation of the Mission; priests, brothers, students.

## **The Third Commitment: Collaboration in Formation**

This section refers to the initial and permanent formation of the missionaries of the Congregation of the Mission and lay Vincentians. In order to overcome the possible inconvenience which the excessive homogenization of the various Vincentian branches presents, the document invites us to respect the historical experience and traditions of each Vincentian group. It also alludes to mutual collaboration in formation, without forgetting the autonomy of each group.

As is clearly seen, the General Assembly repeatedly asks that the Congregation of the Mission collaborate in formation, but always manifesting an attitude of maximum respect for the singular characteristics of each Vincentian group.

At the same time this section of the document insists, in humble tones, that it is not suggesting any great and novel changes. Its intent is to take advantage of existing situations and offer to the various components of the Vincentian Family a strong sense of belonging, as has been accentuated during the last decade. This third commitment contains, after a short introduction, three sections: formation of our own, of formators, and of the Vincentian Family.

### **Initial and permanent formation of our own**

This section directly affects all missionaries of the Congregation of the Mission, be they in initial formation or in the latter. In general terms the General Assembly broadens the scope of our existing formation, so that from now on our programs will include all that concerns the Vincentian Family and, in particular, the relationship of the Congregation of the Mission to those entities that share our charism, in order to construct a solid edifice of mutual relations. Towards this end, on our part, nothing could be better than attempting to know better the other groups, to help them grow in a sense of belonging and, of course, opening to them the opportunity to serve and evangelize the poor.

The Assembly document goes farther. Missioners who dedicate themselves to the formation of others should at the same time get to know their subjects. Vincentian groups have much to teach to members of the Congregation of the Mission. They often help us to discover the freshness and modernity of the Vincentian charism. They can often show us new forms and manners of actualizing our charism within the many different cultural and social environments of the world. There are many examples of this which are useful to recall. Day by day an increasing number of Daughters of Charity and lay Vincentians are teaching in the internal and major seminaries of the Congregation of the Mission. At the same time their names are showing up on programs of meetings, workshops, congresses, and formation courses being offered to the entire Vincentian Family, including members of the Congregation of the Mission. And not infrequently do

we see a Daughter of Charity animating retreats directed to missionaries of the Congregation of the Mission.

The Assembly then indicates several disciplines which must be considered by the provinces in their plans of formation: causes of poverty, study of languages, Church social doctrine, participating in the CIF and similar activities. In this way the use of these means will benefit formation and, in the end, the mission itself.

Why this insistence on the part of the Assembly on the initial and permanent formation of our members? The answer should not scandalize anyone. First of all, the need we have of more formators. The lack of confreres who specialize in formation is well known in not a few provinces of the Congregation of the Mission. This is due in part, but not exclusively, to the gradual abandonment of seminaries where our missionaries used to teach. Another cause is the closing of Major Seminaries in many provinces, seminaries where our candidates received their philosophical-theological formation. Actually the greater part of the students of the Congregation of the Mission attend study centers not run by the Congregation. This fact can be considered normal and even advantageous. But what is not so acceptable is the small number of Vincentians who teach in these centers. In the same way we can attribute the lack of specialization to at least a sufficient group of missionaries in each province which offer a third factor: the option for certain specific ministries, for example parish work, for which knowledge of formation is minimal.

The General Assembly, realizing that lack of formators affects the Congregation of the Mission., invites the provinces to put into practice the necessary means to find an adequate solution. So, in order to raise the level of initial and permanent formation, there must be, above all, cooperation on the part of the provinces. It is incumbent on the Provincial Assemblies, and particularly on the Visitors and Councils, to examine the situation and arrive at decisions in agreement with those taken by the General Assembly.

The call of the General Assembly, secondly, is due to the lack, many times proven, of Vincentian formation, and very notably, of sufficient information and the sense of belonging to the Vincentian Family. One sector of missionaries of the Congregation of the Mission has in fact remained aloof from happenings of the recent past and the reality of the Vincentian Family, and consequently has little or no experience of the affective and effective closeness of the various family groups. We can see therefore the convenience of the stimulus given by the Assembly towards the formation of missionaries in order to increase relationships and collaboration with the rest of the Vincentians. Wherever we may find ourselves in the Congregation of the Mission, we must, as the occasion arises, in accord with the voice of the General Assembly, encourage everything referring to the Vincentian Family, so that all together we may undertake, with greater guarantee of success, evangelization in the third millennium.

## **Formation of our formators**

The General Assembly addressed this topic with great clarity and decision. It is not in vain to state that sooner or later the Congregation of the Mission will depend to a certain degree on the formation of young missionaries, and that this be possible, of those who will carry out the duty of formation in the near future. The provinces are invited to put into practice all necessary means, including economic, to offer the best preparation possible to present and future formators. Furthermore the Assembly calls for interprovincial cooperation to assure the formation of formators, indicating three paths to follow: mobility and interchange of formators, providing economic help to needy provinces, that provinces accept confreres from other geographic areas. And the Superior General asks that, having examined the pros and cons and if it be judged opportune, extraordinary means be taken to insure the formation of formators. The General Assembly suggests two possible ways: the establishment of one or more international centers of formation, and a traveling team of experts which would visit provinces or geographic areas where missionaries of the Congregation of the Mission labor. No door is closed. Time and circumstances will indicate what should be done at each moment. In calling for this collaboration the Superior General and his Council, keeping in mind what the General Assembly approved, have initiated a process of discernment with the purpose of arriving at opportune decisions in this matter.

The General Assembly, without going into too many details, makes a distinction between the formation of professors and formators. Without excluding the former it makes special reference to the latter. For this reason it alludes to some special obligations of the Vincentian formator. It accompanies and supports the candidate in his integral growth: his vocation, the option for priesthood or layman, Vincentian spirituality, and missionary priesthood.

We wonder: Does the insistent call of the General Assembly to prepare formators respond to a real necessity? Is it opportune at the present time? Have we been negligent during these late decades in regard to this decisive activity, formation of formators?

Allow us to respond, based not on more or less well known preconceived theories, but on experience garnered by the writer in his post of Assistant General, and by those who have affirmed the constant and clear reality of the greater part of the Congregation of the Mission.

The Congregation of the Mission gives evidence by its own life of a novel fact. As the second millennium ends and the third is about to commence, the Congregation of the Mission is moving from the northern hemisphere to the southern. As the experts predict, during the next 25 years the Congregation of the Mission will experience a notable growth in the Latin American, African and Asian countries, contrary to what will take place in Europe and the U.S.A. In the majority of the provinces of the Congregation of

the Mission, not excluding Europe and U.S.A., the lack of formators is very evident. In every case the paucity of prepared and sufficiently motivated formators is, from every point of view much more evident in most, but not all, the provinces of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Precisely in the places where day by day the number of candidates knocking at the doors of our houses of formation is increasing.

The respective Visitors are personally experiencing the problems and difficulties of those who lack formators, and do not find an ideal formula for solving so great a challenge. Sooner or later the solution will be found right in those places where the problem exists. But for the immediate present we have, up to a certain point and in a provisional way, the solution in interprovincial collaboration. The help offered by those provinces gifted with personnel and at times also with economic means to needy provinces is decisive and absolutely necessary at this time as we establish and make firm the presence of the Congregation of the Mission in the aforementioned continents. This is one of the goals which the Congregation of the Mission must face with firm decision as we begin the third millennium.

We should not be surprised that the General Assembly, faced with so many facts and necessities, has urged the Congregation of the Mission to undertake without delay proper action. Those provinces which have no formators should give this ministry first consideration and so order their provincial plans and distribution of personnel. Preparation of a formator demands economic means and time. Its number one enemy is improvisation, especially in those provinces where the number of vocations has dropped considerably and, theoretically, they have prepared formators. The reality is different. On losing a formator, these Visitors in many cases have no confreres prepared and motivated to take up this delicate ministry.

There are many causes which contribute to the situation we face. During the three first decades after Vatican II the preferences of the missionaries were for directly pastoral ministries. The strong impulse given to reflection on Vincentian spirituality and in particular to the end of the Congregation of the Mission induced not a few confreres to think that the pastoral ministry, with care of souls, agreed more authentically to the thought of our Founder than, for example, the formation of our own. Another factor, of a different nature, must be added: parish ministry, during these final years of the century, has absorbed a greater number of confreres than at any other time in our history. Through parishes, without a doubt, a great missionary labor has been realized, frequently in truly poor areas. Nevertheless this ministry, so valid to evangelization, has brought some inconvenient results. A growing number of missionaries have felt a reluctance to accept other ministries, for example, formation of our own candidates and of diocesan clergy. Nor has another factor gone unnoticed. A missionary working in a parish often, not always, sees quickly the positive results of his pastoral efforts. Experience teaches that the same does not happen in the case of those dedicated to formation, who must wait for years to measure the fruits of their efforts. This is definitely a factor which, added to

those already mentioned, has contributed to a certain distancing and dissatisfaction among many missionaries for the ministry of formation.

Considering what we have written, and the fact that we find ourselves about to begin the next millennium, it behooves us to urge, following the word of the General Assembly, the preparation of formators. We must take advantage of this moment to take the necessary steps leading to a satisfactory solution in the area of the formation of our own.

### **Formation of the Vincentian Family**

The General Assembly, in a change of tactics, imagines different groups, members of the Vincentian Family, knocking at the doors of the Congregation of the Mission, seeking help in their formation. In reality, this does happen frequently. The General Assembly seriously begs the provinces to take the necessary steps to answer this need. The vitality, in greater or less degree, of the different groups is real and their needs arise and are evident in their local ambience. The solution of these needs is usually in the hands of those who know, from up close, the situation. According to the General Assembly, it seems inadequate to look to entities geographically and culturally distant, when the solution really is close at hand.

Descending to details the General Assembly refers to the formation of different Vincentian groups under two headings: initial and permanent. The Assembly reminds the missionaries of the advisability of giving a hand to existing groups who may be faltering because of lack of vitality. They also invite the missionaries to accompany local groups that enjoy good health, since permanent formation must be considered opportune for all and at all times.

More surprising yet is the call of the General Assembly to set up formation teams composed of missionaries of the Congregation of the Mission and members of other groups of the Vincentian Family, Daughters of Charity, and laity. In this way the General Assembly goes beyond the era when formation of the Vincentian Family involved two groups: usually the Congregation of the Mission and the group being formed, made up of members of the Vincentian Family. The General Assembly very wisely refutes the former vision of things and opts for the creation of joint formation teams. Certainly, at the present time, and even during the next few years, the task of the spiritual and Vincentian formation of lay Vincentians will continue to fall upon, for the most part, the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity.

From what has been said we arrive at a conclusion: retreat directors, missionaries, Daughters of Charity, and whoever in the future will join this group ought to know Vincentian spirituality and at the same time the peculiarities of the associations with whom they will collaborate as formators. They will make certain that the qualities and

life of these associations be based beyond all doubt on Vincentian bases, avoiding all admixture with other spiritualities.

The Final Document goes one step farther. It invites the provinces of the Congregation of the Mission to open themselves to organisms already in existence to receive permanent formation. Doubtlessly this treasure, if accepted, will be of benefit to all. Sometimes created structures feel frustrated for not being used sufficiently. The influence of new groups can contribute to revitalizing these. Even a group enjoying full realization of its objectives could be aided by the extension of its area of activity, if in this way it reaches different branches of the Vincentian Family. The Final Document invites us to consider these and other alternatives that refer to mutual collaboration.

## **Conclusion**

The General Assembly has placed in the hands of the missionaries of the Congregation of the Mission a document in which is found the commitment, among others, to collaboration in formation. It is up to the missionaries to assimilate and put into practice these commitments. Without doubt this is a time of grace for the Vincentian Family. The Congregation of the Mission has broadened its pastoral horizons. It has explicitly assumed a particular responsibility: to collaborate with the rest of the Vincentian Family in formation. This collaboration affects the Congregation of the Mission, but at the same time it is open to the other components of the Vincentian Family. The missionary, on his part, is disposed to give of himself, but also to receive. He recognizes that he is an agent of formation, but also a recipient of the same. He faces the beginning of a millennium, collaborating closely with the Daughters of Charity and the laity. The members of the Vincentian Family, gifted with a good formation, guarantee the evangelization of the poor in the very -near future.

St. Vincent appreciated the ministry of formation. Speaking to the missionaries he invited them to contemplate Jesus Christ, who evangelized the poor, but also formed the apostles and a group of women. He told the missionaries: "What a great blessing of God it is to find ourselves in the same state in which the Son of the Eternal Father found himself, that we direct some women who serve God and the public in the best way they are of" (SV XI, 193).

(Translated by: John V. Kennedy, C.M.)



# The international missions

- Final Document, Commitment n\_ 4 -

*Victor Bieler, C.M.  
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To begin this essay I cite from the Final Document of the General Assembly 1998 in *Vincentiana* July-October 1998, p. 395-396:

"Today, as never before, the Church has the opportunity of bringing the Gospel, by witness and word, to all people and nations. I see the dawning of a new missionary age, which will become a radiant day bearing an abundant harvest, if all Christians and the missionaries and the young churches in particular, respond with generosity and holiness to the calls and challenges of our time.<sup>1</sup> All of us are invited to contribute to the preparation of the new Christian springtime by being docile to the action of the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup>

Since the Holy Spirit has already opened the way to new forms of collaboration in some of our international missions and in other already established ones, we commit ourselves to:

- a) encourage broad participation of the members of groups within the Vincentian Family, as well as of individual Vincentian collaborators, in both the established missions *ad gentes* founded by the provinces and in those under the direction of the Superior General;
- b) establish a commission to develop a "*ratio missionum*" (guidelines for our missions), concerning: inculturation and north-south collaboration, criteria for accepting new missions, the process for selecting missionaries and for admitting candidates to the congregation, relationship to the Vincentian Family, international support for already existing missions in individual provinces, procedures for regular evaluations, and funding;
- c) recommend that the superior general study the possibility of establishing a secretariat for the new international missions for reasons such as: facilitating the relationships among the provinces, the branches of the Vincentian Family, other mission organizations, and himself; coordinating the gathering of information; searching out funds and other resources."

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1 *Redemptoris Missio*, 92.

2 *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 18.

I give here just a few thoughts with regard to a) encourage broad participation, etc. The points b) and c) are still in study by the commission to develop a "ratio missionum."

In that context, we may ask: where are our international missions? To what degree can they be called international? Which provinces have a mission *ad gentes*? How many confreres work in the missions *ad gentes*? What is the future of our missions *ad gentes*? Still many other questions could be put forward.

It is clear that from the beginning of our Congregation, confreres were sent out of the home country, France. But not all of them were missionaries *ad gentes*; think of Poland, Italy, etc. There were confreres sent to Algiers, Tunis; were they missionaries *ad gentes*?

It is clear that those sent to Madagascar were certainly missionaries *ad gentes*, as we can see from the letters Vincent wrote to them. But what about the confreres sent to Ethiopia or Abyssinia as it was called in former days.

However, let us have a look at the challenges nowadays. In a short article like this it is not possible to mention all, nor to analyze them in depth. I see many challenges. So, I mention here just a few at random.

We live in a *time of change*: there are so many issues that formerly would be accepted without questioning. Today we are not always certain. The border between truth and untruth is not always clear. There are difficult questions with regard to salvation and creation. Many answers are partial. How should a missionary act with such a background?

Science develops; what we learned during our seminary years may no longer be up-to-date. Are we conscious that ongoing formation is a must?

We are to *encourage broad participation*. This means that many missionaries have to shed a clerical attitude and be able to consider others as their partners, who might be better trained and more able of approaching people directly (in a non-liturgical way). Women (laywomen and sisters) are often considered as inferior. Being men, it is only natural that we bring a "manly" culture, forgetting that it is through women that faith grows in ordinary life. In many missions *ad gentes* we miss a chance because of such a mentality and attitude.

The situation of many "*gentes*" in the old sense has changed. They are driven away to remote areas and their governments consider them often as a shame to the country. They are oppressed, not considered as equal citizens with the same rights and obligations. Or they are allowed to exist in a kind of museum: reservations, where they are obliged to maintain their culture and folklore as an attraction for tourists, bringing money into the country. Are we prepared to live with them and

bring the good news by helping them to develop themselves in order that they become full-fledged, equal citizens?

Our missionary spirit must become more and more humble: we may be proud of being sent to bring the *good news to other peoples who do not know about this yet*, but it is possible that they, conscious of their own rich spiritual tradition and culture, reject that which we would like to bring them and do not consider our message as a good message for them. They may consider accepting our good message as bringing disaster to them. Are we prepared to accept this fact and in spite of that continue bringing the good news?

Often we are tempted to stress the **material progress and welfare** of the peoples, forgetting that they do not share our point of view. What is most needed is a spirit of respect for other people, for the human person whatever his color, culture, church, or belief, seeking and finding the good in him or her and bringing it to development.

There is the temptation of *giving*, whereby one feels oneself superior to the other, considered as inferior. Of course, it is difficult to give as an equal, because then one runs the risk of not being accepted, of being unwanted. And it is certainly better to help people develop themselves so they do not need aid. Instead, we should provoke them to contribute to Christianity and to Christian culture.

It is often very difficult to understand other people: we may study a *language*, a culture, but we can never speak like that person or live the culture of that person. Our efforts are often more important than the results. The language of our heart should be clear and loud.

One of the great challenges in many parts of the world is to be missionaries who bring love and make people love each other. It is tragic that situations of *hatred*, discrimination and even massacre can arise, where missionaries brought the good news. We should learn from the mistakes made in the past. Why did things go wrong? Even for Jesus it was not easy to overcome the feelings between Jews and Samaritans, but he succeeded in making people understand that we have one Father and that we are all brothers and sisters of the same family.

Many injustices have been committed in the *past*. The consequence of all that is often hatred and indifference regarding the message we bring. Have we seriously tried to study such a situation, trying to find a way out, opening hearts for the good news?

It appears that provinces start working together more and more. *Working together* is a new challenge in our missions, even more so in a wider range with other members of the Vincentian Family. It is much easier and more satisfying to work alone, and in that way become "popular" and known. However, collaboration produces more and better fruit.

It is often said that the provinces that have no vocations have no future. This is certainly not true. Many of the "old" and aging provinces were formerly the provinces with the greatest number of missionaries "ad gentes" all over the world. They are often thought of as provinces only good to help with money. However they possess such a large, rich, missionary experience. Do we ask them to share that *experience* with the members of the younger provinces, to help them develop their missionary spirit?

Several of the answers the commission on the "ratio missionum" received bear witness of that great missionary spirit.

It is only fitting to be grateful to our missionaries from the past and the present. So, let us show that gratitude in our deeds by facing the challenges of our times as opportunities for renewal and growth!

# **New Means of Communication**

## **- Final Document, Commitment N° 5 -**

*by John Freund, C.M.  
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### **Vincent's Legacy of Inventiveness**

Vincent left us a legacy of inventiveness in service of the poor. He did whatever was necessary to evangelize and serve the poor. Vincent marshalled all of the resources he could: young and old, men and women, clergy and lay, the rich and the poor themselves. His passion for the poor expressed itself through an empowering humility that invited others to share their gifts. He realized that effective evangelization and service of the poor required organization.

He moved through the corridors of power to evangelize and serve the poor. He accepted riding in a carriage when he could no longer ride a horse. His massive correspondence reveals how much communication mattered to him. (Just think what his telephone bill would have been had he had access to "modern" means of communication such as telephone or fax.)

His sense of mission led to creating new structures (keeping the Daughters out of the confinement of convents and organizing the laity in the Ladies of Charity) or doing traditional things in a new way (preaching of parish missions and creating a new seminary system and inaugurating Tuesday conferences for the formation of clergy).

As we enter a new millennium we are faced with some "givens" that call for us to tap Vincent's legacy of inventiveness.

1. The gap between the poor and the rich is growing wider.
2. Poverty has new, and previously unknown, forms.
3. We are a huge family that can be a powerful force in the service of the poor.
4. Rapid, almost instantaneous, communication is an increasing fact of life.

For Vincentians these "givens" must be a clarion call to meet the expanding "circle of poverty" with what should be an expanding "circle of solidarity" \_ solidarity with the poor and all those who share our vision. These "givens" call us to continue Vincent's tradition of practical inventiveness in the service of the poor and to do traditional things in a new way.

As Roger Cardinal Mahoney of Los Angeles indicated some of these new forms of poverty are intimately connected with the rise of technology. There is a revolution going on and the poor are increasingly becoming marginalized and excluded. In an economy where the new measure of wealth is information those who have access to information increasingly control the fortunes of those who do not.

Those who control access to information will be more powerful than the largest multinational corporation.

Lack of access to information creates a new form of apartheid and powerlessness. Without access to information technology many are voiceless regarding decisions affecting their development.

- . Who will speak for the poor?
- . Who will enable the poor to speak for themselves?

Walter Brueggemann reminds us, "To be reduced to silence is to be eliminated from the flow of power."

### **The General Assembly and what is already being done**

Our Final Document states:

"We are entering into an era of information technology which brings with it unrecognized, and therefore even more insidious forms of poverty. If the poor remain without access to information technology, they will be further marginalized and locked into a cycle of poverty."

The fifth and final commitment of the General Assembly challenges us to use creatively the new means of communication as powerful tools to create the conditions for collaboration with members of our Vincentian Family, and foster actual collaboration with this expanding "circle of solidarity."

These new means of communication provide effective resources in formation for our mission.

The Congregation has developed an increasingly rich tradition of using these new means of communication. Our confreres in Brazil have mounted a TV station which reaches vast numbers. Their work has been featured in an earlier issue of *Vincentiana*. Many provinces have made excellent use of the print media. CEME of the Province of Salamanca comes immediately to mind with their rich offering of documents, studies and audiovisual material. *Vincentiana* itself can be counted among our uses of the new media.

These efforts are relatively well known. The focus of this article is on the rapidly developing tools associated with computers and the Internet. The Internet is a way of connecting computers through telephone lines. Anything stored in a computer can be transmitted: documents, pictures, sounds.

Creative and appropriate use of computers and information technology can revolutionize our methods and means of delivering services and investigating the underlying causes and long term solutions to poverty.

Information technology will play an increasingly indispensable role as we carry out the other commitments of the Assembly. A primary concern is not only how to

use technology more effectively in our own work but also how to connect the poor with the skills and tools needed to have a voice in their own destiny.

## **The Limitations and Dangers of Technology**

Before we go any further some healthy skepticism about computers is in order. Computers and technology do not feed the hungry, clothe the naked, or shelter the homeless. Computers do not take vows to serve the poor. People do. The poor can not eat mechanical mice, wear floppy disks, live in computer casings.

The Good News must be incarnated in flesh and blood. The human touch and contact will be all important if we are to be signs of God's love. We will always need that direct human touch as we break the bread of God's word and share our table with the poor.

We must also recognize that lack of access to computers can itself be an underlying cause of poverty.

Pope John Paul II, on World Communication Day in 1997, underlines his own concern: "We must hope that the gap between the beneficiaries of the new means of information and expression and those who as yet do not have access to them will not become another intractable source of inequity and discrimination."

Today Vincent's resourceful practical-mindedness calls us to examine fearlessly the two-edged sword of information technology and its impact on the poor.

## **Technology in the Service of Mission**

Already computers serve to extend our Congregation's mission.

Experience with the Miraculous Medal web site is illustrative of the ministerial use of the net in another way (<http://www.amm.org>). Fr. Charles Shelby, Director of the Association of the Miraculous Medal in Perryville, Missouri in the USA, writes: "I think it has been one of the best strategic moves of my administration in this ministry." He explains that the site "has given us a worldwide reach." The Association adds about 800 names per month to their database drawn from those who have visited the website.

Fr. Shelby continues, "We get about 120 e-mails a day, responses to our surveys or general correspondence." The Website tells the Medal's story. The Bulletin newsletter presents spiritual instruction, testimonies, mission and Vincentian Family news, and offers devotional articles. The Shrine, the Association's center for prayer, can be toured "virtually" by Web surfers who look at an attractive combination of graphics and text. The site encourages e-mail feedback, which can lead to catechesis or ministry.

Most significantly, Fr. Shelby notes, "This is the first effective outreach we have had toward the young. The average age of people filling out our survey is

around 35, compared with average age of nearly 70 for our regular mailing list. The challenge is to adapt our site to their interests, values, and vocabulary without losing touch with any older viewers."

This brings up an important point. To address today's great barriers to social and economic justice, we need not only infusions of youthful energy, but also the technical literacy of the young who are much represented on the Internet. Already in 1989 Pope John Paul said "Let us trust the young. They have the advantage of growing up with the new developments, and it will be their duty to employ these new instruments for a wider and more intense dialogue among all the diverse races and classes who share this `shrinking globe.'"

## **General Assembly Use of Technology**

Last summer's General Assembly was the first to make significant use of the Internet. At <http://www.famvin.org> on the World Wide Web, Vincentians around the world could see bulletins and up-to-the-minute photos of the Assembly. A number of delegates stayed in touch with the provinces by e-mail. Delegates learned that computers and e-mail greatly facilitate editing and laying out *Vincentiana*. Much of the work can now be done online, which saves an enormous amount of time compared to using "snail-mail" \_ regular postal services.

An exciting prototype of a computer-readable disk (CD) showed the possibilities for expanding access to formative documents. This disk contained writings of Vincent, Louise, Frederick, and others of the Vincentian Family as well as pictures \_ graphics for use in brochures and in other ways. A single CD-ROM can provide, at low cost and with minimal storage requirements, unprecedented access to whole libraries and to the best modern translations available.

Computer-driven information technology as used at the General Assembly effectively demonstrated the almost instantaneous communication from Rome to our houses around the world. With a keystroke, for instance, Fr. Pat Griffin notified our houses around the world of the re-election of our Superior General. He estimated that using the Internet at the General Assembly saved considerable time and expense, as compared to the more traditional means of communication. Think of how this means of communication could be used in times of crisis around the world. We can mobilize public opinion and speed much needed relief anywhere in the world.

## **E-mail**

Before the General Assembly convened, some of us already had had the opportunity to use Internet technology in evangelization, in collaborating with other followers of Vincent, and in direct service to the poor. Although the Internet grows constantly in its ability to deliver information, e-mail continues to provide an important way for people to connect with each other.

Since 1996, St. John's University has hosted what is called an e-mail list which is named "Vincent." It permits English-speaking people with e-mail access and a

common interest in Vincent to communicate with each other. At present, about 400 people around the world share their thoughts and concerns. List members hail from the USA, Canada, Mexico, Panama, Brazil, Peru, the Philippines, Australia, China, Taiwan, Indonesia, Turkey, Austria, Hungary, England, Germany, and Ireland. Some represent the international offices of the Vincent de Paul Society, the International Association of Charities, the General Curia of the Congregation of the Mission, the Generalate of the Daughters of Charity, representatives of various Seton communities, and more.

Our common bond is concern for the poor after the fashion of Vincent, Louise, Frederick, Elizabeth, and others of our heritage. Some days, there is no e-mail at all for the group. On other days, everyone will receive a message from someone in the group: perhaps a question, a thought, a book review, a prayer request. Discussions include practical matters: how should one respond to a request for help when one is almost certain that money will be used for drink or drugs? What strategies seem to be having the greatest impact on bringing about systemic change? Frequently the input from other corners of the world puts a global perspective on issues being discussed.

The archives of this e-mail list show the wide and deep interests of list members and the unexpected opportunities for collaboration. Recently someone needed help translating into English notices about a Vincentian youth meeting in South America; someone else needed resources in Spanish about setting up Spanish-speaking Vincent de Paul groups in the United States. E-mail to the list provided documents and details about the beatification of Frederick Ozanam and a calendar change for the international meeting of the International Association of Charities (AIC). In January 1999, the Provincial of Colombia, Gabriel Naranjo, C.M., sent word to the Vincent e-mail list of the plight of the Vincentian Family in with wake of the earthquake there. As a result, many members around the world came to its aid. Not only did some of the other branches of the family make major contributions directly as a result of this post, but also many smaller groups generated smaller gifts through a variety of fund-raising efforts in their schools, etc. And we have mourned the death of giants, such as Sr. Irene Kraus, D.C., a nationally recognized pioneer in the field of health care in the United States.

It has been a valuable tool in fostering collaboration, mutual support and formation in mission and charism.

## **Web sites**

While each day seems to bring more Vincentian sites on line, I would draw your attention to some of the other more developed sites, especially those focused on the wider family.

To the author's knowledge \_ and perhaps because it is closest to his backyard \_ the first site attempting to encompass all branches of the Vincentian Family was begun under the auspices of the Vincentian Center for Church and Society at St. John's University in New York in December 1995 (<http://vincentian.stjohns.edu>). Now this and other sites have spread the story of Vincent and his followers as they serve the poor. There is a very well developed Vincentian Family Site originating in Spain (<http://www.familia-vicenciana.org/>). This Spanish language site is very

attractively presented and provides excellent background material on various branches of the Vincentian Family. It is also a rich source of graphics for these branches.

The list could go on and on with examples from other countries and languages describing specific works of the Congregation. For a further listing of Vincentian sites see the links page on the [www.famvin.org](http://www.famvin.org) site. We are continuing a long heritage not only of evangelization and direct service of the poor but of creativity unto infinity in the service of mission.

The Web allows for inexpensive storage, transmittal and retrieval of documents and graphics. The Web also can provide e-mail access and the ability to "converse" by way of keyboard between two or more people who are linked to the Internet at the same time from different places around the world. It sounds incredible, especially taking into account that the main cost \_ aside from Internet access \_ is the price of a local telephone call. But it is happening; thousands of people are "chatting" in just this way while you read this sentence.

The Center for International Formation intends to use the famvin web site to provide information and study materials helpful for charism formation programs around the world. These may include a Web-based "Virtual Tour of Vincent's Paris" and a Virtual Vincentian Museum which will allow worldwide access to many of the treasures of the Maison-Mère with its Archives and Relic Room.

Even as this article is being written there are plans to revise the General Assembly web site. It will no longer be merely a site for the General Assembly of the Congregation but a site which can be used by the entire Vincentian Family. Each branch of the worldwide family will have its own section on the site. The General Assembly section will be moved to the section pertaining to the Congregation of the Mission.

At the recent meeting in Rome of the leaders of the various branches of the worldwide Vincentian Family, all agreed to identify the web sites connected with their apostolates. These sites will then be "linked" to the appropriate section on the [www.famvin.org](http://www.famvin.org) web site. Each branch will be responsible for the content development and updating of its own sites. In effect the [www.famvin.org](http://www.famvin.org) site will become a gateway to whatever information each branch wishes to make available to the world. As such it should greatly facilitate awareness of each other and the works we are engaged in. This is an important step towards greater collaboration.

The section of this site devoted to the Congregation of the Mission will contain much additional information which is being developed. The site will provide easy access to the writings of Vincent, Louise, etc., as well as a collection of their images in art. CIF, as noted above, already has a section of this site. Over the next year it is expected the *Vincentiana* and other relevant publications, especially of the Curia, will be available.

A further phase in the development of the site will allow greater inter-activity. We can anticipate a worldwide family calendar in which each group can post notice and a description of its major international, regional and national meetings. This should facilitate planning for major events.

## **New Justice Issues**

We must also seize opportunities to look with fresh eyes at the needs of the poor. Just as Vincent saw new needs arising out of the poverty that came with the abandonment of the poor country people and the rise of the cities, so also we must recognize the new dimensions of poverty in an information age.

Roger Cardinal Mahoney of Los Angeles points to "a statistical correlation between the lack of information technology in the less developed countries and the poverty in those countries." He aptly describes an "Information Apartheid" that develops as few of the world's people have access to increasingly necessary means of communication and learning and even earning a living.

Perhaps a simpler way of stating this: We are fond of quoting Vincent, "Give a man a fish and he will eat for a day. But teach a man to fish and he will eat for a lifetime." But all this presumes that he has fishing tools to fish and a place to fish. Lacking these, all the knowledge in the world will not produce the next day's catch. Having information technology at one's disposal \_ having access both to the tools and the knowledge is one aspect of the long term solution.

As Vincentians, some provinces more than others are strongly positioned to attract, train, and deploy resources to respond to what Cardinal Mahoney describes as "new justice issues." Is not this encompassed in the General Assembly's call for provinces blessed with more resources to share with those who have less? We must work together, both those who use technology to speak on behalf of the poor and those who seek to help the poor speak in their own voice.

No one at the previous General Assembly, held in 1986, foresaw the technological developments that shape our world today. We can only guess at what the developments might bring for 2004. But we know this: these changes will have tremendous impact directly and indirectly, positively and negatively, on the poor we are committed to serve.

Will the unstoppable growth of information technology be a further cause of marginalization of the poor? The poor have a right to sit at the table of the emerging measure of wealth and power \_ information. It may well be that we need to re-imagine Lazarus as sitting at a distance from this new table of power begging for the crumbs that will be necessary to gain any measure of control over his destiny.

The recent approval of NGO (non-governmental organization) status for the Congregation at the UN will serve as the beginning of a Justice and Peace portion on the revised famvin site. This can be done in conjunction with the AIC and their deep involvement in NGO activities.

## **Evangelization**

The opportunities for evangelization are manifold in what the Pope several times refers to as the "new areopagus."

Seekers from around the world are turning to the Internet looking for the spiritual dimension lacking in their lives. The Evangelical denominations have realized this and are rapidly evangelizing cyberspace. I have been amazed at the number of "hits" (as visits to a web site are called) to "virtual retreat houses." And who knows whether what has begun as a search for meaning may even lead to a vocation or some other form of service. Online contact is often the first step in the journey to a more personal encounter with a wisdom figure.

In her formal reflections, the Church has long acknowledged that communication media have a role in fostering community and in spreading the Gospel. "The media of social communication can contribute a great deal to human unity" (*Communio et Progressio*, # 9). "The Church would feel guilty before the Lord if she did not utilize these powerful means that human skill is daily rendering more perfect. It is through them that she proclaims `from the housetops' the message of which she is the depositary" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, # 45, 1975). "Since the very evangelization of modern culture depends to a great extent on the influence of the media, it is not enough to use the media simply to spread the Christian message and the Church's authentic teaching. It is also necessary to integrate that message into the `new culture' created by modern communications. This is a complex issue, since the `new culture' originates not just from whatever content is eventually expressed, but from the very fact that there exist new ways of communicating, with new languages, new techniques, and a new psychology" (*Redemptoris Missio*, # 37, 1990).

Will not this evangelization be part of the long-range solution to poverty as more and more people come to understand we cannot have God as Father without loving our sisters and brothers?

## **Opportunities**

What does this mean on a practical basis?

The Bishops' Conference in Peru has said it well, "Social communication is the new global form of love of neighbor and people. It is a love shown mainly through information and formation, helping people to think rather than suggesting how to think, assisting them in making choices and in their quest for personhood" (Bishops' Conference of Peru).

Just as Vincent once mobilized volunteers from the pulpit, we now have opportunities to use the Internet to help in gathering, forming, and supporting volunteers of all ages. A decade ago Pope John Paul challenged us "Whether we are young or old, let us rise to the challenge of new discoveries and technologies by bringing to them a moral vision rooted in our religious faith, in our respect for the human person, and our commitment to transform the world in accordance with God's plan. On this World Communications Day, let us pray for wisdom in using the potential of the `computer age' to serve man's human and transcendent calling, and thus give glory to the Father from whom all good things come."

As I look at the Fifth Commitment of the General Assembly, it seems to me that it may well be a primary key in moving forward on our other commitments.

Wider use of information technology can facilitate the planning and networking that underlie and support effective collaboration. Electronic communication will never replace face-to-face meetings, but much can be accomplished in collaboration \_ and at far less expense \_ using emerging technologies. So many causes, such as AIDS, have no geographic bounds. The solutions also must transcend national boundaries.

People around the world who share Vincentian values can learn from each other and, together, find ways of enhancing and improving direct service to the poor.

This is what all the commitments of the General Assembly are about. Information technology is a tool in the service of these commitments.

## **Ten Foundational Principles in the Social Teaching of the Church**

*P. Robert P. Maloney, C.M.*

Let me begin this article with an exam, a very easy one in fact. How many readers can name:

1. the ten commandments?
2. the eight beatitudes?
3. the four cardinal virtues?
4. the three theological virtues?
5. the seven sacraments?
6. the seven corporal works of mercy?
7. the seven capital sins?

Just about everybody, at least with a little prodding of the memory.

How many can name ten social principles that are "an essential part of Catholic faith"?

Nobody?

Strangely, this question receives the same befuddled response in almost any group of Catholics. Yet the Church has been proclaiming her social doctrine eloquently and repeatedly over the last hundred years. Six years ago, in expressing my hopes for the Congregation of the Mission, I raised a question: "Do (those) whom we train come to sense that Vincentians are 'experts' in the social teaching of the Church?" Even more recently, on January 1, 1999, I offered this challenge to the Daughters of Charity: "I encourage you to make the social teaching of the Church an integral part of the formation of the members of the Company."

But the truth is, as one bishops' conference recently stated, "Far too many Catholics are not familiar" with the social teaching of the Church. The bishops added: "Many Catholics do not adequately understand that the social teaching of the Church is an essential part of Catholic faith."<sup>1</sup>

Why is this essential part of our faith so little known? One reason is that the Catholic social doctrine has not been conveniently condensed for consumption; it has not been "packaged" for catechetical purposes like the ten commandments or the seven sacraments.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions* \_ Reflections of the U.S. Catholic Bishops (Washington, DC: N.C.C.B., June, 1998).

How can we help the Church proclaim this relatively unknown, yet essential, part of our faith? In some ways the answer is simple, but also very challenging: we must first know the teaching ourselves and then, secondly, communicate it to others.

### **Ten principles in the social teaching of the Church**

Here are ten building-blocks upon which the Church's entire social teaching rests.

1. *The principle of the Dignity of the Human Person.*

"Every human being is created in the image of God and redeemed by Jesus Christ, and therefore is invaluable and worthy of respect as a member of the human family."<sup>2</sup>

This is the bedrock principle of Catholic social teaching. Every person \_ regardless of race, sex, age, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, employment or economic status, health, intelligence, achievement or any other differentiating characteristic \_ is worthy of respect. It is not what you do or what you have that gives you a claim on respect; it is simply *being* human that establishes your dignity. Given that dignity, the human person is, in the Catholic view, never a means, always an end.

The body of Catholic social teaching begins with the human person, but it does not end there. Individuals have dignity; but individualism has no place in Catholic social thought. The principle of human dignity gives the human person a claim on membership in a community, the human family.

2. *The principle of Respect for Human Life.*

"Every person, from the moment of conception to natural death, has inherent dignity and a right to life consistent with that dignity."<sup>3</sup>

Human life at every stage of development and decline is precious and therefore worthy of protection and respect. It is always wrong directly to attack innocent human life. The Catholic tradition sees the sacredness of human life as part of any moral vision for a just and good society.

3. *The Principle of Association.*

"[O]ur tradition proclaims that the person is not only sacred but also social. How we organize our society \_ in economics and politics, in law and policy \_ directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions \_ Reflections of the U.S. Catholic Bishops* (Washington, DC: N.C.C.B., June 1998) 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 1-2.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 4.

The centerpiece of society is the family; family stability must always be protected and never undermined. By association with others \_ in families and in other social institutions that foster growth, protect dignity and promote the common good \_ human persons achieve their fulfillment.

4. *The Principle of Participation.*

"We believe people have a right and a duty to participate in society, seeking together the common good and well-being of all, especially the poor and vulnerable."<sup>5</sup>

Without participation, the benefits available to an individual through any social institution cannot be realized. The human person has a right not to be shut out from participating in those institutions that are necessary for human fulfillment.

This principle applies in a special way to conditions associated with work. "Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God's creation. If the dignity of work is to be protected, then due basic rights of workers must be respected \_ the right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, to organize and join unions, to private property, and to economic initiative."<sup>6</sup>

5. *The Principle of Preferential Protection for the Poor and Vulnerable.*

We believe that we touch Christ when we touch the needy. The story of the last judgment<sup>7</sup> plays a very important role in the Catholic Faith tradition. From its earliest days, the Church has taught that we will be judged by what we choose to do or not to do in regard to the hungry, the thirsty, the sick, the homeless, the prisoner. Today the Church expresses this teaching in terms of "the preferential option for the poor."

Why a preferential love for the poor? Why put the needs of the poor first? Because the common good \_ the good of society as a whole \_ requires it. The opposite of rich and powerful is poor and powerless. If the good of all, the common good, is to prevail, preferential protection must move toward those affected adversely by the absence of power and the presence of privation. Otherwise the balance needed to keep society in one piece will be broken to the detriment of the whole.

6. *The Principle of Solidarity.*

"Catholic social teaching proclaims that we are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, wherever they live. We are one human family.... Learning to practice the virtue of

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Mt 25:31-46.

solidarity means learning that 'loving our neighbor' has global dimensions in an interdependent world."<sup>8</sup>

The principle of solidarity leads to choices that will promote and protect the common good.

Solidarity calls us to respond not simply to personal, individual misfortunes; there are societal issues that cry out for more just social structures. For this reason the Church often calls us today not only to engage in charitable works but also to work towards social justice.

#### 7. *The Principle of Stewardship.*

"The Catholic tradition insists that we show our respect for the Creator by our stewardship of creation."<sup>9</sup>

The steward is a manager, not an owner. In an era of rising consciousness about our physical environment, our tradition is calling us to a sense of moral responsibility for the protection of the environment — croplands, grasslands, woodlands, air, water, minerals and other natural deposits. Stewardship responsibilities also look toward our use of our personal talents, our attention to personal health and our use of personal property.

#### 8. *The Principle of Subsidiarity.*

This Principle deals chiefly with "the responsibilities and limits of government, and the essential roles of voluntary associations."<sup>10</sup>

The principle of subsidiarity puts a proper limit on government by insisting that no higher level of organization should perform any function that can be handled efficiently and effectively at a lower level of organization by persons or groups that are closer to the problems and closer to the ground. Oppressive governments are always in violation of the principle of subsidiarity; overactive governments also sometimes violate this principle.<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, individuals often feel helpless in the face of daunting social problems: unemployment, people sleeping in doorways or begging on street corners. Since these problems have societal dimensions, no one person or one group can do much

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* p. 6

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> These first eight principles were culled from the relatively brief "Reflections of the U.S. Catholic Bishops," as the second subtitle of *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching* described this published product of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. As I read on through the summary of the task force report, I found an articulation of the two additional principles which follow.

about them. While giving due regard to subsidiarity, the government entity that collects taxes should help individuals, smaller communities, and the national community to "do something" about such social problems. When we pay taxes, therefore, we are contributing to the establishment of social justice.

#### 9. *The Principle of Human Equality.*

"Equality of all persons comes from their essential dignity.... While differences in talents are a part of God's plan, social and cultural discrimination in fundamental rights... are not compatible with God's design."<sup>12</sup>

Treating equals equally is one way of defining justice, also understood classically as rendering to each person his or her due. Underlying the notion of equality is the simple principle of fairness; one of the earliest ethical stirrings felt in the developing human person is a sense of what is "fair" and what is not.

#### 10. *The Principle of the Common Good.*

"The common good is understood as the social conditions that allow people to reach their full human potential and to realize their human dignity."<sup>13</sup>

The social conditions the Church has in mind presuppose "respect for the person," "the social well-being and development of the group" and the public authority's maintenance of "peace and security." Today, in an age of global interdependence, the principle of the common good points to the need for international structures that can promote the just development of persons and families across regional and national lines.

What constitutes the common good is always going to be a matter for debate. The absence of sensitivity to the common good is a sure sign of decay in a society. As a sense of community is eroded, concern for the common good declines. A proper communitarian concern is the antidote to unbridled individualism, which, like unrestrained selfishness in personal relations, can destroy balance, harmony and peace within and among groups, neighborhoods, regions and nations.

Those are the ten principles. There is something wonderful about including these principles of Catholic social teaching among the essentials of the faith. By doing so, we affirm that our beliefs are the basis for action. For the Christian there are not only *credenda* but also *agenda*. Our agenda, then, rests on these ten building blocks:

#### 8. Dignity of the Human Person

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<sup>12</sup> "Summary," pp. 23-24.

<sup>13</sup> "Summary," p. 25.

9. Human Life
10. Association
11. Participation
12. Preference for the Poor
13. Solidarity
14. Stewardship
15. Subsidiarity
16. Equality
17. Common Good

### **Communicating this teaching**

I want to encourage all the members of our Vincentian Family to communicate the Church's social teaching to others. This teaching should be very important for us who live in the Vincentian tradition. The Church's preferential option for the poor flows from it. The poor will surely benefit to the extent that we, and others, are deeply rooted in this "essential part of Catholic faith." Let me offer a rapid series of concrete suggestions about how we might "use" these principles.

1. They might constitute
  18. ten topics for an adult education lecture series,
  19. ten segments for a semester-long course,
  20. ten chapters in a text book,
  21. ten projects in a research center,
  22. ten sections on a web page.
2. For those who keep files, they might be ten "bins" for gathering the collected wisdom drawn from
  23. scripture,
  24. patristic literature,
  25. Church history,
  26. theological writings,
  27. conciliar and papal teaching,
  28. the teachings of various episcopal conferences,
  29. other sources, like contemporary literature.
3. Those who enjoy coming up with pneumonics or acronyms might rearrange the order to construct an easily remembered set of capital letters.
4. To incarnate the principles, one might compose ten brief biographical essays focusing on persons who embodied one or more of these principles in a significant way; e.g.,

30. St. Vincent,
31. St. Louise,
32. Frederick Ozanam,
33. Rosalie Rendu,
34. Mother Teresa of Calcutta,
35. Dorothy Day,
36. Mahatma Gandhi
37. Martin Luther King
- ?

5. One might search for excerpts from the great social voices of the past and drop them in each of these ten files:

38. Ambrose,
  1. Chrysostom,
  2. Aquinas,
  3. ?
  4. ?
  5. ?

6. Using these ten principles as a guide, one might study the great social encyclicals and select key passages that express the principles and then drop them in each of the ten files.

7. One might consult the index of the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* to find fuller explanations of the Church's social teaching and to identify sections of the *Catechism* that relate to each of these ten principles.

Principles are important. Once internalized, they lead to something. They direct our choices. They prompt us to act. A principled person has a place to stand. He knows where he is coming from and where he wants to go. Principles give us purpose. Those of us who are teachers yearn, deep in our hearts, to help form principled persons who are ready and willing to act responsibly.

These ten principles can serve as the analytical base for *any* social problem. For example, if anyone wonders *why* Church documents focus so frequently on war, peace, nuclear weapons, the economy, abortion, euthanasia, health care, education, and a wide range of other topics that have a clear social and moral dimension, these principles provide the necessary framework for understanding that teaching.

Looking back over the last hundred years, Pope John Paul II wrote in *Centesimus Annus*: "To teach and to spread her social doctrine pertains to the Church's evangelizing mission and is an essential part of the Christian message."<sup>14</sup> He adds: "The `new

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<sup>14</sup> *Centesimus Annus* 5.

evangelization'... must include among its elements *a proclamation of the Church's social doctrine*."<sup>15</sup> Those are strong words. It would be hard to put the matter more clearly. The doctrine is an essential part of our faith. We must proclaim it openly in the new evangelization.

Today I encourage the whole Vincentian Family to take up this challenge.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> I confess, with very little shame, that I have stolen much of the content for this article, body and bones, from William J. Byron, "Ten Building-Blocks of Catholic Social Teaching," *America* (Vol. 179, # 13; October 31, 1998) 9-12. Fr. Byron's article has been widely circulated in reprint form by the Asian Bishops' Conference. The author has been most generous in giving me permission to use it in whatever way I like and has even sent me a more complete version.

## **Vincentian Bibliography**

**LUIGI MEZZADRI, C.M.**

*Le Missioni Popolari della Congregazione  
della Missione nei secoli XVII-XVIII. I. Studi*

Published by CLV-Edizioni Vincenziane, Rome, Italy, 1999 (551 pages)

This is the first of a two-volume collective work which is under the direction of L. Mezzadri; among other contributors is Luigi Nuovo, C.M. This first volume is a collection of "Studies" and the second will contain "Documents."

The popular or parish missions peaked between the 17th and 19th centuries. The Congregation of the Mission participated intensely in this missionary activity and, in Italy, it became the principal task. The present work aims at preserving the historical memory of these Vincentians missions. The period studied is from 1638 to 1796: from the first and timid appearance of the Vincentian missionaries until the French occupation of the Italian peninsula. Much has been published about the missions in Italy but in a scattered manner. This work gathers a part of the abundant existing material in order to offer to researchers an organic presentation of what the Congregation accomplished in Italy.

This volume is divided into two parts. The first, of 150 pages, exposes and analyzes "The Vincentian Missionary Project." It gathers together articles: on the history of the missions in the context of the history of the preaching; on the historiography of the missions; on the method of the popular missions; and on other related themes, like the catechism, feasts, and popular piety. This part concludes with a bibliography of the Italian Vincentian publications of the last 25 years.

The second part, "The Missions in the Italian States," gathers in 400 pages a number of very well documented studies on the missionary activity accomplished by the Vincentians in the diverse regions of Italy, starting from the houses of the Congregation of Turin (Piedmont), Ferrara, Florence (Tuscany), Bastia (Corsica), Rome, Tivoli, Perugia (Umbria), Naples and Lecce.

Each of the two parts is very interesting: the first has a greater "theoretical" interest; the second is more concentrated on the situations of the populations and the difficulties of the missionary tasks. The book, as a whole, is a good work of history which will be very useful for those who do research on this theme, and also, being filled with instructive references and suggestive figures, for missionaries who work in the Vincentian ministry of the popular missions today.

**JAIME CORERA, C.M.**

*Servir a los Pobres es ir a Dios*

Published by Editorial Milagrosa, Madrid, Spain, 1999 (292 pages)

This book, which has for its title an expression of St. Vincent himself, collects 12 studies, revised and now edited in a definitive manner, which previously appeared in diverse publications of several branches of the Vincentian Family. The studies are 12 variations of a single, fundamental theme in Vincentian spirituality: to work for the poor is the way of St. Vincent to go to God. The studies are organized around three key ideas: 1) the poor as beneficiaries of our charism; 2) the Vincentian response and the spirituality which motivates it; 3) the Vincentian heritage, or the diverse groups of the said Vincentian Family, which strive today to actualize our charism and project it into the future.

Some chapters are particularly relevant given the interest shown in the Vincentian Family: "Share the Charism with the Laity"; "The Assistant of Lay Vincentian Movements"; "The Spirituality of the Vincentian Laity." This is a solid book for deepening the roots of the Vincentian charism and useful to those who make up the Vincentian Family, priests, consecrated persons, and laity.

**RONALD RAMSON, C.M.**

***Orando con Federico Ozanam***  
**Compañeros de viaje**

Published by Editorial Milagrosa, Madrid, Spain 1999 (122 pages)

Spanish translation by Alberto Román, C.M. of the original book, *Praying with Frédéric Ozanam*, published by Saint Mary Press, Winona, Minnesota, 1998. You will find a description of the book in *Vincentiana* 1998/1, p. 61. Fr. Ramson is the national chaplain of the St. Vincent de Paul Society in the United States.

**COLLECTION**

***En tiempos de San Vicente de Paúl... y hoy. II***

Published by CEME, Apartado 353, Salamanca, Spain, 1999 (422 pages)

This second volume presents 33 new themes, translated from the "fiches vincentiennes," published over the years by the Province of Toulouse under the title, "Au temps de St. Vincent de Paul... et aujourd'hui." The themes are presented in their historical Vincentian roots and in the reality of the world and the Church. There are many pertinent quotations which illustrate each theme.