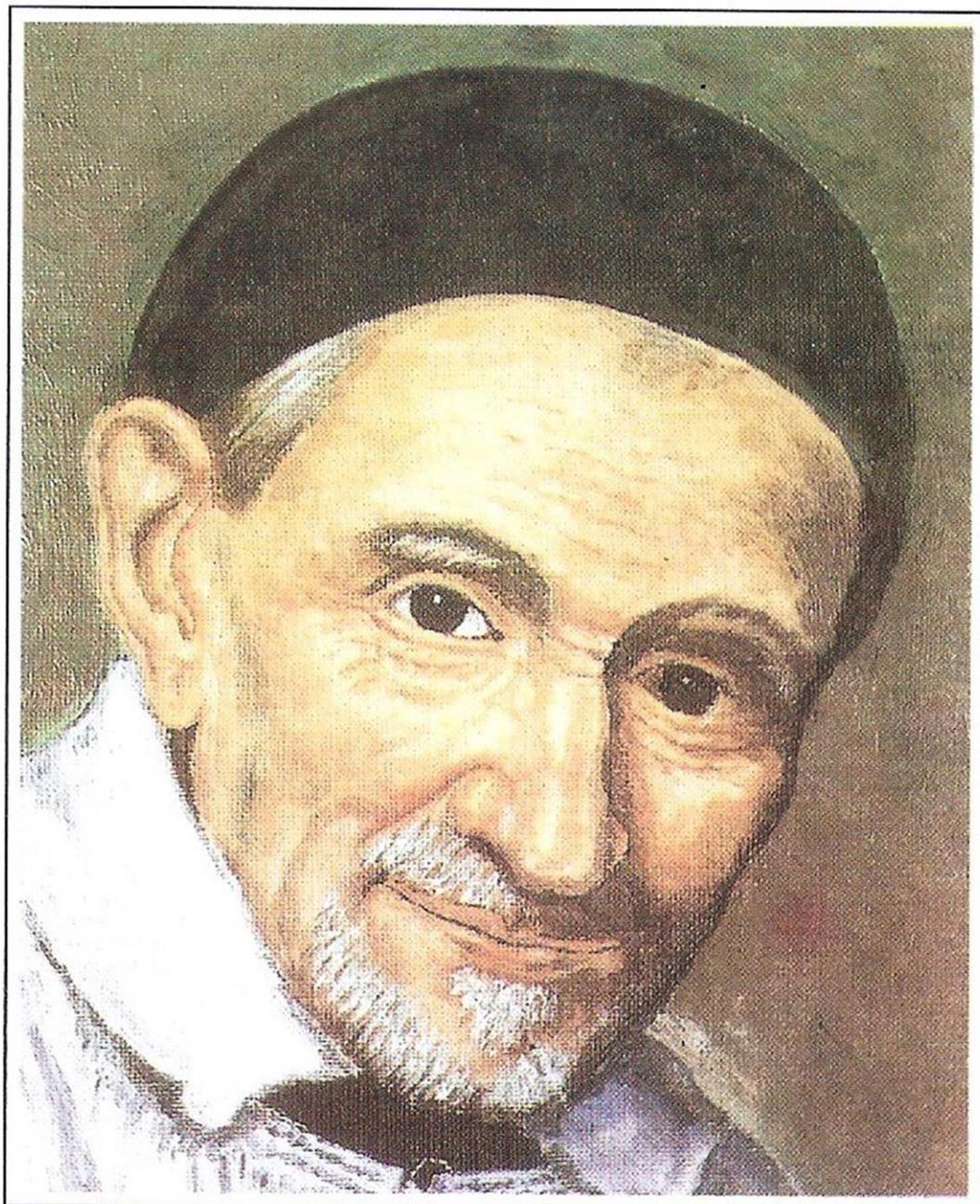


VINCENTIANA

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FEATURE:

Evangelizing Europe

CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION
GENERAL CURIA

SECRETARIAT OF STATE

N. 467.907/G.N.

From the Vatican, February 4, 2000

Dear Father Maloney,

The Holy Father has learnt with joy that the Congregation of the Mission is celebrating the Third Centenary of its presence in China. He is spiritually united with you and all the Vincentians in giving thanks to the Lord for three centuries of evangelization in China in fidelity to the charism of consecration and service left to you by your Founder, Saint Vincent de Paul.

Since the first group of missionaries, led by Father Ludovico Appiani, arrived in China on October 14, 1699, the Vincentian Fathers have been tireless in preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ and particularly in the work of priestly formation. Generous cooperation with other missionary congregations and involvement in scholarly pursuits characterized their creative approach to making known the good news of salvation. Great was their joy when in 1926 the first group of Chinese Bishops included two Vincentians and one taught by them.

For love of Christ, many Vincentians have undergone suffering and trial and have known privation and imprisonment. Some have paid with their blood for their fidelity to Christ and his Church. Their martyrdom “is the most eloquent proof of the truth of the faith, for faith can give a human face even to the most violent of deaths and shows its beauty even in the midst of the most atrocious persecutions” (*Incarnationis Mysterium*, 13). The Church honours the memory of martyrs such as Saint Jean Gabriel Perboyre and Blessed François Régis Clet whose supreme testimony is a sign of that greater love which sums up all other values and is a source of encouragement and hope to those who continue to suffer for their faith.

Today the Congregation gives joyful praise to God for the love for the Chinese people reflected in the lives of their confreres. The Holy Father encourages the Vincentians to look to their example as they face the new challenges of evangelization. During this Jubilee Year the Christian community is called “to lift its eyes of faith to embrace new horizons in proclaiming the Kingdom of God” (*Incarnationis Mysterium*, 2). In a special way, His Holiness prays that as the Vincentians celebrate three hundred years of presence in China they will be invigorated and renewed in their commitment to making known to the great Chinese family the mystery of God’s will “which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fulness of time, to unite all thing in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph 1: 9-10).

With these sentiments, His Holiness entrusts the Congregation of the Mission in China to the heavenly intercession of Mary, Mother of the Redeemer, and he cordially imparts his Apostolic Blessing to all who join in the Anniversary celebrations.

With the assurance of my own prayers and good wishes on this special occasion, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ

+ Angelo Card. Sodano
Secretary of State

The Reverend Robert P. Maloney
Superior General
Congregation of the Mission
Via dei Capasso, 30
00164 ROMA

To members of the Congregation of the Mission throughout the world

My very dear Brothers,

May the peace of Christ, crucified and risen, be with you!

Over the centuries pilgrimages have enjoyed immense popularity among Catholics. In the *Canterbury Tales* Chaucer writes of a housewife from Bath:

*Three times she'd journeyed to Jerusalem;
And many a foreign stream she'd had to stem;
At Rome she'd been and she'd been in Boulogne,
In Spain at Santiago, and Cologne.*

The allure of pilgrimages continues to this day. Many of us know people who have made their way to Fatima, Lourdes, Guadalupe, Luján, or Rue du Bac. Last summer I chatted with someone who had just completed a five-week journey to Compostela on foot. This year millions will walk through the Holy Door at St. Peter's or trace the Way of the Cross in Jerusalem. Of course, Catholics are not alone in fostering pilgrimages. Jews flock to the Holy Land. Moslems travel to Mecca. Hindus journey to the Ganges. One of the great classics in Protestant piety is John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, which at one time was second only to the Bible in popularity.

Pilgrimage is not simply a recurrent phenomenon in popular piety. It is, rather, a metaphor for the whole Christian life. Its biblical roots run deep. The authors of Exodus and Deuteronomy depict a pilgrim people whom Yahweh loves and forms as he leads them toward the promised land. Many of the psalms are pilgrim songs, ringing out God's praises as his people "go up to the house of the Lord" (Pss 42:5; 43:4; 122:1). Luke's gospel, beginning with 9:51, focuses on following Christ to Jerusalem, and Luke's second book, the Acts, describes Christianity as "the Way" (Acts 9:2; 18:25; 24:22).

Since as early as the second century, Christians have engaged in pilgrimages both literally and metaphorically. Literally, many set off courageously for unknown lands, facing perils and physical hardships, hoping that an exodus from the ordinary circumstances of daily life would sharpen their consciousness of what is central to being a Christian. By the middle ages there were hundreds of pilgrimage sites. As travelers visited shrines they hoped to grow in sensitivity to the mysteries celebrated

there. Of course a danger, then as now, is that such pilgrimages degenerate into tourism. Unfortunately, many a group that has passed through Rome or Jerusalem has pondered the scriptures little and has remained largely untouched by the death and resurrection of the Lord.

But whether we remain at home or travel abroad, all of us profess to be a pilgrim people. So, as we begin the first Lent of the new millennium, let me suggest to you three reflections about pilgrimage in its metaphorical sense.

1. Lent itself is a pilgrimage. It is a desert experience like that of the people of God in the Exodus or that of Jesus at the beginning of the synoptic gospels. Its goal is to immerse us more deeply into the mystery of the death and resurrection of the Lord as we journey toward the Kingdom of God. Since most of us will not be journeying literally during these 40 days, the question is: What will we do, metaphorically, to alter the humdrum circumstances of our everyday lives so that we might have a heightened consciousness of our baptismal commitment to follow Christ even to death, and thus share in the joy of his resurrection? Once, in the not-too-distant past, fasting altered our daily regime during Lent and focused our attention, even physically, on the deeper renunciations involved in the following of Christ. Now that fasting is rarer, what might we do to change our environment and sharpen our focus? Might we carve out more substantial periods of desert-like silence? Might we rise earlier to ponder the scriptures and turn them over in our hearts like Mary the Mother of Jesus? Might we engage in voluntary fasting, or quit smoking, or moderate our use of alcohol? Might we turn off the television or the radio or the video player in the evening in order to have time for *lectio divina*?
2. Of course, not just Lent but all of life is a pilgrimage. That is the principle meaning of the metaphor and it is precisely what Lent seeks to recall to us. Do we really sense that we are pilgrims in life? While deeply appreciating the beauty and value of created things, can we say with conviction, as did St. Paul (1 Cor 7:29-31): “From now on those with wives should live as though they had none; those who weep should live as though they were not weeping, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing; buyers should conduct themselves as though they owned nothing, and those who make use of the world as though they were not using it, for the world as we know it is passing away”? Are we eager, and at the same time patient, on the journey: eager to reach the goal, but patient because we trust that, though the desert is trackless, wide, and arid, the Lord accompanies us? St. Vincent states that patience is the “virtue of the perfect” (SV X, 181). If that is so, then it is surely also a virtue to be cultivated by all of us who are sinners, wayfarers, conscious of our limitations. Are we patient with ourselves as we come to understand better, on our pilgrim way, how imperfect we are?
3. In our Vincentian Family, we choose to make our pilgrimage in company with the poor. One of the privileges I have, in my present ministry, is to visit so

many Vincentians, Daughters of Charity and members of our lay groups, younger and older, precisely as they accompany the most abandoned. I want to encourage all the members of our family today, at the beginning of this new millennium, to listen ever more attentively to our neediest fellow travelers, to work beside those who experience helplessness in the face of violence, natural disasters, unemployment, or similar crises, to love them deeply as brothers and sisters, to stand with them in their struggle for justice, to support them in being agents of their own human promotion, to be their soul friends, evangelizing them and being evangelized by them. Our family now exists in more than 140 countries. Do the poor there perceive us not merely as aid-givers but as friends whom they have grown to love on the journey, as bearers of the genuinely good news of God's closeness?

Those are my thoughts this Lent. This season reminds us that our pilgrimage, like the Lord's, will surely involve suffering, especially as our journey becomes more closely entwined with that of the poor. I join with you in praying that suffering love may be an energizing force along the way and that as it develops into dying love it may burst into the joy of resurrection.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.
Superior General

December 6, 1999

To the Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission

My very dear Confreres,

May the grace of Our Lord be always with you!

The heads of various branches of the Vincentian Family, at our annual meeting last January, decided to publish a Jubilee Declaration on behalf of the poor. Fr. Charles Shelby was commissioned to coordinate the writing process and, after numerous drafts and much consultation, the attached document has been unanimously approved. It is available in eight languages: English, French, German, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Slovak, and Spanish.

Fr. Shelby is sending this document to the heads of the various branches of our family for distribution in their groups. It will also be posted on our Vincentian Family web page.

I am sending it to you today to ask that you distribute it throughout your province. Please give it the widest circulation possible: your own newsletter, local newspapers and periodicals, radio, television (where feasible), Internet. May I ask too that you coordinate your efforts with the other branches of the Vincentian Family that exist in your province so that there will be no duplication. I am attaching the document in the principal language(s) of your country. If it would be useful for you to have it in another of the above-mentioned languages, please let me know.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter which, I hope, will promote a worldwide awareness of the needs of the poor.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.
Superior General

Jubilee 2000 Declaration on Behalf of the Poor

Introduction to the Final Draft

At the 1999 Vincentian Family Reunion in Rome last January, I was given the task to formulate a declaration on behalf of the poor for the Great Jubilee 2000. It is to be no more than one page, and it is to speak to the widest possible audience.

In developing this declaration, I have sought:

* to use the "little method" of Saint Vincent, presenting motivation (in the Scripture passage), explanation (in the facts and convictions), and means (in the invitation). The declaration closes with the consequence of a world closer to God's kingdom. At the end are our names as the international Vincentian Family. I would hope that between September 27 and November 28 we would open the declaration to endorsements from local groups, whether divisions of our organizations or other local groups who share the vision of Vincent. The wider the participation, the greater the impact.

* to speak for the poor, the voiceless in our society, those at the margin. I see no need to speak for those poor who can speak for themselves (although we can and should speak in solidarity with them); rather, we are speaking for the poor who are so powerless that their own voice will be ignored, in some cases even by the poor themselves. I chose the image of a threshold, a doorway, because it is one of the major symbols of the Jubilee. In the initial motivation, the reference to Scripture, I placed the poor in the person of Christ, knocking at the door. I also refer to the image of the poor Lazarus (who is voiceless himself but gains Abraham to speak for him) at the door of the rich man.

* to use short phrases in order to put the maximum impact in the minimum space. I focused on what seemed to be the root causes of poverty. For publicity, the press often likes brief statements which they can quote. I hope that at least some of my words evoke strong images. In developing the declaration this way, I have chosen a particularly "American" format. In other cultures or languages such a format may not be suitable. With this in mind, I encourage translators to do more than simply translate the words; instead to be free in adapting the declaration to their own culture. The important points are that we speak together and bear witness to the place of the poor in the kingdom of God.

* The statements, and especially the items in the lists, can be interpreted in a narrow, condescending, arrogant sense; or they can be seen in a broader, inclusive, and evangelistic way. The intention, obviously, is the latter. However, I do not know how to eliminate that ambiguity without producing a much, much longer essay.

Here is a summary of the process so far. I produced a very rough first draft and presented it to Fr. Maloney, Fr. Benjamin Romo, and a few others who gave some excellent suggestions. I then developed a second draft which I offered to the Vincentian Family members who had been at our reunion. They gave suggestions, comments, and critiques, which have all been very valuable. With such a wide base from which to work, some of the comments were contradictory. I have submitted this draft to Fathers Maloney and Romo before distributing it generally. I think I have completed my task. It is now up to us to translate it, offer it to our members for endorsement, and publish it.

Charles Shelby, C.M.

**At the Threshold of the Great Jubilee 2000
To the Nations of the World and All People of Good Will
On Behalf of the Poor**

*The poor of the world stand at the door and knock asking to enter
and dine with us, to join the guests at the banquet of this Great Jubilee.*

(see Revelation 3:20; compare Luke 16:19-21)

We, the international Vincentian Family, following Jesus Christ and his disciple Vincent de Paul, share a deep concern for the suffering of those who are poor. We recognize these facts and hold these convictions:

- Every human being possesses a fundamental dignity and deserves respect.
- Long-existing forms of poverty remain with us: ignorance, hunger, homelessness, unemployment, low wages, sickness, addiction, lack of sanitation, oppression, the ravages of war.
- New poor and new forms of poverty have arisen in our midst: AIDS, rupture of families, denial of access to technology, environmental pollution, culture of death.
- Some of these poverties, old and new, are reinforced by the structures of our society.
- Christ our savior lives and suffers today in those who are poor.
- Effective love for the poor proclaims the good news that God's kingdom is at hand.

We, the international Vincentian Family, invite all people to unite in listening and responding to the cries of those in need. Together we can do what separately we cannot do. Let us open the doors of opportunity by:

- Building a culture of solidarity, understanding, and dialogue, as we grow in respect for the rights of each person.
- Providing the resources for education to every person, regardless of status, race, or gender.
- Assuring a living wage to all workers.
- Easing the burden of debt for those less able to pay, whether nations or individuals.

- Offering to the hungry the food, resources, and skills they need in order to feed themselves and their families.

Then all of us, rich and poor throughout the world, will join our hearts to celebrate the Great Jubilee and join our hands to move forward together in the third millennium.

We are the leaders of some of the principal branches of the International Vincentian Family:

International Association of Charity, founded 1617, 260,000 members

Congregation of the Mission of Saint Vincent de Paul, founded 1625, 4,000 members

Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, founded 1633, 25,000 members

Federation of Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, founded 1734, over 4,500 members

Sisters of Charity Federation in the Vincentian-Setonian Tradition, founded 1809, 7,000 members

Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, founded 1833, 930,000 members

Religious of Saint Vincent de Paul, founded 1845, 300 members

Vincentian Marian Youth, founded 1847, 200,000 members

Association of the Miraculous Medal, founded 1905, over 6,000,000 registered members

Feast of Saint Vincent de Paul, 27 September 1999

Jesus Christ, Alive in His Church, a Source of Hope for Europe

“Reflexions about the special Assembly for Europe
of the Synod of Bishops

by Jean Landousies C.M.
Paris Province

The second Special Assembly for Europe of the Synod of Bishops which was held in Rome, 1-23 October brought to a close the series of continental synods called by John Paul II in view of the Jubilee Year 2000. My intention here is not to give a general overview. Two of our confreres who participated (Mgr F. Rodé, Archbishop of Ljubljana and Mgr T. Gocłowski, Archbishop of Gdańsk) would be more qualified. I wish simply to offer some reflexions by an outside observer on a few of the themes which were treated and which concern us more closely as Vincentians. I will do this on the basis of documents issued by the Press Office throughout the Synod. Within a year an apostolic exhortation by the Pope is due to take up the essentials of the synodal reflexions.

1. A Realistic Appraisal

Several organs of the press, basing themselves especially on a certain reading of the *'Relatio ante disceptationem'* (introductory report) of Cardinal Rouco of Madrid, have reported that the starting point for this Synod had been a pessimistic description of the situation of the Church in Europe. It is doubtless true that several bishops arrived at the Synod in this frame of mind. Nevertheless, it seems more balanced to read the interventions of the first days as a realistic appraisal of the grave crisis of faith which affects European society today, and especially as an acknowledgement of the great diversity of situations among the Churches in countries formerly referred to as of the East or of the West, as well as within these same regions.

By way of example, take the intervention of Cardinal Eyt (Bordeaux): “The idea that perhaps Christianity has failed in Europe is a widespread idea, resulting at times in programmes of distancing from each other: Church, Christianity and contemporary culture. There results therefore a sort of ‘quiet apostasy’ of the majority of Europeans, at least in the West and particularly amongst adolescents and the young. *‘Anima europea naturaliter jam non christiana.’* Mgr Rodé (Ljubljana) insists on the future of the faith in Europe. Certainly he would stress that religious practice is diminishing, Christian values are crumbling, in spite of the Council and the enormous effort for spiritual renewal in the Church. But “perhaps a turning-point is on the way. I see a proof of this in the failure of the atheism of this cruel century.... Having revealed its

radical negativity, it can permit us to hope that it will also appear in the eyes of European man like a prison for heart and intelligence, incapable of giving meaning to life or a future to humanity. Now, a humanity which lacks a future is a prey to despair or threatened with madness.”

The first part of the Synod was able to lead to a serious “stock taking” which opened up a new sense of optimism, since, in the words of Cardinal Tettamanzi (Genoa), “Christian realism which ought to animate our discernment cannot fail to open itself up to a radical optimism. It is the optimism which is born of faith in the presence of the Lord Jesus who has not abandoned the Church and humanity, and who continues to send his Spirit from the four corners of the earth with the aim of touching Europe and transforming it in its hidden depths. This is what continually happened throughout two thousand years of history. And numerous are the signs of this active and vivifying presence of the Spirit.”

It was already an appeal for a “vigorous hope” launched by John Paul II in the homily of the opening mass. The final message of the Synod, centred on “the Gospel of hope” would come to confirm this state of mind which would run through the Assembly. The group work sessions laid it bare that the context of mission in Europe today is that of a crisis of faith. Indeed, in the course of recent years society has undergone a deep secularisation. However, in spite of numerous negative aspects of this situation, it is not appropriate to hold a pessimistic vision of things, because there is noticeable almost everywhere a demand for faith. And so, it seems more just to interpret this crisis situation as being a sign, an invitation to gather together the energies of Christian communities in order to bring a renewal of true hope.

2. Recentring the Mission on Christ

This synod was in a way a strong encouragement to cast out into the deep. In a period of doubt, of anxiety about the future where confidence and hope are sorely tested, it is an appeal to stretch oneself, to throw oneself into the following of Christ by refusing to be put off by appearances on the surface of things in order to get back to essentials. And so, in order serenely to face up to the difficult spiritual situation which is traversing the continent, there is an urgent need to come back to the very origin of mission, to fill oneself again with faith in Christ in order to proclaim him and lead people to him. Because once again John Paul II was to say “Jesus Christ is alive in his Church and continues from one generation to the next to ‘draw near’ to people and to ‘journey’ with them. It is particularly in moments of trial, when disappointment threatens to cause a wavering of confidence and hope, that the Risen One joins in on the wandering paths of humanity and, even if he is not recognised, he becomes the companion of our journey” (*Opening Homily*, p. 2).

It is therefore necessary to re-establish at the centre of mission the mystery of Christ, source of hope, while not separating him from the Church which ought to be a

living witness to the gospel message. The Church possesses no other treasure than that of announcing Jesus Christ as dead and risen again. That is the kerygma which should be at the heart of mission, convinced that the salvation brought by Jesus is necessary for our times and for our culture. When it is received this message brings about a progressive moral change of the whole of existence and of its liturgical celebration.

Proclamation of the kerygma takes on even greater importance when faced with the considerable number of our contemporaries who no longer are aware of the essential Christian message or who simply reduce it to a list of values learned or maybe even outdated. For most people therefore is Christ still perceived as the Son of God? Is he our Saviour? Besides, does the asking of such questions still contain any meaning since one no longer knows or one no longer understands from what or why one should be saved by this man who died 2000 years ago? Thus for example, has the celebration of the Jubilee, or more precisely the 2000 date itself, any meaning for most people apart from the symbolism of its digits? In a world where a democratic spirit rightly fashions people's mentalities more and more can faith be anything more than the fruit of common opinion based on opinion polls? Can it still be a real expression of commitment?

It is therefore urgent to propose to European man a renewed proclamation of Jesus Christ our unique Saviour and of the salvation which he brings to all people and all nations, especially to the poorest of them, and to give witness of a faith which stirs up a durable hope. This proclamation should make it clear that Christ reveals man's true identity and makes possible a communion between man and God. The conception of man which Christ reveals is the pre-eminent response to the search for the dignity of the person which is one of the highest aspirations of the people of today. Indeed it affirms to us that the existence of each human person has meaning in the eyes of God, that communion between persons is historically possible and that diversity can become richness. It also indicates that the power of the Kingdom is at work in history and contributes to the building up of the city of man according to God, that charity gives an eternal value to every humanising gesture, and that suffering, freely accepted, is transformed into an instrument of redemption. It is in the long run the certitude that life triumphs over death.

3. Transmitting the Faith

The transmission of this faith in Christ who died and rose again and is always acting in our world is a crucial question. But it must be noted that this problem is not peculiar to the Church. It is our present age which seems incapable of transmitting its spiritual, moral and cultural heritage to the generations which follow. Besides, evangelisation today takes place in a new cultural context which represents an immense challenge for the faith and the behaviour of Christians. It has been said that Europe is a sort of laboratory where confrontation is being played out between faith and modernity. In fact the transmission of faith must take account of a process of

secularisation which limits man's horizon to what is concrete and visible, thus excluding God and the invisible.

However, even in this context man experiences a strong need for hope and certainty. Hence, transmission of the faith demands that the mystery of Christ should be proclaimed in its entirety. Otherwise it is impossible to reply to the serious questions which people ask themselves. This is all the more important because many of our contemporaries no longer succeed in judging what distinguishes Christianity from the numerous currents of spirituality of every kind which invades their minds. Christian faith is not a vague religious feeling which makes few demands. To announce Christ and to bear witness to him requires a fearless showing forth of what is Christianity's specific identity. Consequently how can one not feel the necessity of giving proof of courage by proclaiming one's faith. Certain synodal Fathers characterised as Pauline this audacity which displays such fine enthusiasm.

The eschatological dimension of proclaiming the faith, often underdeveloped in preaching, manages to find a basis of support in the secret aspirations of the heart of European man, haunted by the questions of suffering and of death. This eschatological endeavour concerns also the present life. The coming of the Reign of God in this world is not the fruit of our human efforts alone, often rather despairing, but above all it springs from the gratuitous grace of God.

It is therefore urgent for each Christian, each Christian community to regain a missionary spirit for proclaiming the kerygma with the strength which the Spirit is already giving to the task, seeking at the same time new methods which will enable us to meet man where he is "making" himself and expressing himself today. Announcing the Gospel is a task which concerns all Christians. This calls for communities and persons who are authentic believers. Personal testimony is an absolute necessity. In order to evangelise, it is necessary to take note of the shortcomings of the agents for evangelisation and those of communities, at the level of faith and its expression. These would be a faith based more on custom than on convictions, a routine religious practice or a lack of concern for the challenges of contemporary culture. In a world which is loathe to accept abstract doctrines, it is through individual and communitarian witness by authentic believers, through companionship and listening in daily life, that the Gospel is often announced with most authenticity and impact. On the other hand if the knowledge of fundamental truths cannot be left aside – having done this at times may have led to the present situation – there is no evidence that transmission takes place. Only credible apostles who have themselves met the living Christ the true evangeliser, can have the transparency of witnesses who lead others to follow them towards Christ. Only a person who has been evangelised can evangelise, only a person who has been sanctified can become an instrument of sanctification. The evangelizer is the person who allows himself to be fashioned by the charity of God to the point of becoming an earthly reflexion of God's merciful love for people.

Revitalising communities so that the Church should become a source of hope in Europe, passes through a sort of spiritual awakening, a renewed recognising of the Lordship of Christ, Son of God made man; that is, by vigorously confessing that Jesus Christ is truth and life, the only worthwhile hope down through the ages and not merely a mentor, however worthy he be.

As a consequence, the evangelizer will be seen as a prophet, a sign of contradiction who, in a spirit of dialogue and of service, with more emphasis on questioning than on denouncing, discerns and welcomes the positive signs of culture. At the same time he confronts and vigorously points out whatever goes against the interest of humanity and its destiny.

4. Evangelising the Poor

If this theme was not explicitly presented as major topic of the Synod, it was however present in many ways in the interventions of the synodal Fathers. Thus, from the opening days, Mgr Kenney, Auxiliary of Stockholm, in the name of the Scandinavian bishops, expressed several aspirations which seem to me significant because they were subsequently taken up many times:

- “In the first place, we ask the Synod to promote concrete moves to aid the poor of Europe, whatever be the reason for their poverty. This means showing greater signs of solidarity with the poorest countries of our continent. At the same time we cannot forget the poor in other parts of the world. In other words, we should be more generous than we are today.” In their forceful reminder that Europe should not become closed in on itself, the Fathers made solidarity a key point in their reflexions both regarding the internal life of the Church (solidarity between the Churches of the West and of the East for example), and also for relations between the nations of the continent in order to reinforce the process of constructing Europe. Several bishops strongly insisted on the responsibility of Europe and of the Churches towards the poorer peoples and on the urgent need for an examination of conscience by the richer Churches. The presence of delegates representing the five continents, but especially perhaps the fact that numerous European bishops have effective relationships with the poorest Churches, brings it about that this preoccupation is experienced more and more as a pressing appeal for solidarity and for a change from consumerist habits in developed societies. “Without sobriety we cannot develop a spiritual life which is authentic in solidarity.”
- “Secondly, we ask that the Church should place more emphasis on the problem of clandestine immigrants present in many of our countries - which have now amounted to several millions on our continent. We should not allow these sisters and brothers to be forgotten.” The question of welcoming the stranger and, to go beyond that, of meeting others who are different, was repeated in numerous

interventions. Obviously we ought to recall all the discussions which began to find expression concerning the meeting of cultures even within the continent. I shall confine myself here to two elements which are today burning issues in several countries: immigration and Islam.

- It has been pointed out that in certain countries the Church and its organisations are often the sole source of assistance and support. An important emphasis should be placed, with realism of course, on the welcome given to immigrants, while being aware of the difficulties and the necessary financial commitments. The assistance offered to these people ought to enable them to bring about their own development and to become established through a partnership with the Church and the country from which they come. Faced with the diversity of people's situations, economic immigrants, refugees fleeing from their country to save their life or through despair, it has been suggested that the different Church organisations involved could elaborate a serious critique of European policies in this domain.

- Our relationship with Moslems who are not all immigrants or foreigners has been focussed on by the press as a particularly difficult matter. Even if a few interventions failed to display much openness, it could be said that broadly speaking, the Church's involvement in dialogue with Moslems was forcefully reaffirmed. Moreover it is not without significance that a few days after the Synod, at St. Peter's Square in the Vatican, John Paul II himself was presiding over an interreligious Assembly organised as a follow-up of the 1986 Assisi meeting and declared: "The task which now awaits us consists therefore in promoting a culture of dialogue.... I am convinced that the growing interest in dialogue between religions represents one of the signs of hope which is present in this last part of the century. It must however continue. Greater mutual esteem and growing confidence should lead to an even more effective and coordinated action in common in the name of the human family." Certainly the Pope knows the concrete difficulties of this dialogue. However "it must continue," because it is an irreversible option of the Church (Cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, n. 55-57). Confronted with the reality of Islam in Europe, the Church no longer has any other options than to propose a sincere dialogue, and it must engage in every effort to instigate this and cause it to progress without naïveté but also without prejudice. Dialogue with Moslems demands from Christians a Gospel attitude of charity and graciousness. But in the same spirit they must also require from Moslem-majority societies in which Christians are living proper respect for the fundamental rights of persons, one of which is religious liberty. So that interreligious dialogue might progress it is also necessary that Catholics should be firmly grounded in their faith and that they should rediscover the richness of their own spiritual tradition.

- Another of the Synod's requests concerning evangelisation of the poor touched on the social doctrine of the Church. It is clear that to find Christ is at the same time to serve one's brothers and sisters, each one personally and in their life in society. The doctrine and the activity of the Church go hand in hand. It is a matter of credibility. Many Bishops stressed that the Church cannot remain silent in the

presence of certain situations of injustice and contempt for humanity, for the Gospel calls us to humanise society. In the face of evolving society the social doctrine of the Church ought to take account of the new forms of poverty. It is necessary to alert Christians and the whole of public opinion to the importance of such areas of action and thus to contribute to the diffusion and appreciation of the social doctrine. And of course we are aware that, in recent months ago a “catechism of the social doctrine of the Church” is being drafted.

5. Formation of the Laity

The laity's place in the Church was at the centre of many interventions. Particular emphasis was placed on the importance of their involvement in the life of society. A serious worry was manifest that a social conscience has not been formed during this present generation, and it was noted that this generation has adopted a more and more individualistic attitude. The call to become involved in public life is based in the Gospel. To make an appropriate response to their vocation and to allow them to reflect on their role in the light of the Gospel it is necessary to provide for a Christian formation of the laity in which the social doctrine of the Church must occupy prime of place. A solid theological and spiritual formation is showing itself to be more and more indispensable if they are fully to assume their baptismal responsibility. The values on which a sane society can be built can only come from the convictions of individuals. And so, special attention must be paid to laity who occupy important responsibilities in the areas of culture, economics and politics, since they are often subjected to much pressure or temptation.

6. The Mission “ad gentes”

The universal dimension of the mission of the Church was very much present in this Synod. The representatives of other continents often forcefully recalled the urgency of ecclesial solidarity. Thus Cardinal Tomko, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples, recalling that two-thirds of humanity still do not know Jesus Christ in a relationship of faith, declared: “If in certain countries and certain European groups there exists a crisis of faith, this will not be resolved through European Churches turning inwards on themselves but rather through their opening up to their universal mission. However none of those who believe in Christ, no Church institution can evade this supreme task: ‘to announce Christ to all peoples’ (*Redemptoris Missio*, n. 3).” And the Cardinal asked more specifically for the courageous pursuit of the mission *ad gentes* through the promotion of missionary vocations *ad vitam*, the development of sending priests *fidei donum* and a special care for the mission with immigrants who find themselves in Christian communities in Europe. “The European Churches ought to be dynamic communities who are evangelising, rather than maintenance communities dedicated to conservation.” This last affirmation seems to be of great importance for us at a time when the small number

of priests leads to their being used in a more and more limited way for the already gathered community to the detriment of the mission to those who are furthest from the Church. Besides, there has been insistence on the need to renew missionary theology, giving their proper foundational place to Christology, pneumatology of mission, inculturation, ecumenism and interreligious dialogue.

7. Vocations to the Priesthood and Religious Life in Europe

Everyone knows how most of the countries of Europe are preoccupied today with this question. The crisis is linked with the crisis of Christianity in general which is noticeable in the same countries. It is important to continue calling people to ministries and to the religious life with foresight and insistence, and with this in mind, to develop a pastoral policy for vocations which is begun at the right moment, giving the greatest visibility possible to instances of awakening vocations and readying for ministry. Young people need to know very early which are the religious communities pervaded by an atmosphere which assists the living out of the Christian faith. It can also happen that the vocations crisis might be due to an inadequate vision of the Church, to a lack of clarity about priestly identity and the specific and intimate connexion which exists between the ministerial priesthood and the priesthood of Christ.

8. European Unity

One cannot speak of this Synod without making reference to the preoccupation it showed for the spiritual unity of Europe. On the continent, the Church has the mission once again to pass on the hope given to it in Jesus Christ. The peoples of Europe still suffer today the effects of totalitarian ideologies, the after-effects of war and civil disorders. Also noticeable is the failure of European institutions when faced with the horrors of the ethnic cleansings of recent years. These events represent an urgent call to the Church to promote a new culture of readiness to come together, and new forms of solidarity and participation.

In this context, reconciliation becomes a major element of evangelization which appeases memories and suggests possible ways ahead for the future.

9. A Message of Hope

The Synod's final message, addressed to believers and to all citizens of Europe, is focussed on a powerful appeal for hope. The document insists first of all on the fact that man cannot live without hope, or his existence would be condemned to insignificance and would become unbearable. However, it is clear that this hope finds itself confronted by various challenges, to diverse forms of suffering, anguish and

death. And so, Christians must be ardent and prophetic witnesses to *the Gospel of Hope*, establishing themselves on the certainty that the Spirit of God is victorious over every kind of despair.

The bishops therefore invite Catholics to confess their faith in Jesus Christ, the true and unique hope for Man and for History. Let them rest assured that hope is neither a dream nor a utopia, but a reality. Concrete signs of the work of God in the European Churches and society are there. And the document enumerates a certain number which make of the Church a community of hope: signs of hope, the martyrs whose faith was stronger than death, the sanctity of those who lived in generous fidelity to the Gospel; signs of hope so numerous in the daily life of ecclesial communities and of every disciple of Christ.

All this is both a gift and a responsibility for communities and for individuals, leading also to a courageous examination of conscience. In this perspective the Fathers of the Synod throw out a confident appeal: “Allow yourself to be converted by the Lord and respond with a renewed fervour to the apostolic and missionary vocation you have received through Baptism.”

“Let us proclaim, celebrate and serve the Gospel of hope.” That will be so to speak the vigorous appeal which will come out from this second European Synod. And so it will be possible to look at Europe in a new perspective which recognises numerous signs leading to hope.

The conclusion from the Bishops, which is also ours, is a prayer to the God of life, of hope and of joy: “European Church, fear not! Our God is faithful, the God of hope is not abandoning you. Hope in the Lord and you will never be confounded.”

(STANISLAUS BRINDLEY, C.M., translator)

VINCENTIANS IN EUROPE 1999 A TIME OF CRISIS

by Kevin Rafferty, C.M.
Visitor of Ireland

INTRODUCTION

WHY FOCUS ON EUROPE NOW?

In his letter to European Provincials in advance of their meeting in Lebanon in April 1999, the Superior General, Fr. Bob Maloney, encouraged us to think beyond our own provincial perspectives and to focus on the challenges that face us as Vincentians ‘on mission in Europe’ today.¹ In doing so he acknowledged the diversity of background and variety of mission and ministry in the European Provinces. When one checks our catalogue² one will see that there is at present great diversity from one province to another in regard to size, personnel, number of communities and indeed, great diversity too in the works each province is engaged in. However, with the exception of our provinces in Eastern Europe, it would be true

¹ *Vincentiana*, May-June 1999 - Fr. Maloney’s letter to the members of CEVIM, (European Conference of Visitors of the Mission) April 12th, 1999 - p. 145 - 149.

² Statistics on CEVIM Provinces - Catalogue 1999:

<u>COUNTRY</u>	(1) <u>PERSONNEL</u>	<u>MEDIAN AGE</u>	<u>NO OF COMMUNITIES</u>	<u>STUDENTS</u>	(2) <u>PROVINCE FOUNDED</u>
Austria	21	55.8	5	2	(1853)
Belgium	10	69.6	3	0	(1902)
Paris	124	65.19	20	8	(1642)
Toulouse	85	66.22	15	7	(1661)
Germany	14	56.8	5	2	(1781)
Ireland	92	63.4	16	0	(1848)
Barcelona	54	63	10	5	(1774)
Saragossa	131	60.54	21	4	(1774)
Madrid	159	61.17	19	5	(1774)
Salamanca	109	60.57	22	2	(1774)
Holland	67	72.2	6	0	(1921)
Hungary	15	76	3	5	(1926)
Naples	66	65	13	1	(1815)
Rome	66	65	9	2	(1642)
Turin	97	63.51	14	2	(1703)
Portugal	55	58.54	11	7	(1829)
Poland	266	46.5	31	46	(1651)
Slovakia	34	52	8	30	(1941)
Slovenia	53	55.64	9	6	(1852)
Orient	44	50.38	8	4	(1785)
TOTALS:	1,496	61.35	248	138	

(1) Personnel includes bishops and priests and brothers.

(2) A number of Provinces give 2 or 3 dates of founding or re-founding. I only include the first date here.

to say that now is a time of real crisis in regard to the future of many of our European Provinces. The number of candidates coming forward to join us has radically diminished and many of our provinces are faced with the reality of not having enough confreres to maintain our works into the future. At the same time, the median age of confreres in many provinces is very high - in many cases around the mid-60 mark. Of course we are no different to many other orders and congregations in focusing on what kind of future the Congregation may have in our respective countries. Certainly, the future facing many of our provinces is either one of continuing decline, or one in which, though leaner in numbers, we have a more focused Vincentian presence.

A second reason for considering further a European focus for the Congregation is the fact that at so many other levels so much thinking is going on - politically, socially, culturally - about Europe, not only the European Union, but a much broader view of Europe that stretches west to east - from the Atlantic to the Urals and north to south - from the North Pole to the Mediterranean. We can have various attitudes towards the European Union and be sceptical about the focus on the EURO as such.³ The fact of the matter is that we probably do divide at present into EURO enthusiasts and EURO sceptics and we are faced with all the nationalistic barriers that are part and parcel of our European histories. The challenge of Fr. Maloney's letter and indeed, the challenge of much of what is coming through from the recent European Synod is how to focus on a mission in Europe that meets the spiritual needs of people today.

CRISIS TIME

Some may think that the word 'crisis' is too strong a word to use in regard to the present situation. In the course of this article I will point up some of the factors

³ In November 1998 (*International Herald Tribune*, Nov. 28th/29th) the French Philosopher, Regis Debray, wrote:

"What do we see on our future EURO banknotes whose prints have just been invented? Windows, bridges, portals, glass doors and viaducts - all symbolising openness and communication. There is no image of even a single human being. The pillars and columns have no foundation. No proper names. No landscape either, nor date, nor place. There are only cold, technical desert-like images generated by computers. This is Euroland - a no-man's land, a land of no-where.

Are we Europeans really without memories and without heritage? Even if we disregard political and military glory, which inevitably offends national pride, we are still left with Erasmus, Newton, Shakespeare, Garibaldi, Goethe, Voltaire, Cervantes and many others. Nations are "imaginary communities" in which individuals are linked less by their ideas than through shared images, myths, legends and personal items. Memory is essential to form a common will.

Nothing is really more revealing than these banknotes that have no story to tell and show no figures of which one would be proud; no founding events, no independence. We seem to have forgotten the lessons the philosophers have imparted to us over the course of civilisations - 'nothing great can be achieved without passion.'

Debray could also have included the saints - St Benedict, St Dominic, St Francis, St Teresa of Avila, St Ignatius, St Vincent de Paul - and many others - who, even more than the philosophers, have demonstrated a passionate interest in the well-being of their fellow human beings.

that I think justify us in using this word, but at this stage I would like to indicate that I am using the word in both its positive and negative meanings. There is no doubt that this is an extraordinary time of change and of transition in our societies in Europe. The rate of change at many different levels has increased rapidly over the last 10 or 20 years. All kinds of new challenges and new needs are arising all round about us. It is against this background of accelerating change and new opportunities for mission and evangelisation that I am using the word 'crisis.' I am also using it in the sense that if we do not grasp these opportunities, we may very well maintain some kind of presence into the future but it may be one where we do not meet the real needs of Christians today, or withdraw into a ghetto world where we concentrate exclusively on survival at all costs.

A EUROCENTRIC FOCUS

I can already sense a number of people being anxious about a Eurocentric focus in this article. Since Vatican II we have been encouraged to look outwards beyond Europe and to focus on a world Church and indeed, to focus on what Europe can learn from Asia, Africa, North America, South America and Australia. I take all this for granted and that it is healthy for us to do so. The very fact that most of our provinces have been involved in missions to various parts of the world has in fact given us many points of contact with the other continents. At the same time, I think the time has come for us to focus on what form the mission may take in Europe itself into the future without letting go a world, or global, perspective. Would it be true to say that some provinces in Europe are dying in giving birth to new provinces in Africa, or Asia, or South America? Many resources of personnel and material resources have been directed to new missions, where young Churches have been taking root. There is no doubt that there are many things that are praiseworthy about this approach but, at the same time, it would seem to me that we are also called to take the challenge seriously on our own doorsteps, as Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*⁴ pointed out some nine years ago.

1. THE CHANGING SCENE IN EUROPE - IN SOCIETY AND IN THE CHURCH

Over the summer I participated in a summer school in Louvain University. In the course of a session a young lecturer remarked that he and his own age group (he was in his mid-30's) believed that the Catholic tradition could disappear from Northern Europe in the next 20 years. Many of us attending the lecture were shocked. On being challenged on why he thought so, he went on to remark that, first of all, there are very few of his own age group in the 30's and younger, participating in Church life today. Secondly, many seminaries are virtually empty and it is hard to

⁴ *Redemptoris Missio*, 33, 34, 37.

see where the full-time personnel will come from to maintain Church life into the future as things are presently structured. He had other remarks to make about clericalism, patriarchy, alienation of women, which we hear on all sides today. The focus of this young lecturer's comments was on Northern Europe - Belgium, The Netherlands, Germany and France. The statistics for Mediterranean Europe - Spain and Italy - are less startling but no less serious. When one looks at facts and figures that sociologists are beginning to surface today, one is certainly faced with a continuing decline in religious practice in these countries too. The exception of course is Eastern Europe, where one gets the impression that a vibrant Church life is developing in Slovenia, Slovakia, Poland and Hungary. Nevertheless, at recent meetings of European Provincials, I have often been struck by the remarks of a number of confreres from these Provinces that the challenge facing Western Europe is one that will be facing Middle and Eastern Europe in a short time. What seems to be certain in most European countries today is that there has been an accelerated loss of young people from the Church, which has led to talk of a 'dying Church' in many parts of the western world.

Over the summer a series of articles appeared in the English religious journal, *The Tablet*,⁵ on the haemorrhaging of Catholic practice in England and Wales over the past 40 years. This was taken up by other writers in subsequent weeks, including Jan Kerkhofs,⁶ writing from a continental European perspective. A good deal of

⁵ *The Tablet* - 19th June, 1999: Gordon Heald – “Where Have All The Catholics Gone?” p. 860 - 863. The latest statistics for the Catholic Church in England and Wales show a sharp decline in most areas of church life since the sixties.

⁶ *The Tablet* - 24th July, 1999: Jan Kerkhofs “Where Have All The Catholics Gone - Europe Needs Therapy.” p. 1015 - 1016. Drawing from the European Values Study, Kerkhofs points out that the trends Heald (above) draws attention to for Catholics in England and Wales are characteristic, with few exceptions, across Europe and in all main European churches. Here are some of the statistics Kerkhofs includes in this article:

NETHERLANDS: Percentage of population who say they do not belong to a Christian Church: 1900 (1% of population); 1958 (4%); 1970 (39%); 1991 (58%). In 21-30 age group: 72%. Catholic Baptisms: 1992 (36%); 1996 (24%). Only 25% of Dutch will be Christian by the year 2020

GERMANY: Regular Sunday Mass-going amongst Catholics in Germany: 1950 (51%); 1965 (43%, West Germany); 1989 (22%); 1996 (18%, all of Germany). Christians leaving their Churches: 1986-1990 (1 million); 1991-1995 (2 million); 1995: 186,000 Catholics and 297,000 Protestants

BELGIUM: Regular Sunday Mass-going amongst Catholics: 1950 - 50%; 1967 - 43% (Flanders, 15%); 1980 - 26% (Wallonia, 11%); 1995 - 13% (Brussels, 7%). Baptisms (1967, 90%; 1996, 68%); Marriages (1967, 86%; 1996, 50%); Church Funerals (1967, 84%; 1996, 78%). It is estimated that today one out of every two people under the age of 25 in Belgium no longer belongs to a Church.

ITALY: 88% say they belong to the Catholic Church; 9% say they have no religion. Regular Sunday Mass Practice: 1981 (36%); 1990 (40%); 1995 (31%).

SPAIN: Profession of Unbelief: 1970 (2%); 1990 (25%). Regular Religious Practice: 1970 (87%); 1990 (53%). (Only 15% among younger generation).

discussion took place around how to interpret these figures - is it a question of seeing the glass half full, leading to an optimistic interpretation, or a glass half empty, leading to a pessimistic interpretation? What interested me most in these articles was the question of getting into focus a social and cultural analysis across Europe today that would enable us to understand better the world we are called to evangelise. The following is a brief outline of 10 key factors which bear on our contemporary European situation and which are frequently invoked in accounting for the decline of religious practice in many of our countries:

- **Economic & social changes:** In most of our European countries we have experienced extraordinary social and economic changes over the past 50 years. Many confreres of my age group will have memories of frugal living in post-war Europe - in all probability in a rural setting. Today, many people have moved from a rural to an urban setting. Economic development and increasing affluence have opened up all kinds of new opportunities for people. The rate of change has, of course, varied from one country to another. The supermarket has replaced the Church as the centre of community life. The expansion of opportunities for leisure, especially at the weekends, offer all kinds of alternatives to participation in Church life on Sundays and weekends.
- **Dramatic developments in the mass-media:** Many sociologists draw attention to the fact that we have many more democratic sources of information in our media today - media that relentlessly attacks all deference to authority. Some would say that the media have replaced the Church as the one absolute authority. In many European countries the Catholic Church is continually and relentlessly being exposed to negative criticism which, in time, becomes part of the air we breathe. We internalise negative images of the Church, which can stifle the faith of many people and lead them to search for positive values elsewhere. On the other hand the media, like “secularisation” is often envisaged as one of the heads of the dragon of the Apocalypse. How to see the media, not as something demonic but as having great potential for evangelisation, often requires a shift in perspective.
- **Wider access to 2nd and 3rd level education:** One of the extraordinary developments across European countries, including Eastern Europe, is the availability of 2nd level education to all citizens and many now have the

FRANCE: Percentage of those who say they do not belong to any religion has increased in all age groups (especially for those between 15 and 25): 1987 (33%); 1996 (40%). Sunday practice has stabilised at 8% - increasing slowly for those over 60. Baptisms (60%), Marriages (50%), Church Funerals (80%)

CENTRAL EUROPE: Professing to be Catholic: Poland (89%); Croatia (83%); Lithuania (67%); Slovenia (62%); Slovakia (58%). Those who profess to have no religion: Czech Republic (73%); East Germany (72%); Ukraine (68%); Hungary (40%); Estonia (87%); Latvia (63%); Russia (63%). Comparisons between 1990 and 1998 show that in most of these countries the younger generation is increasingly alienated from the Churches.

opportunity to avail of 3rd level and university education. The consequence is of course that we are now challenged to evangelise an 'educated people' who will be far more critical of what we present as the Christian message and far more demanding in the pastoral care we provide. We also find that the standards of religious education for many adults have remained at a rudimentary level. In the recent synod there was a good deal of soul-searching around the question of our failure in the Catholic Church to communicate the teaching of Vatican II to our people.

- **The marginalisation of the Church:** With the decline of Church personnel we have observed in many countries the state taking over more and more responsibility for education, health care and the social services. Even in our so-called Catholic countries there is a diminished presence of Catholic personnel in these spheres. All this raises a number of questions of how well we have prepared lay men and women - teachers, doctors, nurses, social workers and others - to exercise a Christian influence in these important areas of life.
- **The privatisation of religion:** The practice of religion is being seen increasingly as a voluntary matter and subject to individual choice.⁷ Many people continue to experience a religious hunger but they find 'spiritual alternatives' to Sunday Mass, which may take the form of cultural outlets - literature and music on the one hand and, at their worst, in esoteric forms of religious belief - New Age⁸, etc.
- **Charismatic Groups - New Movements:** Worldwide, people will draw attention to the success of charismatic groups, inside and outside the Catholic tradition and this is true in Europe too. A number of these groups seem to take very seriously the scriptural and theological formation of their members, but others tend towards fundamentalism, which is difficult to reconcile with 'reasonable' religious belief in today's world. The ambivalence of many Catholics to 'New Movements' in the Church today, in the European context, can spring from the above.⁹

⁷ At the recent European Synod it was interesting to learn how frequently various participants spoke about "freedom": A new freedom to worship in Eastern Europe; the abuses of freedom in Western Europe; the conflict between the Church and modernity in Europe – a drama that in due course will be repeated elsewhere; the restrictions of women's freedom - Synod discussions were impoverished in that women did not participate in any significant way in them. How can the gospel be proclaimed as Good News – an invitation - rather than a litany of moral demands.

⁸ In many European cities over the past five years, I am continually astonished at the amount of space given to this kind of literature in good book-shops.

⁹ The significance of the New Movements for the Church today would appear to have been a major talking point at the European Synod. Do they constitute a last hope for a European Church in crisis, or should they be absorbed into the parish life, giving new energy and new dynamics to parishes in decline. cf. *Tablet* – Reports on the Synod - 23rd October 1999 pp. 1444 & *Tablet* 30th October 1999, pp. 1459.

- **Believing but not belonging:** A recent study of two English Sociologists, who interviewed a significant number of people who had ceased to practice, discovered that over 80% of those questioned indicated that they had left because of disappointment with some aspect of the “Church’s liturgy, the quality of pastoral care, or negative views about Church leadership today.”¹⁰ There is no doubt that there can be quite contradictory expectations among people about liturgy and church leadership and there certainly has been a good deal of polarisation in many European countries on these issues. How to hold the middle ground can be a difficult task.
- **Loss of faith – a post-modern culture:** In any analysis of the present situation in Europe we cannot escape the fact that we are now living in what is called a “post-modern age.” When one gets through the complexities of trying to unravel what the word ‘post-modern’ means, we have to accept that believers are faced with a whole range of negative critiques of religion, coming from philosophy, sociology, psychology, anthropology etc. One might argue that critiques coming from these disciplines can ‘purify’ religious belief, but a good deal of work is required to reach this position and the faith of many may have withered away at the first icy blasts from atheists and agnostics in our contemporary culture.
- **Rites of passages:** The evidence coming through from Kerkhofs’ statistics indicates that many Catholics keep in touch with the Church for the important ‘Rites of Passage’ - births, marriages and deaths. Much of the work that goes into preparing young people for First Communion and Confirmation is followed by a quick departure from the Church, so much so that, increasingly, people will see First Communion and Confirmation as “Goodbye Sacraments.” For many young people today, religion is something you “grow out of.” In such a context, priests and ministers are viewed more and more as ‘functionaries’ to engage in rites that have lost all meaning for many participants.
- **From social to cultural secularisation:** Arguing from an Irish context, where there has been a dramatic fall in religious practice over the past ten years and where the general credibility of the Church has been damaged by various scandals, Michael Paul Gallagher SJ argues that our “secular” culture has its greatest impact in the zones of imagination, disposition and sensibility. “*Ours seems to be a crisis, not of creed but of culture, not of faith in itself but of the capacity to believe beyond ourselves.*”¹¹ He suggests that we have moved beyond an old style anti-clericalism to a deeper battleground in which a dominant secular environment can eclipse any sense of need or desire for anything more than immediacy. “*God is missing, but not missed.*” Gallagher

¹⁰ Philip Richter & Leslie Francis : *Gone But Not Forgotten* : Darton, Longman & Todd, London 1998.

¹¹ Michael Paul Gallagher SJ, “From Social To Cultural Secularisation” in *Louvain Studies* (24) 1999, p. 104.

points out that in this context: “*Christian faith becomes not so much incredible as unimagined and even unimaginable.*”¹²

Frequently I find that many of the above factors are lumped together under the term ‘secularisation.’¹³ When one looks closely at each of the above one finds that frequently there are many positive factors operating - elimination of poverty; cultural development; overcoming of superstition; a better focus on the Church’s essential role in society; more space to proclaim authentic gospel values; moving beyond tribal Catholicism, etc. There are of course many negative factors operating too - materialism, selfishness, individualism, narcissism, lack of concern for the marginalised and vulnerable. Sharing both a positive and negative critique of the socio-political and cultural situation in our respective countries is an important exercise to be engaged in before getting a Vincentian European mission into focus.

2. A VINCENTIAN READING OF THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Over the past 30 years, various General Assemblies have provided a Vincentian reading of the signs of the times and a focus on how things look from the “underside” - that is, from the world of the poor, the excluded, the outsiders. Many of the points I outline above could be looked at from this perspective. In what follows, I would like to concentrate on what we have called the two “foundational works” of the Congregation, which I believe are “in crisis” in both the positive and negative senses I mentioned earlier.

a) Parish Missions - A work in transition

It strikes me that one area worth exploring as an area of common interest across our European Provinces is the work of parish missions - and now all the more so as many European countries are recognising the need for new forms of evangelisation. The Vincentian Month on Popular Missions, held in Paris from July 7th to August 2nd 1997 certainly gave a good outline of developments in many of our Provinces worldwide, as well as in our European Provinces. One cannot but be impressed by the efforts of confreres in many of our Provinces to re-focus this work and to consider what shape it should take as we cross the threshold of the new century.

In his April 1999 letter to European Visitors, Fr. Maloney had a number of interesting comments to make about these popular missions in a European context:

¹² Ibid. p. 105.

¹³ To avoid a blanket condemnation of ‘secularisation’ some theologians will distinguish between secularisation and secularism. cf. Also Pope Paul VI - *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 55.

*“The work of the popular missions has undergone a significant critique. In some places, the traditional form of parish missions remains effective. In others, Provinces seek for new methods for the integral evangelisation and up-building of parish communities.”*¹⁴

I would venture to suggest that the following are some of the reasons why a “significant critique” is taking place at present about what we regard as one of the “Foundational Works” of the Congregation:

- One question arising in many Provinces is the precise **point of our insertion** into the whole process of parish or diocesan renewal. In many of our Provinces one realises that diocesan priests have now taken the whole renewal process in hand and there are good reasons for doing this. Any diocese that is moving forward today will want to be in charge of the renewal process and because of this it is sometimes quite difficult to see what role parish missionaries can play in this process of renewal.

How does one **evangelise an “educated people?”** Obviously in many situations today these parish missions are engaging with people who have very often had second level education and an increasing number who have third level education. Would it be true to say that the whole parish mission movement in the past was geared to people who had very basic levels of education and who respected priests as one of the few educated groups in a parish?

- Many would take the view that the whole **parish mission movement has been “domesticated;”** *i.e.*, that now it takes the form of a parish retreat or a time of renewal for the converted. In the Irish context, Emmet Larkin, an authority on 19th century Irish Church history has remarked that the fire went out of the parish mission movement as early as 1870, after many parishes had been evangelised. I suspect that this is also true of other European countries.
- We have tended to **separate parish missions from the whole theology of mission** and this I think to the detriment of the parish mission movement in our European Provinces. We have been ready to say that those who are going overseas to what we used to call mission countries are engaged in mission and even though we use the terminology of ‘popular missions,’ I doubt if the word ‘mission’ has retained its original meaning in the parish context of our European Provinces.¹⁵

¹⁴ *Vincentiana* : No. 3 May / June 1999: Fr. Maloney’s letter to European Visitors, p. 147.

¹⁵ David J. Bosch : *Transforming Mission - Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. Orbis Books, N.Y. 1993, p. 349 ff. Bosch makes the point in a variety of ways that one does not have to cross a deep blue sea to go on mission.

- What kind of Church community are we asking people to return to? In critiques of the popular mission today as a form of evangelisation one is inevitably going to have to face up to the **Theology of Church and Ministry** that under-girds the parish mission process - the theology of Church and ministry one is encountering in parishes and the theology of Church and ministry that one is hoping to introduce.¹⁶
- A crucial question for all engaged in parish missions is how to communicate the **'urgency' of salvation** today. Many people of an older generation will have bitter memories of 'scare tactics' in the past. How to communicate God's compassionate love and mercy - what we call the 'Good News of Salvation' - to people today is one of the great challenges of this kind of evangelisation.
- Finally, one is led to ask if the parish mission process, especially when it is short-term - one, two, three weeks - is an inadequate instrument to deal with the different kinds and the different degrees of alienation one encounters among Christians. A much longer process may be required to deal with the alienated, not to speak of the need of initial evangelisation if we are to go forward.¹⁷

The confreres who met in Paris in July 1997 put together a number of proposals in regard to the future of parish missions in the Congregation. Two of them have particular relevance in the European context:

"Set up an international secretariat for popular missions, which would provide information, formation and development. The same should be done on an inter-provincial level where possible." (Proposal 2).

"Promote periodic meetings of popular mission teams both at regional and international level." (Proposal 8).¹⁸

Perhaps the time has come to take these two proposals forward at a European level. Certainly if we think that the context of a declining Church is true of many of our countries, we should have plenty to discuss and share with one another, especially in regard to new forms of evangelisation in the parish context.

b) From seminary formation to formation for ministry

¹⁶ We are still in the process of working out some of the key theological developments of Vatican II, such as: the understanding of the Church as 'communion' and not just 'institution'; recognition of the view that outside the Church there is salvation; finding ways for lay men and women to participate actively in the ministry of the Church; finding ways to model collaborative ministry, rather than an exclusively clerical ministry; recognising that the primary sense of 'vocation' is the vocation of all the baptised.

¹⁷ Kevin Rafferty : "Morality & Conversion" : *Vincentiana* No 4/5, July/Oct 1997 - p. 288.

¹⁸ *Vincentiana* : No. 4-5, July / Oct 1997 : "The Popular Mission," p. 443, 444.

New Horizons in the Making:

As we explore other possible areas of collaboration between our Provinces, another area worth considering is that of seminary formation. In this context, Fr. Maloney has made the following remarks in his letter of April 12th, 1999:

“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 evangelisation of the poor.” (C1, 3^o)¹⁹

Fr. Maloney sums up very succinctly what has happened, historically, in many of our European provinces. At the beginning of the century we were actively involved in staffing and administering seminaries in many dioceses and today we have withdrawn from most of these, although we continue to maintain a presence in a number of seminaries where confreres work on an individual basis. We have always regarded seminary formation as the second foundational work of the Congregation and we know how St. Vincent, as he began the parish mission movement across France, was drawn into the formation of priests in a number of dioceses, either through the Tuesday Conferences, or being actively involved in implementing the Decrees of the Council of Trent.

Jan Kerkhofs, in his recent book - *Europe Without Priests?*²⁰ points up the extent of the crisis in regard to seminaries in the European context. Despite certain areas of development here and there - and very often the Archdiocese of Paris is given as an example of renewal and development - the fact of the matter is that many of our seminaries for diocesan priests right across Europe are in a state of

¹⁹ *Vincentiana* : No. 3 May/June 1999: Fr. Maloney’s letter to European Visitors, p. 147

²⁰ Jan Kerkhofs (Ed.) - *Europe Without Priests?* - (SCM, London, 1995). I quote below some of the statistics Kerkhofs gives in his recent *Tablet* article: *The Tablet* (24th July, 1999 p.1015)

FRANCE: 1965: 40,981 Priests; 1985: 28,629; 1995: 19,700. Average Age : 66

GERMANY: 13,334 Parishes; 8,313 have a resident Priest; 5,021 have not got a resident Priest; Lay Ministers : 5,166 (1990)

BELGIUM: City of Antwerp : 313 Parishes; 1986, 4 Parishes without Priests; 1992, 60 Parishes without Priests; 1994, 106 Parishes without Priests.

POLAND:	Semin.	Ords.	Priests
1982	7,225	775	21,059
1987	7,038	1,009	23,432
1993	7,379	1,132	27,059

OVERALL OBSERVATIONS ON EUROPE:

- In many dioceses in Europe by the year 2000 between 30% - 50% of parishes will have no resident priest.
- In many dioceses the average age of priests has climbed to 65 - 70 years.
- Europe has still the largest number of priests in comparison with Asia, Africa and South America. (These statistics put our European situation into context). 60% Diocesan Priests; 47 Religious Priests.

crisis in regard to both the number of candidates entering and the quality of candidates. A second area of grave concern is the increasing workload on a diminishing and ageing group of priests. Seeing no replacements in the pipeline adds immeasurably to the burdens priests have to carry today.

The following are a number of brief comments that strike me about the present European situation:

- There is a good deal of evidence now that the **tridentine seminary as we have known it is in a severe crisis**. The Church is passing through one of the great turning points in its history in regard to formation for priesthood, comparable to what took place at the time of Trent in the 16th century and before that in the Middle Ages, when the Mendicant Orders influenced our understanding of priestly ministry. It would seem to me that we are in the process of searching for:
 - a) New ways to call people to ministry and
 - b) New ways to prepare people for ministry.

As we work through this period of change there is likely to be a good deal of tension between different models of formation for many years to come.

- Kerkhofs has pointed out that the problem of a **great shortage of priests in many European countries** has not penetrated the collective awareness of the Catholic Church and is not being owned by many people exercising authority in the Church. Reports of discussions at the recent European Synod give evidence to this.
- Over the past 50 years, Vincentians have disappeared from many seminaries across Europe and elsewhere. At a time of great change in seminary formation, it is not surprising that diocesan authorities will want **full control of seminaries** in this time of great transition.
- *Pastores Dabo Vobis* ²¹ certainly opened the door to **exploring new models** of formation. However, perhaps the traditional model of seminary formation still remains central to our thinking. Our old and more recent models are still “teacher-centred, classroom based, curriculum driven, product orientated and subject dominated.” The issue then is not just a matter of modifying the seminary model but one of exploring new models - seeking different centres, bases, motivations, orientations of people who take the Christian life seriously today and who want to engage in theological, pastoral and spiritual formation in order to participate actively in their Christian communities. ²²

²¹ Pope John Paul II's - *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 64.

²² I have drawn here from discussions with an Irish confrere, Eugene Curran, who is studying various forms of Adult Religious Education at present.

- Discussions about seminary formation are taking place against the background of a good deal of questioning about **support systems for priests**. I have met quite a few people in various countries who say that the support systems are no longer in place to support diocesan priests and this all the more so as they are beginning to live in greater and greater degrees of isolation from one another.

Already we can see some signs of new developments in our own European Vincentian Provinces. Apart from confreres who continue to work in seminaries, other confreres are actively engaged in the formation of lay men and women. This may take the form of setting up courses in various institutions, or more often, engaging in formation of lay people in parishes in the context of our parish missions.

We Vincentians are particularly vulnerable in this time of crisis. Traditionally, we have been closely aligned with diocesan priesthood and there is overwhelming evidence now from one country to another in Europe that there is an acute crisis in regard to the future of diocesan priesthood as we have known it. This places us in a particular dilemma. Do we continue to support the system we have grown up with and I think this is our natural way of acting because we have always tried to maintain our contacts with diocesan priests and to support them in many different ways, or do we have to face up to the fact that there is a whole new era in the making and that our efforts should be directed to promoting the initial and continuing formation of priests, yes, but also to promoting the formation of lay men and lay women for mission and ministry? In this context, sharing whatever good practices are developing from one province to another in the formation of priests and the formation of men and women, in an institutional or a non-institutional context, could provide a fruitful area for discussion in our European Provinces.

CONCLUSION

In his recent article in *The Tablet*, Jan Kerkhofs remarked, “*it looks as though some sort of mutation, probably much deeper than after the Renaissance, is accelerating in the depths of Europe’s collective consciousness.*”²³

Against the background of the discussions taking place on the social, political, cultural and religious changes taking place in Europe today, both east and west, it is not surprising that Cardinal Martini, at the recent Synod for Europe, called for a new reading of the ‘signs of the times.’ In an earlier part of this article, I outlined 10 factors which strike me about the European scene, looking at it from the periphery of Europe, on the Atlantic sea-board. No doubt there are profound

²³ *The Tablet* - 24th July 1999, p. 1016.

variations from one country and from one province to another. However, it seems to me that it should be possible for us in European Provinces to reach some consensus about the **European “signs of the times”** as we read them **from a Vincentian perspective**.

I have found Fr. Bob Maloney’s April 12th letter a challenging one and the confreres in the Irish Province continue to reflect on the six specific challenges he puts in front of us. One of them is of particular relevance to us at the moment. With the arrival of many refugees and asylum seekers on our shores over the last five years, a Vincentian, a Daughter of Charity and a member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul have set up a centre for refugees in our Dublin parish. We look forward very much to learning more about what is taking place in this area in other European Provinces, where confreres have been involved for many years. Connected to this is Fr. Maloney’s question about making the ‘European voice’ of the Congregation of the Mission expressed more clearly at the European Union headquarters in Brussels. I have concentrated in this article on what we call the **two “foundational” works of the Congregation - parish missions and formation of priests and lay people**. It is evident from what I have said that I am taking on board that these two works of the Congregation are in transition and that we are searching for new ways to give expression to them in the European context. The thesis of this article is that it is these two areas we should concentrate on in our exchange of information and in any collaborative projects that may develop between our provinces into the future.

As one will see from the outline of statistics about personnel in the European Provinces, there is also tremendous variation about the dates at which each province was founded. Knowing more about the **founding events** and our **respective histories** would, I think, be very helpful. This means not only getting in touch with the founding events of our own provinces, but a willingness to listen to the founding events of our neighbouring provinces in Europe too. Paul Ricoeur remarked, in the context of political union in Europe.

*“It is a matter, not only of subjecting the founding events of our culture to a cross-reading, but of helping one another to set free that part of life and of renewal which is found captive in rigid, embalmed and dead traditions.”*²⁴

As we learn more about one another, I believe that this will help us to recapture something of the impetus of the founding fathers of our various provinces. It could also open windows on how to move forward in exchanges and collaboration.

²⁴ Cf. Paul Ricoeur : “Reflections on a New Ethos for Europe” in *Festschrift for Paul Ricoeur*, 1995, p. 5 ff.

There is something exciting and challenging going on at the heart of Europe today. With our presence in so many European countries, both east and west, north and south, we are in a position to be at the heart of the great questions that are being asked about the meaning of life, about reconciliation between peoples, about the preservation of Christian values and especially about the call for 'equality and justice for all.'

At The Dawn Of The Third Millennium

Some Challenges for the Congregation of the Mission in Europe

by Christian Sens
Visitor of Toulouse

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring Good News to the poor, to announce deliverance to captives, and return of sight to the blind, to give liberty to the oppressed, and to proclaim a year of grace of the Lord” (Lk 4:18-19).

In this year of Jubilee and at the dawn of the Third Millennium, the prophecy of Isaiah, proclaimed by Jesus in the Synagogue of Nazareth, continues to inscribe in history, the hope of an era of grace for the human race. “Today this quotation from Scripture is being **accomplished** in your hearing” (Lk 4:21). It is the “today” of the year 2000, at the dawn of the 21st Century and of the Third Millennium. It is always the messenger of hope; it is also the basis of challenges for humanity, for the Church and for the Congregation. The General Assembly of 1998 has, besides, itself clearly identified the challenges to be faced by the Vincentian Family.

In this attempt to assess the challenges which the Congregation is required to face in Europe, I am acutely conscious of the limits of my perspective and analysis. Europe is a **continent** which is too complex, from the viewpoint of language, cultures and religious traditions to warrant a portrayal that does not take account of diverse nuances and instead aim at a single expose. In Europe, the Congregation of the Mission itself presents a portrait full of diversity which indeed, constitutes its richness, but does not always permit of the realisation of united approach to planning. It is equally true that at the very time when Europe - the political and economic entity - is trying to come to terms with itself, not without some difficulties, that the CM in Europe owes it to itself to confront the challenge of a tighter unity, a stronger solidarity of conjoint cooperation. The meeting of the Visitors of Europe and of the Province of the Middle East, in Lebanon in 1999, has proved, even beyond the question of better mutual understanding, the desire for a greater degree of collaboration.

The challenges facing the CM in Europe are many, and in fact differ from country to country, region to region. Here I shall confine myself to 4 points - the challenge of the evangelisation of the poor; the confrontation of poverty and misery in their various forms; the question of interreligious dialogue, and the problem of vocations.

1. The Challenge of Evangelisation of the Poor

This problem confronts the whole Church, and Pope John Paul II has frequently

put before the “Old Church of Europe” the need to remind itself of its Christian roots, with its two-fold tradition, Western and Eastern. For him, the Church and Europe are intimately united from the beginning, both in their being and in their destiny. All the same, I believe that we must sound the death-knell of a new European Christianity, dreaming of a Church which would re-create itself as a Christian entity, as at the times of its first evangelisation. However one goal still remains unchanging for the Church, that of the mission to evangelise. “The Church exists in order to evangelise,” wrote Pope Paul VI in 1975, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. The Church, in fact, cannot consider itself in any other role than that of being open to all and turned towards all, because she takes her origin in a “Good News” which she believes to be the “Good News” for all humanity. It is thus that she proves her Catholic nature. This openness to all its identified by the Congregation as openness to the poor.

The theme of mission and evangelisation is sufficiently well developed in publications and revues so that it is not necessary to repeat such reflections and commentaries here; I wish merely, in the light of the challenge of evangelisation of the poor, to mention certain objectives for us, here in Europe.

a) Dialogue with society and with the poor

The problem of evangelisation in Europe – and equally on all the continents – necessarily impels the Church to enter into a dialogue with society. We involve ourselves in this dialogue, but because of the end of our Congregation, which is to follow Christ, the Evangelizer of the Poor, it is also a dialogue with the world of the poor, that imposes itself on us. The Gospel cannot possibly be preached without, on our part, a listening attitude, an apprenticeship to their culture, a real attention to their wants, aspirations, the values which they hold, the questions which concern them, but also their anti-values, their negative experiences, everything which in this day continues to disfigure the human person, to unman him, oppress him, or to render fragile or break up thoroughly his social bonding. Such an attitude involves basically a choice which is in the spiritual realm, namely that of loving this world of ours, this “world which God has loved so much as to deliver up for it his only Son.” (Jn3:16).

b) As witnesses to the faith

Our societies, and especially without doubt the secularised society, challenge us to show forth the vitality of our faith at the very heart of history. Faith does not merely stem from the private domain or from individual consciences because the Gospel is not a stranger to the development of humanity and that of the poor. The Church has an original message to give to people of today. The Congregation has a message, an original one for the poor and in union with them. Europe has need of witnesses to the faith, witnesses to hope. Words or statements claiming to impose the truth in a kind of definitive manner are rejected by a majority of our contemporaries. Back in 1975 in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* Pope Paul VI wrote “Our contemporaries are more likely to listen to witnesses than to teachers, or if they do listen to teachers it is because they see them as witnesses also.” This statement is undoubtedly always pertinent. For us, the Congregation of the Mission, the privileged

focal point from which to witness to the faith, is that of the deprived, the wounded, the sufferers, the excluded. A more vigorous presence in their milieu, supporting them, is certainly a challenge which we can take on with courage and boldness, in solidarity with the whole Vincentian Family. Without turning our back on our traditional forms of mission, as, for example “popular” missions which have been recently updated, or about to be re-envisaged, we should undoubtedly, in collaboration with the poor, work out new forms of evangelisation, new ways of being present with them, of mingling with them. We have already commenced some of the new methods; others remain to be opened up. However there are undoubtedly pressures at the level of the Congregation in Europe, which demand collaboration, if the appropriate answers are to arise. In the above, I have no intention of pointing out either new forms of evangelisation or new ways of proceeding. This has already been underlined during the meeting of European Visitors in Lebanon, in connection with the question of Vincentian formation. A decision was arrived at, for all the Vincentians of European provinces involved in formation to meet in the year 2000. That, of course, is not the only aspect of Vincentian activity in which it would be possible or appropriate to collaborate. Similar cooperation might be envisaged for mission work or for contact with refugees or asylum seekers. That is, perhaps, a challenge for the CM in Europe!

c) Updating the language of the faith

The word inculturation has come into the Church’s language in the past few decades, but the reality of such an operation is a constant task of the Church, always and everywhere in its contact with various peoples, in order that the Gospel can speak to all in different languages and cultures. This work is permanent and obviously vitally relevant at present. Humanity has become the meeting place, in Jesus Christ, of God and man; and so the paths travelled by mankind and by the poor are God’s routes also. We realise that our meeting place with the poor cannot be assured in an authentic manner without an updating of the language of faith and Christian activities. The stakes are high, because it concerns the possibility of their making the Gospel their own. It is not enough to declare certain questions definitively decided thus assuring that they will not be raised again. Cardinal Martini stressed this during the Second Synod of Bishops in Rome, calling for a greater increase in collegiality, “which would allow the undoing of certain knots in matters of discipline and doctrine, which reappear from time to time, like danger signals on the road of the Churches of Europe and indeed non-European Churches as well.” He recalls the deepening and development of the ecclesial communion of Vatican II, the lack, dramatic in certain areas, of ordained ministers, the place of the women in society and in the Church, the place of the laity in certain ministerial functions, the question of sexuality, the discipline of marriage, the practice of penance, contacts with other Churches involved in Orthodox Faith, the need to rekindle hope in the ecumenical dialogue, contact between democracy and positive values, between the civil and moral law.

d) The need for ongoing formation.

These “disciplinary and doctrinal problems (knots) (mentioned above) as well as new questions which raise their heads nowadays in the realm of ethics or involving so many forms of poverty and misery, make ever more obvious for us the need for ongoing formation. The need for such formation is proclaimed already in the explanation by St. Vincent of the Rules of the Daughters of Charity. “The time you have at your disposal after your service to the poor, must be well employed; never be wholly idle, learn to read and write not for your own use, but so as to be ready to be sent where you can teach; do you know what Divine Providence wishes to do with you? Always keep yourself ready to ‘go’ wherever holy obedience sends you.” I think we can regard as a challenge this need to learn reading. Is it not necessary to study social problems in their complexity, the questions of modernity, the phenomena of poverty and exclusion and their causes, so that we may have a better understanding of them? Is it not a fact that we should study the Vincentian charism so as to deepen our knowledge of it and thereby live it? Do we not need to ‘learn’ the life of the poor, so as to ‘turn the medal’ and so recognize in the faces of the poor, the face of Jesus? Do we not need to learn to read the Gospel so as to be able to announce it through the passage of time. The poor have a right to demand our competence, and if humility leads us to take the lowest place – that is the condition of one who serves – we undoubtedly need the competence to fulfil that role as perfectly as possible.

e) Getting involved in the formation of lay people

Vincent de Paul became involved in the formation of the clergy and the setting up of seminaries because he understood that the continuity of the missionaries’ work demanded there and then the presence of a trained and zealous body of clergy. Would he not also have noticed in this same mission perspective the need to get involved in the formation of the laity? In the context of this formation, if there is a challenge for us it must surely be the challenge of opening up communities and Christians to the poor and a recognition of their dignity. There is in this a decisive issue for the Church of Christ. She cannot content herself with merely turning towards the poor and working on their behalf through her charitable organisations. She proves herself the Church of Christ by building herself up with the poor. This also implies that formation be planned in such a manner that the most impoverished can find their place and make the faith their own in their own language and culture.

2. The Challenge of the fight against poverty and misery

This challenge is of course no stranger to the subject of Evangelisation. It is even one of the privileged areas for the sowing of the seed of the proclamation of the Gospel. It calls out to the entire Congregation on all the continents; it calls out to it in Europe. Different forms of poverty change their appearance, new forms arise and the poor go on calling out and longing for justice, compassion and solidarity. I do not recognise myself as having the competence or sufficient knowledge of all facets of poverty in Europe as to allow me to present them here. The list of deprived, wounded, excluded, all those who find no longer any direction in their lives, in history or in the

future of humanity. I speak of a dramatic list of those without a roof over their heads, those with no fixed home, those with no documentation, the unemployed, the victims of AIDS, those dependant on drugs, asylum-seekers, victims of the Balkan or Chechnyan wars, refugees in the transit camps or strangers in foreign countries of Europe, victims of the earthquakes in Turkey. Will this Europe now under construction be merely an economic entity, abandoning on the roadside - in the name of a regrettable but necessary fate those it does not need to build a competitive economy? Will it be a Europe which has a social conscience and a generous spirit; or instead will selfishness or tit-for-tat responses, imperil generosity and solidarity? During their meeting in Lebanon, the visitors of Europe and the Middle East had to consider a question put to them by the Superior General. This had to do with the way in which the 'European Voice' of the CM could make itself heard in Brussels, at the heart of European Union. Since the AIC had already a permanent Secretariat in Brussels, it seemed better to contemplate and thus seek a collaboration which would involve the whole Vincentian Family. It will be a voice among others, in the dialogue for Europe. It will have as its objective to recall that the poor, the outcasts, the victims of all kinds of violence, the excluded, are ever present and cannot be ignored. Our Vincentian voice will take part - even though in a modest way - in the working out of a European project, which conveys a meaning. I borrow the comments of Jacques Delors, who was the President of the European Union for ten years: "The European construction cannot claim to solve the crisis of direction so long as this problem goes back to the destiny of humanity, to its accepted, refused, or ignored transcendence, to the reinvention of an active laity, bearing values which are recognised by all.... But there as elsewhere, we are dogged by routine, the atmosphere of our age is unfavourable, divisions threaten us. It is precisely in these moments that Europe -now more than ever- needs a soul, this spiritual power to reinforce and stimulate her."

The wounds which affect so many are clearly a challenge to the CM in Europe as it endeavours to fulfil its mission of Evangelisation of the poor in "word and deed." The Gospel cannot be 'Good News' for the poor without justice, without solidarity, without defending their dignity and without witnessing to the tenderness of God for them. At Chatillon, Vincent de Paul realized that the answer to the challenge of poverty cannot but be collective, communitarian. This conviction leads us to collaborate today with all who refuse the fate of poverty, with the entire Vincentian Family, with the poor themselves who are the chief actors in their own promotion and evangelisation. This conviction also calls us to reflect upon the possible forms of collaboration among our provinces in Europe. In fact this viewpoint was brought up by the Visitors in Lebanon in response to a question raised by the Superior General as to what the CM in Europe could contemplate doing in regard to the refugees of Kosovo. In their reflection on the above the Visitors also spoke on the subject of immigrants and migrants. In our provinces, some confreres are already thus engaged, but we surely need to emphasize the commitment of individuals and communities. We know that, unfortunately, the size of the problem arouses attitudes of fear, mistrust, rejection, and even xenophobia in some of our contemporaries. Helping towards a better understanding of the phenomenon of immigration, and working for an integration, is a challenge for us to take on. The large wave of immigrants and

refugees in Europe bids us to intensify a collaboration already in existence. To face the emergency situations in regard to refugees and migrants, or humanitarian emergencies, the arrival of confreres of other provinces - even for a limited period - would be desirable, even if it were only to help organize a response to the problem. It would also be, the milieu for a collaboration of the Vincentian Family.

This challenge to struggle against various forms of poverty and misery is of concern to the Church at the dawn of the Jubilee Year. It concerns the CM both in Europe and everywhere. God Himself issues an appeal to us through the cry of the poor. "A poor person cries, the Lord hears," we read in the Bible. And if occasionally we feel that God is not hearing us, perhaps it may be that we are deaf.

3. The Challenge of Interreligious Dialogue

It does not concern merely Europe, but we can well assess its importance on our continent. It is of obligation, it is in no way "take it or leave it." The statement of the Archbishop of Algiers, Henri Teissier, that on the success of the Islamic-Christian Dialogue depends the balance of many of our societies, can be verified here in Europe. Interreligious dialogue is not confined to our relationship with Islam, but it is certainly this relationship which appears the most delicately balanced at this time. The session on Islam, in Lebanon in July 1999, is in answer to this challenge and gives us some elements of understanding and response to which we can refer.

This dialogue is taking place between believers, but history teaches us that religion can become a standard raised in defiance against others, leading to contempt rejection or aggressive attitudes, even violent ones. Defending the "true" God might hide a longing for conquest and history is unfortunately punctuated with instances of intolerance in the name of religion. Christians themselves cannot forget their own history. There can be no authentic dialogue without a deep respect for the other and his faith, without a desire for a better understanding of his religious tradition. What a huge number of misunderstandings have been created due to a lack of knowledge or erroneous interpretations! Dialogue is only possible if the partners involved respect one another and refrain from imposing either themselves or their own version of 'the truth.' It involves the acceptance of queries or questioning, all of it on the level of reciprocity. It calls the participants to humility in order to place themselves in the role of 'seekers of God' with all the richness of their respective traditions, not as people already possessing God and the truth. Putting forward one's own religious experience as the only possible one for others could only finish in a sterile confrontation. The path of dialogue a sharing of the 'belief' experience, the experience of God and its implications in one's existence. That is the dialogue of believers in search of the Absolute different by paths. The adoration of God is the common point of believers, but people's concepts of God differ and by that fact, the vision of man, of society, of history and the relation of people with God. Dialogue, if it is to be authentic, cannot pass over in silence neither the adoration which we have in common, nor our differences. It demands an attitude of truthfulness - otherwise known as affirmation -

by the participants as to their identity as believers. It would not be respecting the other to keep silence about one's own experience on the pretext of being welcoming and benevolent.

Dialogue is, indeed, difficult; nevertheless, it is an obligation, if only in order to respond to the suspicion which exists today among some of our contemporaries, in face of religious fundamentalism. These believe that religion is a source of intolerance, even of violence. Interreligious dialogue has become nowadays inseparable from the proclamation of the Gospel. In this we have a huge challenge for the Church and for the CM in Europe.

4.The Challenge of Vocations

This is by no means the least of the challenges facing the CM in Europe, more particularly in the northern and western sectors. Statistics given during the General Assembly of 1998 have shown clearly the diminution and the ageing of our European Provinces. Jesus' invitation to beg the Lord of the harvest to send workers into his harvest, since that harvest is great but the labourers are few, rings out urgently in our countries. The prayer for vocations begging the Lord to raise up evangelical workers, according to the words of St. Vincent, is by no means a miracle solution. However, his prayer keeps us alert, preventing us from giving up too readily.

The mere fact of putting forward the report and noting the challenges does not evidently give miracle cures for solving the problem. The question concerns us all, both communities and confreres. Perhaps we do not always have the courage to call to propose to the young the question of a vocation as a possible life choice. Perhaps we should – much more than we do– invite young people to take part in activities with the poor, so that the young may hear the cries of the poor. Perhaps our communities must be more welcoming and more open to contact with youth. Perhaps our missionary commitments with the poor must be more characterised by the Vincentian charism. In the context of the problem of vocations for the CM in Europe the question is not so much that of the actuality of the Vincentian Charism and its future for Europe, as it is of the actualisation which we make of it, of the face of it that we present today through our institutions, commitments and our communities. Perhaps... but in all the above and in all the vocation work in our provinces, the most appealing witness will always be that of the happiness of risking one's life in following Christ, Evangeliser of the Poor.

From Europe, numerous of missionaries set out for LatinAmerica, Africa and China. Tomorrow perhaps – but this is already beginning in some provinces –from those lands which were mission lands for Europe, missionaries will come to participate with us in the evangelisation of the poor in our continent. Without becoming resigned to the decrease in vocations, welcoming them will be a new challenge for us.

There are many more challenges ahead of us, differing according to the countries or regions of Europe, because our societies present different outlooks politically, economically, socially and culturally. I have put forward four of these aspects which seem to me speak to the entire CM in Europe. We confront these challenges in varying ways, with the originality of history and the tradition of our various provinces. I believe that they call us to a greater degree of collaboration in Europe, at least by region. I have not forgotten either the collaboration of the Vincentian Family. That is surely a challenge to be taken up in the meeting of the year 2000 and, quite soon, of the third Millennium.

(ANDREW SPELMAN, C.M., translator)

The european provinces of the C.M. And the mission “Ad Gentes”

*by Ignacio Fernández Mendoza, C.M.
Vicar General*

This issue of Vincentiana attempts to offer our readers a few broad brush strokes about the European provinces of the Congregation. The committee responsible for the magazine asked me to write an article about the mission “ad gentes,” carried on in the past and in the present by the provinces of the old continent. It is not my intention to refer extensively and in detail to the mission “ad gentes” carried out in the past by the aforementioned provinces. The Congregation has scholars more capable than I to write that history in good time.

The missionary character of the C.M.

The Congregation of the Mission was born in the heart of Europe. An important feature St. Vincent gave it was its missionary character. His frequent teachings and concrete facts confirm this; even taking into account the scarce personnel of the new-born Congregation, Vincent took on missions “ad gentes” of great importance. Within a few years, the Congregation made its presence known in different countries inside and outside Europe.

Our present Constitutions, for their part, gather together diverse orientations about the missionary character of the C.M.: “In the works of evangelization the Congregation plans to do, we should bear in mind this characteristic...”, the “...availability to go anywhere in the world following the example of the first missionaries of the Congregation” (C 12). “...among the apostolic works of the Congregation the missions “ad gentes” or to countries that find themselves in a similar state of evangelization, have an outstanding place” (C 16).

“That heart which makes us go anywhere” (SV XI, 291)

Born in Europe, the C.M., as was said above, continued to extend itself in concentric circles throughout the length and breadth of the world. The European provinces have behind them a long and fruitful missionary history. In successive periods they announced the gospel and established the C.M. in other continents: Africa, Asia, America, the Pacific Islands and the Middle East. All the European provinces, to a greater or lesser degree, felt the call to mission as a fundamental duty, inherent to the Vincentian vocation itself. Especially in the 19th and 20th centuries entire ordination classes set forth from the European provinces and countries as missionaries to those places where today the C.M. is firmly established. On some

occasions a particular province began a new mission in a particular place in the world; other times, missionaries from various provinces worked together in a single mission.

In broad strokes, we can point to the missionary expansion in the different areas of the African continent: the Italian and Dutch area in Abyssinia, the Portuguese area in Mozambique, the Belgian area—together with Polish and Dutch missionaries—in the Congo, the French area in North Africa, Madagascar and Cameroon, the Irish area in Nigeria. Today various European provinces are engaged in missionary activities, and we can cite as examples Madagascar where missionaries from France, Poland, Italy, Slovenia and Spain are working together, the latter in the Androy mission. Almost all the African provinces, today, count on the presence of European confreres in the actual working of their missions. They also continue to receive economic aid from the European provinces, especially for the promotion of the poor and the formation of native vocations.

The presence of the Congregation and its work in Asia and the Pacific islands is due to a great degree to the missionary thrust of the European provinces, especially in the past. Spain, for example, carried the mission to the Philippines and India. As a result of this tenacious missionary activity, the Congregation today finds itself in both countries firmly rooted and expanding. The Dutch confreres, supported by missionaries from Italy, carried out mission work in Indonesia where the Congregation today shows clear signs of vitality. The Congregation owes its presence in Vietnam to the French and Dutch confreres. And the great mission in mainland China and Taiwan was begun by missionaries from various backgrounds: Italian, Portuguese, French, Dutch, Polish, Hungarian and Irish. The Irish missionaries also brought the Congregation to Australia.

The French confreres missioned in the Middle East and established the Congregation in that part of the world, although our presence today is very uneven depending on the country: Lebanon, Syria, Israel, Egypt and Iran.

The missionary activity in America followed the same path as in Africa and Asia. The European provinces worked diligently to collaborate in the evangelization of the new continent and establish the presence of the Congregation. In general terms it can be said that the majority of the European provinces sent confreres to do mission work in those places where the Congregation finds itself today. It was the French who, at the request of the Superiors General, were the first to carry out the mission and establish the Congregation in Latin America: Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Peru, Ecuador, Columbia and Central America. Later on missionaries from different provinces carried on the work initiated by the French. Brazil received missionary aid from the Portuguese, Polish and Dutch confreres. The former Pacific province was consolidated thanks to missionaries from very different parts of Europe, among others the province of Barcelona. Central America got missionaries from Holland, while Costa Rica got them from Germany. The Spanish provinces missioned and established the Congregation in a huge area of Latin America: Cuba, Puerto Rico, Peru and Venezuela, not to mention their collaboration in other territories of the new continent.

The provinces of Barcelona and Saragossa currently attend to sizeable missions in Honduras. At this moment, 170 Spanish missionaries contribute to the work of evangelization in Latin America, Africa and Asia.

The mission and the establishment of the Congregation in the United States is due to the combined efforts of missionaries from various European countries: Italians, Spaniards, and later Polish; the latter locating themselves in what is today the New England Province. French and Slovenian confreres attend to the mission in Canada.

At the threshold of the third Millennium

Last summer I spent a week in Belgium, enjoying the hospitality of the confreres. I also went to the house in Panningen in Holland. One fact stands out significantly: every day, during the brief community get-togethers, the confreres' conversation always returned, in one way or another, to the mission in the Congo. The majority of these confreres had missioned there and discovered there the true meaning of the Vincentian vocation. Now, either for reasons of health or age, they have had to return to their homelands. But the remarkable thing is that these elderly Belgian and Dutch missionaries, despite the distances, closely follow everything that goes on in their beloved missions. They analyze and talk about the political and social evolution, the war and the peace in those areas. They maintain interest in the Christian communities they founded, and have a special interest in the provinces: communities, ministries, vocations, etc. The exchange of news with their respective areas of mission is fairly frequent thanks to modern means of communication, as well as through missionaries who return to Europe for health reasons, or to take a few days rest, or begin a well-earned retreat in their home province. In a word, from their place in the rear guard, these confreres who once went forth to mission lands, now returned home, still feel like missionaries, truly involved by means of their prayer and dearly held memories, through their correspondence and economic help, in the missions that gave such meaning to their lives.

One thing is clear: they all feel deeply the undeniable fact that the advanced age of the majority of the confreres and the lack of vocations, in their own countries and in Europe in general, will doubtlessly rein in the flow of European missionaries to their beloved Congo mission, as well as to other far flung places in need of missionary aid.

“Our vocation consists in going throughout the World” (SV XII, 262)

What has been said about the Belgian and Dutch confreres reflects, *salvatis salvandi*, the current situation in the majority of the European provinces. To a greater or lesser degree, they all recognize we are living a time of transition. Gone are the days when large numbers of missionaries left Europe for one mission or another. Because of the advance of secularization, and as a consequence of it, the decrease in vocations, the

missionary activity “ad gentes” of the Congregation, set in motion from Europe, will change; and, on account of this, the baton will pass to other hands. From the early days of the Congregation until the end of the 20th century, the burden of the mission “ad gentes” and the establishment of the Congregation in numerous countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America, had fallen, above all, on the European provinces. Nevertheless, unless the predictions fail, at the beginning of the third millenium the European provinces will continue to participate in the mission “ad gentes” with great generosity, but with less direct involvement.

By necessity, Europe will move without haste and without pause towards greater interprovincial collaboration, perhaps towards the unification of some provinces; and doubtlessly a drastic reform of the apostolic works will be set in motion. With this as a given, the European provinces, in keeping with their history, will continue to carry on the mission “ad gentes” taking into account some particular conditions. A particular province, Poland for example, has enough personnel to carry out the mission “ad gentes,” above all, given the urgent need, in Eastern Europe and Russia. Other provinces will continue to support existing missionary projects, and perhaps may have sufficient human and economic resources to engage in missions “ad gentes” on a lesser scale. It will be possible for the European provinces to participate in interprovincial or international missions in collaboration with confreres from other continents and provinces. The majority of the new international missions created by the Superior General and, in some cases by particular provinces, count on the collaboration of European missionaries. This is the case in Albania, Kharkov, Ukrania, Nizhni Tagil (Russia), Tanzania and El Alto (Bolivia). European missionaries also help out in the provinces of Cuba and China, as well as in the vice-province of Mozambique, all brought about by the successive appeals of the Superior General. Finally, the European provinces, bearing in mind that the Congregation is one body, will have the possibility of providing economic support for the missions “ad gentes” initiated by confreres from other geographical areas lacking in economic means. A new and interesting phenomenon is the participation of Vincentian lay people in the missions “ad gentes.” The European provinces should appreciate and take into account the possibilities in this area offered by the integration of Vincentian laity into this ministry traditionally performed by clerics and religious. This is a new state of affairs capable of generating new hopes.

Looking towards the future

Within the Congregation the most notable change relative to the mission “ad gentes” will be the gradual ending of direct missionary involvement maintained for so long in the hands of the European provinces. In the short and medium term, the most notable missionary initiatives will be started by, we suppose, confreres from other geographic areas. The African, Asian and Latin American provinces that received help in the past, especially from Europe, will move on to offer missionary help to other countries, and also have a greater role when the time comes to begin and maintain new missons “ad gentes.” Historical cycles inevitably change. At the present time,

according to statistics, Catholicism is migrating from the northern to the southern hemisphere. This reality will have bearing on those who have more active roles in the near future of the Congregation's missions "ad gentes." In this decade the different provinces of Asia, America and Africa, up to now recipients of foreign personnel, have begun to offer missionaries and take responsibility for new mission projects.

In any case, despite the decline in Vincentian vocations in Europe, we must avoid falling into a possible temptation: that of closing ourselves off, looking out primarily for our own security, in detriment to being open to the universal mission. The missions "ad gentes" bring fresh air into the lungs of the Congregation and the provinces; they are an irreplaceable reference point for present and future candidates to the missionary life of the Congregation.

In keeping with the present

The very concept and the methodology of missions "ad gentes" have evolved after the First World War, and especially after Vatican II. I had the opportunity to get to know how the missionaries going to different mission territories interpreted the mission "ad gentes" in the years before Vatican II. I have also become very familiar with the mentality of our missionaries and their way of responding to the mission "ad gentes" during the last three decades. Today the pastoral and theological reflection about foreign missions employs with utter naturalness a series of concepts that denote a new vision about mission. Now we speak and write of insertion into the social space of peoples, of appreciating native religious and cultural values, of inculturating the gospel, of announcing the word and human promotion, of fostering native vocations, of more authentic liturgical expression, of dialogue with other faiths.

The magisterium of the Church has made its own and even fostered these changes. Suffice it to cite the decree "Ad Gentes" approved by Vatican II, the Apostolic Exhortation "Evangelii Nuntiandi" and the encyclical "Redemptoris Missio." In these documents numerous missionary guidelines are pointed out, some having permanent validity and others of a more circumstantial nature.

The European provinces and missionaries, after a serious analysis of the missionary methods of the past, have firmly made their own the conceptual and practical changes demanded by the new ecclesiology, and especially by present day missiology. From this point of departure the European missionaries of the Congregation will continue at the beginning of the third millennium to make their contribution in the area of missions "ad gentes."

(JOSEPH V. CUMMINS, C.M., translator)

Le Berceau de Saint Vincent de Paul

*by Jean-Pierre Renouard, C.M.
Province of Toulouse*

If you are someone who has made the pilgrimage to the Berceau in the past you will remember the old topographical characteristics of the birthplace of St. Vincent: a group of 19th century buildings, very much in the style known as Napoleon III, through which runs a regional highway with the reputation of being very busy, and rather dangerous for both the inhabitants and visitors to the Berceau.

Some years back all this changed markedly. There are, so to speak, two Berceaux, the old Berceau and the blatantly modern School, linked by being “islanded” by a divided four-lane highway which cuts the buildings off from the rest of the locality and the parish. So, a new topography means a new Berceau. Let us look at what this involves.

I. The traditional Berceau

This goes back to 24 April 1864 when the first buildings and the neo-Byzantine chapel were blessed. This was due to the combined efforts of Mgr. de Laneluc, Bishop of the Landes, Fr. Etienne, superior general of the Congregation of the Mission, Fr. Truquet CM, who organised a national lottery at the wish of the Emperor. What started as a hospice turned later into a retirement home. Today it houses 80 retired persons, 20 of whom are elderly Daughters of Charity who live in four renovated welcoming wings.

Each one has the comfort and ease of a separate room, which does not, though, prevent the majority of these retired people taking advantage of the benefit of a community lifestyle, made up of sharing, and meeting for games, in pleasant spacious common rooms.

In each area there are a Daughter of Charity, nursing-aides and welcoming personnel who help by being attentive, listening and caring, so that each one finds, or refinds, peace and serenity, and feels loved, as St. Vincent wanted.

Those who want it find great happiness in being able to talk to and pray with the sisters, or the chaplain, a Vincentian who is usually somewhat elderly and experienced. He knows how to listen and to point someone in the right direction, helping them to make “the transition” at the right time.

Some days are brightened by the arrival of groups: people on courses, college students, Daughters of Charity passing through, scouts, Marian Youth members. By their singing and dancing they spread joy.

The Daughters of Charity are very involved with the old people, and the younger ones devote themselves enthusiastically to caring for their older sisters. The particular grace of the Berceau is linked to the praying presence of these women who are consecrated to God and who, by their singing and praying, give a sort of monastic tone to the chapel, in which all the great ordinary and extraordinary Vincentian meetings take place.

The sisters are also involved in the welcoming service for visitors to the Berceau, that is to say for those who come to spend a few days in reflection or spiritual retreat in this little corner of paradise! A lovely newly refurbished building will be finished by the end of December and this will enable visitors of the year 2000 to live their privileged moments in the most up to date surroundings (bedrooms with en suite facilities, a cloister opening out on to a garden and allowing access to the grounds).

The priests carry on their Vincentian ministry in their own way. They ceased work in the Apostolic School in 1970, not without pain and a wrenching of the heart!

It is not without interest to back over the history of this school. From 1867 Fr. Etienne, at his own expense, made arrangements for a new building, to cater for boys and for retreats for the Daughters of Charity. A historian of the Berceau writes:

“In 1868 another building rises from the earth, intended as accommodation for the chaplains. It will welcome the Spanish Vincentians expelled from their country in 1869, and later the Vincentian seminarists from Paris in 1870. At that time an ambulance station to accommodate fifty wounded as set up there.”

For their part, in the same year, the Daughters of Charity took in about twenty sisters who came to do their noviciate, since it was not possible for them to get to Paris. It became necessary to expand the complex.

This meant that the building intended for the chaplains took on a new role. The children entrusted to the care of the sisters could not be left without some preparation for their future. They had to be provided with some trade for their livelihood. On 27 September 1872 a secondary school and a technical school were provided for them. The former began with nine pupils who had shown a desire to be priests. The technical school, which also began with nine, had Vincentian brothers in charge.

The secondary school became a minor seminary, and was to be enlarged in 1879 and again on 24 April 1881. It would change into an Apostolic School on that occasion.

In 1884 Fr. Pémartin, the superior, wrote that “it can cater for one hundred pupils. At present we have eighty-five. We could have a greater number if we wished, but we lack the resources and we must refuse..., something regrettable at the present time when the shortage of priests is so clearly felt.”

And he mentions that at that time the school had provided 22 priests, 11 of them Vincentians; 37 seminarians, 28 of whom were for the Congregation of the Mission, and two lay brothers. There was need once again to expand in 1899. In 1934 Fr. Pierre was to build the seminary chapel and in 1935 the classhalls along the Buglose Road.

Since then this old building, over a period of a hundred years, has provided 475 priests and 32 lay brothers. Three hundred twenty-three joined the Congregation of the Mission, seven became bishops and 189 went to missions outside France. Who could ask for more? And we must not forget the 33 girls from the orphanage who became Daughters of Charity.

As we go down through this honours list we can understand the emotional reactions to the necessity for the Congregation to having to withdraw from such a blessed location. The withdrawal was caused by some points of French law which were too constricting for the professional staff; there was no option but to comply.

At that time the question arose as to what was to be the new situation of the priests. An old house, Le Hillon, was renovated and adapted as a residence for five or six Vincentians. Since then, through good times and bad, they have always been there as chaplains with the mission of passing on the message of St. Vincent, as parochial clergy, as well as animators at the Vincentian Centre.

The year of the fourth centenary of the birth of St. Vincent brought a change in the life of the Berceau. This was the opening of the Vincentian Centre. This is a joint effort of the Berceau, the Company of the Daughters of Charity, and the Congregation of the Mission, who had met together and decided to create a welcoming environment, a place of “animation,” for the crowds of pilgrims and tourists who arrive, especially on feast days. Although nowadays they amount to no more than about 80,000 per year they used to be around 100,000 during the years celebrating that centenary.

Two Daughters and two priests are responsible for the daily “animation” at the Centre. One Daughter, (Sister Maïté, and later and still Sister Thérèse) welcomes those passing through, sees that they are told something about St. Vincent, brings them to the Ranquines house and shows them the permanent exhibition. Originally this was on the theme of “St. Vincent’s glance” (*Le regard de Monsieur Vincent*) and at present it is on the theme of “The fire in St. Vincent” (*Le feu chez Monsieur Vincent*). The Sister is tireless in answering questions from the visitors. This privileged contact gives rise to much dialogue which is serious, complex and profound. During the summer the sister is normally helped by a priest, Fr. Henri, who administers the sacrament of reconciliation, and other welcoming sisters who receive the larger groups, especially groups of children during the months of May and June.

The Ranquines house is a house of memories. Is it on the precise site of the birthplace? Does it actually include pieces of the house which St. Vincent lived in? There are two hypotheses. It would be helpful if *Vincentiana* were to publish both in their entirety. We would not like to make a choice between these two and on the spot we prefer to speak of “the house of memories” of St. Vincent, located, according to the first hypothesis, the officially accepted one, on the site of the outhouse. That is where the real believers gather for recollection and prayer and celebrate the Eucharist, asking God, through the saint of mission and charity, to make them sharers in his spirit.

There is a project in the pipeline to turn the former school, now largely unoccupied, into a conference and retreat centre. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is very interested in this idea and wants to utilise its vibrant Vincentian strength to give a dynamism to such an undertaking. We will, please God, have occasion to speak again about this. A preliminary outline plan for this building would envisage about thirty single bedrooms, five double bedrooms, all with en suite facilities. There would be four offices, a dining area, four meeting rooms, video facilities, an infirmary, a room for relaxation. Because of all this the existing chapel would be retained and renovated. A contract with the Oeuvre du Berceau would spell out the separate responsibilities of the owner and the tenant.

It is worth while remembering that the Congregation of the Mission has opened its intern seminary at the Berceau. Last year six seminarists started their formation year under the direction of Frs. Renouard and Gurtner. They made acquaintance with the Congregation of the Mission, deepened their relationship with Jesus Christ and were imbued with the spirit of St. Vincent, and tried out the experience of community living. They also, obviously, were initiated into the service of the poor and pastoral ministry.

While on this matter we should point out that we are in the area of one of the thirty-six new parishes of the diocese of Dax, the parish of St Vincent-Notre Dame, which includes the villages of Saint Vincent-de-Paul, Buglose, Gourbera, Gousse, Lалуque, Téthieu, Préchacq, Louer and Pontonx. The Parish Priest, Fr. Paul Soussotte, lives in the last named. The Vincentians attend pastoral conferences, but have no other parochial ministry.

II. “LE COMPLEXE SCOLAIRE”

This is the barbarous name which is used for the entire northern half of the new Berceau. A primary school operates with 130 pupils and six teachers, one of whom is headmistress. There is a college with 200 boys, and a technical school with 210 young people; there are in all 38 teachers and a director, M. Jean-Pierre Beis, and an assistant director Philippe Dupouy.

This block comprises a huge boarding school with 220 occupants, and the technical school offers the following beginners' courses: marketing, various types of accounting, with a *baccalauréat* [completion of secondary schooling] in commercial subjects and a B.E.P. [certificate of completion of professional course] in the electro-technical field.

Recently a central administration unit has been completed. All administrative services will be located there. A hall named "Emmaus" has been made available to the chaplaincy, and a Vincentian chaplain and a Daughter of Charity, assisted by willing volunteers, help the children and young people to maintain contact with God, a thing which is sometimes very difficult to achieve! Three Columbian Vincentians, Rogelio Toro, Ricardo Ramírez and Roberto Ramos, take it in turn to breathe a bit of spirituality into this establishment. It should be mentioned that this block is in the care of the Daughters of Charity, and that the animators are all members of the "Sève" [sap, of plants] network, which is well known in the French Vincentian world.

The educational approach highlights Vincentian values: a feel for the importance of the individual, for the deprived pupil, a sense of responsibility for education in the faith, and the stewardship of freedom.

From an architectural point of view the block is enormous and well built. The different architects who worked on it have succeeded in giving it a modern youthful feel, for which many schools envy us. In the Berceau we have an unbeatable trump card: space. There is no need for a tower or staircases. Everything is on the ground floor. It should be mentioned that examination results match this situation and that the reputation of the place is well founded. So it is a place assured of a fine future under independent management, and which casts a friendly eye towards its older matching Berceau, which is merely thirty years old!

III. What happens at the Berceau

Many things go on at the Berceau. We can mention among recent developments:

- Last 24 April [1999] there was a weekend for sisters engaged in "welcoming ministry" and for young members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, with in-depth discussion of "The love of God and the neighbour in St. Vincent, faith, work – three aspects of reality linked with the person of Christ and experience."
- Many pilgrims on their way to Compostella passed through, because we are on one of the routes to that holy city.
- The bishop of Dax, Mgr. Sarrabère, blessed the new exhibition on the theme of "Fire in St. Vincent."
- A weekend for the 18 to 30 age group on the theme "Vincent de Paul: when love turns into fire."

- An evening of choral singing by the “Marensin Voices,” a choir of children and young people.
- 13 to 23 July, a session with a monk who works in pottery.
- 24 and 26 July, a concert given by Fr. Yves Bouchet CM.
- 27 September, the feast of St. Vincent, the ordination of Fabio Ochoa CM to the diaconate.

But the climax of the summer was the European session, 17 to 30 August. The following is an account by one of the participants, Federico Coda Zabetta CM, from Piacenza, Italy:

The Berceau de Saint Vincent-de-Paul, near Dax, was the starting point and the ideal environment for union among the 23 European Vincentian students attending the ninth formation session.

This birthplace of St. Vincent at present comprises a retirement home, schools, the intern seminary accommodated around a central courtyard in the style of the old eremitical settlements. In itself the Berceau is a centre of enlightenment, an anchorage of Vincentian life, the living memory of a charism united around the region of the Landes and today’s mission territories!

This ninth European formation session aimed at deepening basic matters. We passed through regions of France as pilgrims, and they captured our imagination with the forests and marshes of the Landes stretching out of sight, the sky changing with the behaviour of the ocean, the warm tints of the Basque country. All this contributed to our having the experience of a balanced impression. We saw with our own eyes what the young Vincent had seen; that is the initiation into a meeting with him. The lectures on history and the spiritual meditations became real in the natural environment which was all around us. It was the same for Château-l’Evêque, Folleville and Paris. We made contacts, shared joy, and prayed together in places which have universal appeal.

Then the practicality of the life and work of St. Vincent brought us to see that this loving looking at the land, at people and at ourselves led on to conversion. In this way this practicality struck us by our insight into life in the Landes in the 17th and 18th centuries.

We learnt about the involved social and friendly links between the Depaul and Moras families. The latter was Vincent’s maternal family, linked to the local class of legal and administrative nobility. We learnt how Vincent progressed from a certain compromise with careerism to total dedication of his life to charity and mission.

Everything about St. Vincent’s life, his theology, the context of his life and work, sent us back to God’s providence. This was important for us, as inheritors of the Vincentian tradition and his charism. Through the writings of St. Vincent we learnt how he progressed (and made rich people progress) to the service of “the least.” This

impulse of the heart still has repercussions today and challenges our small number to face the needs of modern man by taking the necessary steps.

Thanks to the organisers, Jérôme Delsinne, J.F. Desclaux, Richard McCullen, Markus Monn, J.P. Renouard, and the animators for such wonderful days!

This has been a short run-down on life and activity at the Berceau. All we have to say to end up is the gospel invitation: “Come and see,” and you will be captivated by the spirit so evident there!

(THOMAS DAVITT C.M., translator)

The *Collegio Alberoni* Yesterday and Today

by Alberto Vernaschi, C.M.
Province of Rome

“The factory of cardinals”: someone called the *Collegio Alberoni* this a few years ago, when the Diocese of Piacenza was discovered to have given the Church a number of cardinals, the majority of whom had completed their high school, philosophy and theology in this well-known institution.¹ What has just been pointed out is certainly a clear and significant piece of data in the history of the *Collegio Alberoni*, even if it was not founded with the intent of furnishing cardinals to the Church, but rather “good pastors and confessors.”

The Project of a Cardinal and a Priest of the Mission

The official document of foundation for the *Collegio Alberoni* is the bull *Clericalem vitam elegantibus* of Pope Clement XII dated July 13, 1732. But the merit for the initiative for foundation goes to a cardinal native to Piacenza, Giulio Alberoni (May 21, 1664-June 26, 1752).²

At the death of Cardinal Collicola at the end of 1730, the Pope had nominated Alberoni as Administrator and Commendatory of the hospital of S. Lazzaro in Piacenza. The institution was completely decayed. During the years of his retirement in Rome after being expelled from Spain in 1718, Alberoni had come into sufficient contact with the Priests of the Mission and, in particular, the Visitor of the Roman Province of the Congregation of the Mission, Fr. Bernardo della Torre. Out of love for his native city,

¹ Cardinals from Piacenza who studied at the *Collegio Alberoni* include: Antonio Samoré (+1982), Silvio Oddi (living), Opilio Rossi (living), Agostino Casaroli (+1998), and Luigi Poggi (living). The most famous of all is certainly Cardinal Agostino Casaroli, Secretary of State for many years to John Paul II. To the list of cardinals one can add a rich list of bishops.

² We do not repeat here, even in summary, the biographical data of Cardinal Alberoni. Among the numerous studies about this data, we cite the monumental work edited by Giovanni Felice Rossi, *Cento Studi sul Cardinale Alberoni con altri studi di specialisti internazionali*, 4 vv., Piacenza 1978. This work concerns not only the person of Cardinal Alberoni but the history of the *Collegio Alberoni* in its various aspects. We also cite Pietro Castagnoli, *Il Cardinale Giulio Alberoni*, 3 vv., Piacenza 1929-1932; G. F. Rossi, *Il Cardinale Alberoni e i duecento anni di vita del suo Collegio*, Piacenza 1957; F. Arisi and L. Mezzadri, *Arte e storia nel Collegio Alberoni di Piacenza*, a richly illustrated volume of 446 pages, Piacenza 1990. The first pages are dedicated by L. Mezzadri to Cardinal Giulio Alberoni as a person. The realization of such a work which constitutes as well the catalogue of the *Galleria Alberoni* [the collection of art found at the *Collegio Alberoni*] –was made possible by a grant from the Industria Cementi Giovanni Rossi of Piacenza, under the presidency of the engineer Aldo Aonzo. For the history of Cardinal Alberoni and the Collegio di S. Lazzaro it is useful to read the issues of the *Bolletino della “Associazione Alberoniana.”* Since 1979, 20 *Bulletin*’s have been published which carry, as well as some papers, the life of the College.

which he had not seen since 1706, Alberoni took to heart the task he received from the Pope, and, with the help of Fr. della Torre,³ who was also an architect, conceived the grandiose project of transforming the hospital into a college for the formation of the clergy. For its running, teaching and even the administration of its goods the founder wished that it all be given *in perpetuo* to the Priests of the Mission of St. Vincent de Paul, called to the vocation of the evangelization of the poor and the formation of the clergy. To this end he obtained from Pope Clement XII the aforementioned bull *Clericalem vitam eligentibus*.

It is important to recognize that Alberoni would not have conceived of and brought to completion his College had he not had great esteem for priestly life and were he not convinced of the need of the Church for “good pastors and confessors.” He was concerned not only with constructing it, but with giving it enough financial support to make access to it possible for so many young men who, though having the necessary intellectual and moral qualities to become ministers of God, did not have at their disposal the corresponding economic means, and thus of guaranteeing them a formation that had solidity and continuity.⁴

The work began immediately. It was nearly completed when Alberoni was nominated as Papal Legate in the Italian region of Romagna. This was a task which he accomplished with great energy. It was Prospero Lambertini, elected as Pope in 1740, taking the name Benedict XIV, who gave Alberoni the legation of Bologna in a very delicate moment of European history. At the same time, the Cardinal continued to concern himself with his *Collegio di San Lazzaro*, [the name he gave to the *Collegio Alberoni*] which was almost ready in 1746. In the war, however, between the French-Spanish and the Austrians, the building was mined and almost completely blown into the air. Others would have given up the task of rebuilding what had been destroyed—but not Alberoni. He went back to work. He had the building reconstructed, refurnished, and he opened it to the first group of 18 young men on November 28, 1751.⁵ He would have wished to follow for much longer the life of the institution he created. Instead, he died on June 26 of the following year in his palace in the city, and he named the College his sole heir.⁶

³ There is also a passage in a letter of Alberoni to della Torre in which he says to him: “You know that you have been the sole helper at my side” (cf. G. F. Rossi, *Cento studi* III, 9-20).

⁴ Cf. The various documents reported in the *Tavole di fondazione del Collegio Alberoni*.

⁵ The date of 1751 is that which is found in the *Catalogus provinciarum, domorum ac personarum* of the Congregation of the Mission when it speaks of the *Collegio Alberoni* of Piacenza. But the confreres had already begun taking care of the College, given the Papal bull of 1732.

⁶ The endowment of the College, already a significant sum at the death of the founder, grew notably during the first century of administration by the confreres, to whom the documents of foundation gave control of everything, both the running of the college and the teaching of the college, as well as its endowment. In 1867 the Italian government decreed the transformation of the Alberonian endowment into a lay-run Pious Work directed by a council, from which the missionaries were completely excluded. Since 1935, two missionaries, named by the Procurator General of the Congregation, have been part of the council of the Pious Work. Since January 29, 1993, by decree of the President of the Region of Emilia-Romagna, the

The formation of generations of good priests

According to the will of the founder, his College should welcome poor clerics, sons of “honest people, ... sound of mind and of excellent manners” to make them “the best priests.” As L. Mezzadri pithily points out, “the Alberonian formation had as its objectives a ‘sound education’ and a ‘virtuous direction’ through which the students were to demonstrate docility, realistic capacity to find the good in everything, respect for the goods of the College, detachment from lay people, and a capacity to cast off the spirit of the world to put on that of Christ.”⁷

St. Vincent had a lofty idea of the identity and mission of priests: “Priests are called to the holiest mystery there is on earth, in which they must exercise the two great virtues of Jesus Christ: obedience toward the Eternal Father and love toward men.”⁸ Faithful to the task left to them by their founder, the Priests of the Mission assigned to formation work in the *Collegio Alberoni* had to strive to prepare seminarians in just this manner: immersed in the mysteries of God but in solidarity with men.

Other than the superior, the professors, the directors and the procurator (treasurer), there were also to be at the *Collegio Alberoni* other confreres dedicated to preaching missions in the diocese. The house was thus in full conformity with Vincentian tradition. In fact, Vincent himself, when accepting the direction of seminaries, asked that there would also be at least two confreres assigned there for giving missions, as it appears in the letter of July 20, 1650, that Vincent wrote to the Bishop of Périgueux: “...two workers are not enough for a foundation that conforms to your wishes and to the aims of our Institute. You are thinking of a seminary, and we have the obligation to preach missions; our principal purpose is the instruction of country folk; and the service we give to the ecclesiastical state is only an accessory to this ... Thus ...since you have asked for some missionaries, it is convenient that you have at least four of them, so that they can thus fulfill both the one and the other function.”⁹

Pious Work Alberoni has become a moral entity of private right and the whole council (3 lay people and two missionaries) is named by the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, having heard the Bishop of Piacenza. It is in this way that one may say that the Congregation is once again responsible for the administration of the goods of the college.

⁷ “Il Collegio Alberoni (1752-1989). Profilo storico [Historical Profile]” in *Arte e Storia nel Collegio Alberoni di Piacenza*, p. 32. To Fr. Luigi Mezzadri one recognizes an important contribution for the history of the College itself under the aspect of priestly formation given by it: *Il Collegio Alberoni di Piacenza (1732-1815) Contributo alla storia della formazione sacerdotale [Contribution to the History of Priestly Formation]*, Roma 1971.

⁸ SV VI, 393.

⁹ SV IV, 42-44. Very precise, and programmatic as well, is the expression that one finds in SV II, 460 (letter of May 13, 1641, to Coding in Rome): “... it is not suitable that we accept any foundation that does not give us the possibility of having at least two priests assigned to the missions; because otherwise our purpose of assisting the poor people would vanish, *quod absit*.” Many parishes of the Diocese of Piacenza

The formation program lasted nine years and was very serious, above all on the level of spiritual preparation; there was nothing extraordinary or singular in this, but it had a strong ascetic character. Scholastic life was also serious; first the students took up philosophy, mathematics and physics, then dogmatic theology, and finally moral theology and Canon Law. Faithful to their tradition, the professors were open to research and to new trends. In particular, the relationship between science and faith was never seen as being in conflict, but in harmony: the program did not fall to fideism nor did it burn incense to rationalism. The teaching methodology favored deepening of knowledge and assimilation of it. Finally, the formation program was serious concerning everything regarding pastoral preparation: the attached parish of San Lazzaro was to function as a stage for the exercises of the students. This aspect was also in line with the indications of St. Vincent, who expressed himself thusly: “Experience has helped us come to know that where there is a seminary it is good that there also be a parish where the seminarians can work, and learn better the works of ministry through practice rather than theory.”¹⁰ According to the various stages of formation, the students were subdivided in three groups, each group assigned a Priest of the Mission as its director.

With this program as a foundation, the *Collegio Alberoni* has surpassed the test of centuries. All its tradition demonstrates how it has been a place of serious human, spiritual, doctrinal, and pastoral formation for generations of priests who have served, not only the Diocese of Piacenza, but also the universal Church. To the cardinals and bishops already mentioned, and to other priests called to the service of the Apostolic See, we must also add those many students of the *Collegio Alberoni* who entered the Congregation of the Mission and other missionary institutes.

Even with the adaptations that have come about because of changing times, the *Collegio Alberoni* remains faithful to its program as a seminary today. Conserving its character as an institute which one enters through a *conkursus*, since 1966 it began, in practice, to welcome almost all the seminarians of the Diocese of Piacenza (since 1992 Piacenza-Bobbio), for the course of studies in philosophy and theology, functioning as the sole major seminary of the diocese. Students of other dioceses of Italy, benefitting from the endowment of the *Collegio Alberoni*, now frequent the College in accord with the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education.¹¹ Studies are now distributed over a six-year period. The Theological School, affiliated with the Faculty of Theology of the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas of Rome, has students of various religious communities, as well as lay students. At the end of the course of studies, the students may be awarded the academic degree “Bachelor in Theology,” which requires the writing of a

were able to derive great profit from the free preaching of missions to the people by Priests of the Mission present in the *Collegio Alberoni* until 1986.

¹⁰ SV VII, 253-254 (letter of St. Vincent of September 6, 1658, to Edmund Jolly in Rome).

¹¹ There are students from the dioceses of Fidenza, Parma, Pontremoli, Mazara del Vallo (Trapani), Piazza Armerina (Enna), and Aquila. The endowment of the *Collegio Alberoni* has also been extended to some students who come from other countries.

thesis and the passing of an examination. Following the reforms of 1966, not only the Priests of the Mission teach in the *Collegio Alberoni*, but also diocesan priests of Piacenza-Bobbio and of religious institutes. Some courses are taught by lay people.

Today's formation program at the *Collegio Alberoni* is fixed in the "Formative Project" and is laid out in the "Rules," two texts prepared during the years 1991-1993 following the indications of various ecclesial documents and approved by the Bishop of Piacenza-Bobbio on December 8, 1993. As a seminary, that is, as a community that the Church has desired as a place of welcome, as a proving ground, and as a place where priestly vocations can mature, the *Collegio Alberoni* strives to "assure an experience of faith that is rich and organically connected with the various phases of the growth of a [candidate's] personality in a climate of intense relationship with Jesus, of demanding community life, and of serious theological preparation." Thus, the "Formative Project" seeks to create conditions and put into motion all the parts of the program that will form those who, through the sacrament of Orders, are called to be "a living image of Jesus Christ, Head and Shepherd of the Church."¹² In line with the wishes of Cardinal Alberoni, the ideal of giving the Church true pastors, animated by a "pastoral charity" that carries them to give themselves without reserve to their brothers, remains alive. The criteria of foundation on which the "Formative Project" is nourished are: "configuration to Christ, Master, Priest, Pastor, and Head," "ecclesial communion," the "educating community," the "centrality of the personhood of the one called," "attention to the situation of those called today, to the directives of the Magisterium and to the tradition of the *Collegio Alberoni*," and the constant "reference to Mary."

A culturally open and productive environment

During the course of its history, the *Collegio Alberoni* has made a notable contribution to the growth of culture. With reason Maurizio Migliavacca, President of the [civil] provincial administration of Piacenza, on the occasion of the exhibition "The knowledge of the Cardinal" of 1993, wrote: "The *Collegio Alberoni* represents, for the people of Piacenza, one of the greatest and most important institutions of the city. The *Collegio Alberoni* has always been a center of culture since its inception; today is for our city an occasion to increase and value anew its own cultural and artistic heritage."¹³ On the same occasion, Gian Carlo Mazzocchi, President of the Fondazione della Cassa di Risparmio di Piacenza e Vigevano [a bank], spoke of the *Collegio Alberoni* as a place given to the formation of the clergy but, because of the multifaceted inclinations of its founder, has become a center of production and dissemination of culture in the broad sense, encyclopedic and humanistic. Here arts and sciences, libraries and collections, theology and scientific instruments have found a tree on which to roost.¹⁴

¹² Thus reads the "Formative Project," citing n. 280 of the Diocesan Synod of Piacenza-Bobbio that, in turn, used expressions from the Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis* of John Paul II.

¹³ C. Francou, *La scienza del cardinale*, p. 9.

The *Collegio Alberoni* has certainly made a significant contribution to the growth of philosophical and theological thought. The instruments of this have especially been the school and the journal *Divus Thomas*.¹⁵ The complete and praiseworthy book collection that was established and is maintained inside the structure of an artistic library is linked to both of these as well.¹⁶

Another cultural contribution worthy of note is the conservation and the growth of a rich collection of art, which, going back to the very valuable fundamental nucleus of its Cardinal founder, includes masterpieces such as the *Ecce Homo* of Antonelli of Messina, the *Madonna alla fonte* and *Bicchiere con fiori* of Jan Provost, 18 tapestries of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (the marriage of Priamo, a series about Enea and Dido, a series on Alexander the Great), etc.

We should also remember the systematic and vast (rather than occasional and sporadic) attention to the area of science. In the atmosphere that formed generations of priests at the *Collegio Alberoni* well known scholars in the field of the physical and natural sciences knew how to initiate their students into love for scientific investigation; in its laboratories developed for the experimental observation of nature and the proof of its laws, as is documented by the collections of minerals and fossils, the zoological chamber, the meteorologic, astronomical, and seismic observatories; in it came together and are conserved texts that can be considered milestones of scientific thought.¹⁷

A fruitful union

The Congregation of the Mission has always held close to its heart the institution founded by Cardinal Alberoni, it believed it to be part of the Congregation, and has

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 7.

¹⁵ The journal *Divus Thomas* first appeared on March 7, 1880, and immediately became an important point of cultural reference; it had periods of particular intensity and was at the center of vivacious philosophical and theological debates. Since 1992, the running of this journal has been ceded over to the publisher *Studio Domenicano* of Bologna.

¹⁶ The library, which certainly constitutes the most meaningful area of the *Collegio Alberoni*, has in various nooks and crannies numerous works from the sixteenth century, rare and valuable books, among which those of Carlo Francesco Berta (Fra' Zaccaria). Other than the texts which he had collected, he left to the *Collegio Alberoni* his own "Erbario" [listing of herbs] manuscript in color, his "Collectio Plantarum," [collection of plants], and his "Hortus siccus" [dried garden].

¹⁷ In recent times, the scientific heritage of the *Collegio Alberoni* has been evaluated and brought to the knowledge of scholars and everyone above all through two exhibitions accompanied by appropriate publications edited by C. Francou. The first of September-November 1993 (that saw a notable number of visitors and interested too the mass media), is documented in the volume *La scienza del cardinale* (Reggio Emilia, Edizioni Diabasis, 1993); the second, in 1997, by the volume *Tra scienza e fede. Pensiero scientifico e credo religioso attraverso i volumi della biblioteca del Collegio Alberoni* (Piacenza, Galleria Braga, 1996)

dedicated particular attention to it in every era. It would be a long task to list the names of superiors, professors, educators, and scholars who spent their lives for the institution. We are going to recall some of them¹⁸ without taking anything away from the merit of so many others. In the beginning, the philosopher, expert in physics, and theologian Francesco Grassi (1715-1773) and his assistant Gian Domenico Cravosio (1725-1776), who later became professor of physics at the University of Parma, stand out. To Antonio Mantenga (1759-1811), professor of physics and mathematics, we owe the foundation of the meteorological observatory (1802), one of the oldest both in and outside Italy. After a brief period when the confreres were sent away from the *Collegio Alberoni*, Carlo Saverio De Petris (1747-1836) was sent to run the College. His was a personality of the highest value; he was venerated as a saint, and he brought the life of the *Collegio Alberoni* to its original form. Between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, the mathematician, astronomer and physics professor Giovanni Battista Manzi shines forth. He was also the superior of the *Collegio Alberoni* from 1881 until 1904, and to him we owe the construction of its own site for the astronomical observatory. Near his time we find the two professors who gave origin to the journal *Divus Thomas*: Giovanni Battista Tornatore (1820-1896), theologian and sought-after spiritual director, collaborator with Rosa Gattorno in founding the Daughters of St. Anne; Alberto Barberis (1847-1896), professor of natural history, acute philosopher, and well-versed in several languages.

In the first half of the 20th century Alcide Marina (1887-1950) distinguished himself, becoming, first, Visitor of the Roman Province, and then Archbishop and Apostolic Delegate, initially in Persia, and then in Turkey, and finally in Lebanon. During his superiorate he directed a refocusing of the *Collegio Alberoni* on all levels; he knew how to surround himself with excellent collaborators, among whom we note the theologian Raffaele Petrone and the biblicist Gaetano Perrella. In the last few decades, we remember Giacomo Crosignani, professor of dogmatic theology from 1936 until 1961, and director of *Divus Thomas*; Pietro Pizzi (1922-1992), Amedeo Rossi (1894-1986), philosopher and spiritual director, and Giovanni Felice Rossi (1905-1987). In particular, the latter worked with passion and competence. Other than teaching, he did historical research on Cardinal Alberoni, and on the institution the Cardinal founded. He worked for the College's preservation and growth, as well as cultivating an appreciation of its artistic heritage.

One can say that the guidance of the Priests of the Mission has been so very useful for the *Collegio Alberoni* and decisive for its functioning; the Congregation guaranteed unity and continuity in the institution's purpose and educative style. It permitted the consolidation of a sound tradition and promoted authentic progress. A harmonic blending of elements contributes to creating a serene formative environment. While one lives in the atmosphere of a family among superiors, professors, and students, the austerity of discipline and the seriousness of the commitment at all levels never diminishes. If, on the one hand, one recognizes the presence of those who guide and show the way to go, on the

¹⁸ A more complete view can be found in the already cited works *Arte e storia nel Collegio Alberoni di Piacenza*, pp. 38-53 and above all *Cento studi sul cardinale Alberoni*.

other hand one realizes that he has been educated for freedom and responsibility. One does not live by what is imposed, but by what one is convinced of. In full respect for the rhythms of the maturing process of each one, one never loses from sight the ideal one wishes to reach.

But the *Collegio Alberoni* has helped the Congregation of the Mission too. Having the responsibility for an institution such as this has always been a stimulus for a serious formation program for the confreres themselves, many of whom were prepared for priesthood in the *Collegio Alberoni*. The spiritual and cultural exchange between the College and the confreres has been great.

If the union between the Congregation of the Mission and the *Collegio Alberoni* has been happy and fruitful, what can one say of the relationship between the institution and the Church of Piacenza? In this regard, one must recall above all that Cardinal Alberoni did not intend to create a seminary that was an alternative and antagonist in respect to the one already existing, but simply to make a gift to his diocese of origin, opening or facilitating access to the priesthood to poor young men. He himself considered the Bishop of Piacenza as an authority to whom his institute should always respond: the documents of foundation call the bishop the “successor” to the founder. History has noted some moments of tension and polemic between the *Collegio Alberoni* and the Urban Seminary of Piacenza with repercussions, besides its relationships between priests formed in one or the other institution, also those between diocesan authorities and the *Collegio Alberoni*. But, overall one can say that the Church of Piacenza has considered the *Collegio Alberoni* (and the presence of the Priests of the Mission in it) as a blessing, defending it more than once. *Collegio Alberoni* and the Urban Seminary of Piacenza have worked well for the Church and for society. On the contrary who knows if the healthy competition between the two has not produced greater results.¹⁹

A history that continues

At the center of so much attention, in its over two hundred year history, the *Collegio Alberoni* has received illustrious visits of men of state, of culture, and of the Church. Two in particular have honored it: that of Pius VI from April 15 to April 17, 1799, and that of John Paul II on June 5, 1988. The first was a pause for rest by a Pope, sick, a prisoner, and unjustly being conducted into exile,²⁰ who found comfort in a good, devoted, attentive, and cordial hospitality; the second constituted a brief rest for a Pope in full activity of his apostolic ministry. As L. Mezzadri observed, the presence of John Paul II, more than for the gifts and for what was said, “was significant for the ideal mission it

¹⁹ Those who wish to deepen their knowledge in this area may usefully consult the works cited many times that treat of the history of the *Collegio Alberoni*; more specifically, for the polemic concerning the origin of Neo-Thomism, cf. G. F. Rossi, *La filosofia del Collegio Alberoni e il neotomismo*, Piacenza, 1959-1961, and diverse articles that appeared in *Divus Thomas*.

²⁰ The pause for rest of Pius VI is remembered by a commemorative stone marker in the atrium of the *Collegio Alberoni*.

gave to the community. He prayed in the Collegio and he gave a view to the community of an apostolic commitment that has as a horizon the new millennium of the Christian era...”²¹

It is in this line that the joint commitment of the *Collegio Alberoni* and the Priests of the Mission continues, in the hope of being able to write still more glorious pages of history of the service to the Church and to society.

(ROBERT J. STONE, C.M., translator)

²¹ In *Arte e storia nel Collegio Alberoni di Piacenza*, p. 53.

The Salamanca Vincentian Studies Weeks

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The Vincentian Weeks began in 1972 and by 1999 the 25th edition was held. This date is important since it manifests a great degree of continuity in the history of this Vincentian event. The history is linked to the house of Salamanca. Perhaps this experience of untold impact in the propagation of Vincentian studies in Spain and throughout the Congregation could only have taken place there. This is so, not only because of the annual event itself, but also because of the publication of a series of volumes that constitute an important array of Vincentian doctrine. We might point out various stages in the history of the Vincentian Weeks.

I. Beginning stage

It all began in early July 1971. During the first Provincial Assembly of the Salamanca Province emphasis was placed on formation and the evolution of Vincentian studies. Some of the priests were quite interested and something had already been done among the students: there had been seminars conducted by certain experts, among them, André Dodin. Now, during that Assembly, the idea of preparing the first Vincentian Week surfaced. The idea was shared with the Visitor, Fr. Miguel Pérez Flores, and with the other members of the community. Everyone thought it was a good idea. So, the preparations for this first encounter, which would prove to be very fruitful, got under way.

The fundamental goal of this first Vincentian Week was the Vincentian formation of the students. Some Daughters of Charity and priests were invited, one from each house of the Salamanca Province. Few showed up. There were about 120 participants in attendance, including students, priests and sisters. The meeting was held in the Throne Room in a very fraternal atmosphere. This event took place on 4-8 April 1972, during Easter Week. It was quite a novelty.

The second Week proved to be much broader and of greater participation. There were about 200 participants between priests and sisters. Perhaps the best description of the week can be found in the introduction to the book: *Vincent de Paul, Evangelizer of the Poor*, which is a collection of the conferences of this event. "During the week of 24-28 April 1973, the 2nd Vincentian Studies Week was held at the 'St. Vincent de Paul' Theologate in Salamanca. Attendance was numerous and of great quality. The organizers never imagined that these workshops would awaken so much interest in the various provinces of sisters and priests in Spain. This simply shows the great anxiety and interest that exists in the renewal and updating of our communities and works."

The title of the volume that contains the conferences of the 3rd Vincentian Week is *Vincent de Paul, Animator of Community Life*. This event was directed by Fr. Enrique Rivas and it was held on 16-20 April 1974. In the introduction, Fr. Rivas states: “The presentations, though different in style and organization, deal with a theme that continues to be of great concern within religious families: the community as encounter and as project. Today, it is a fundamental theme in the theology of the consecrated life. Its comprehension, within the context of a given spirit, is what has led us to ask about the idea of community in the mind of Saint Vincent de Paul.”

The 4th Week was held at the Daughters of Charity Provincial House in León, on 9-13 September 1975. The sisters from the Gijón Province gave us a warm welcome. The theme was *Social Charitable Action*. Clara Delva, international President of AIC was present, and we also received the collaboration of Caritas of Spain. We wanted this Week to be more open and not limited to the double Vincentian Family. So, it was aimed at both Companies, as well as all the associations inspired by the spirit of St. Vincent. Thus, we contacted the Volunteers of Charity as well as the Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul. Whereas the Volunteers responded very well, the Conferences did not.

“The large gathering that attended these study days was not limited to the double Vincentian family. There were many Volunteers of Charity who were attracted by our invitation and added their presence. Likewise, though fewer in number, some members of the Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul also attended.”

The 5th Week wished to develop the motto of the Congregation of the Mission: “*Evangelizare pauperibus, maxime ruriculis*.” It was held in Salamanca on 6-11 September 1976. “Since the time of St. Vincent, the Congregation of the Mission has had as its goal the evangelization of the poor, concretized directly or indirectly, in the rural poor. This evangelization has taken place through a ministry known to all and to which the greater number of Priests of the Mission have dedicated their lives over the past three centuries, namely, the popular missions. For many years, this has been one of the most important ministries of the Congregation in Spain.”

About 250 people attended. There were some organizational problems; the group meetings scheduled for the afternoons were not held. This was due to the specificity of the theme. Therefore, upon evaluating this Week, the idea arose that we should give a new orientation to future meetings.

With this fifth meeting, the first cycle of Vincentian Studies Weeks came to a close. We might call this the initiation phase. These are some of the conclusions from this first cycle:

1. Somewhere along the line, in certain Vincentian circles, especially of priests from a particular province, there arose the false notion that Salamanca was

some sort of center of heterodoxy, of progressive ideas in the negative sense, and of Vincentian deviation. Nothing could be further from the truth. After these studies, many have been convinced that such was not the case.

2. During this phase, the organization depended on a single person. There was no organization committee. Even within the community there was a certain reluctance to collaborate. For this reason, there were various organizational deficiencies.
3. From the beginning, the Vincentian Studies Weeks were a forum to express ideas freely, to share openly among priests and sisters, to gather in an immensely positive atmosphere. We might view these as very normal goals now. However, back then these were real novelties. Thus, the Vincentian Studies Weeks paved the way to free expression of ideas, healthy sharing of experiences, and fraternal encounters.
4. The first three Weeks were scheduled around the Easter season. We soon learned that this time frame was problematic. Many priests and sisters who wished to participate could not because classes began in their schools halfway through the week. So, the date was changed to the first week of September.

II. Consolidation Stage

At a time of doubt and uncertainty, Fr. Flores put me in contact with Sr. Isabel Bello, then the National Secretary of F.E.R.S. We decided on the theme *Saint Vincent and the Sick*.

From the outset, this sister inspired me with her enthusiasm and so we began to work. In order to change the direction of these Weeks, we first contacted the Visitatrixes of the nine Provinces of Spain, because of the involvement that the sisters have with this theme. The various provinces of the Daughters of Charity responded immediately to our call. An inter-provincial team was formed. The work done by this team was extraordinary. This resulted in what we might call "The Vincentian Collaboration Week." It was held in Salamanca, on 17-22 October 1977 and marked an important turning point in terms of organization and dynamics.

The 7th Week took place in Salamanca on 4-9 September 1978. The theme was: "*Vincent de Paul and Catechesis*." As a special facilitator and counselor, we had Mr. Vicente Pedrosa, Episcopal Delegate for teaching and catechesis of the Bilbao diocese. Bishop Estepa also participated.

The dynamics were the same as the previous Week. Since the theme was aimed not only at the sisters, but also and especially at the Priests of the Mission, we asked the respective Visitors to appoint a delegate from each province. This they did.

The novelty during this Week were the “seminars”: rural areas, youth movements, teaching, the aged, parochial work, popular missions, residences, nursery schools, the marginalized and emigrants, public health. It was here that the number of Priests reached its highest level: seventy.

The 8th Week was held in Salamanca on 10-15 September 1979. Its title was *Social Commitment and Evangelization*. The goals were: to gain deeper knowledge of the present social and religious spheres; to discern our role as Vincentians in today’s society; to foment availability in responding to the call of the Church; to offer an occasion to study and reflect on our response to the Gospel in the present socio-political situation, from the standpoint of our Vincentian spirit. Speakers were José María Setién, Bishop of San Sebastian, Ricardo Alberdi and Rafael Belda, among others. There is no publication available on this Week.

The 150th anniversary of the Miraculous Medal apparitions was held in 1980. It was a great opportunity to dedicate a Week to this theme. So, the theme of the 9th Vincentian Week was: *The Miraculous Medal Apparitions*.

The French theologian and scripture scholar, René Laurentin, had done in depth studies of the apparitions from a critical and scientific perspective, and had written a biography of St. Catherine Labouré. I went to Paris and held a long conversation with him. He said he would be more than happy to participate. I recall receiving a great deal of indirect pressure to keep him off the program. Though I could guess the reasons, I never really knew them with certainty. I consulted with the Superior General in Rome, and he told me to ignore the pressures and that he himself thought it would be a good idea to secure the participation of René Laurentin.

In 1981 we celebrated the centenary of the birth of St. Vincent de Paul. In order to celebrate such a happy event in the life of the Vincentian family, we decided to organize an extraordinary Vincentian Studies Week. This 10th Week was held in Salamanca on 24-29 August 1981.

There were interventions by some of the greatest figures in Vincentianism today: André Dodin, Raymond Chalumeau, José María Román, Jaime Corera, José María Ibañez, Benito Martínez, Luigi Mezzadri; specialists in themes dealing with the Daughters of Charity, such as Sr. Pilar Pardiñas and Sr. Carmen Urrizburu; the international president of the A.I.C., Clara Delva, and the National President of the Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul, Luis María Chico de Guzmán. This historical and doctrinal collection was preserved in a volume of about 500 pages: *Vincent de Paul, Permanent Inspiration*.

The conclusions from the consolidation phase of the Vincentian Studies Weeks are as follows:

1. On the organizational level, the Vincentian Studies Weeks found a road that greatly enhanced their development and dynamism. There is no doubt that Sr. Isabel Bello, D.C. played a vital role during this phase.
2. The Vincentian Studies Weeks achieved their definite consolidation and acquired international fame, to the point that they were imitated in certain countries with greater or lesser success. Along with CEME Publications, they contributed in making the Salamanca house Spain's most important Vincentian center.
3. In the Vincentian Studies Weeks there are studies, reflections and investigations that are indispensable for any scholar of Vincentian themes. The nine published volumes constitute a first class doctrinal haven.
4. The dates of the Vincentian Studies Weeks have undergone changes in order to adapt to the needs of the attendees. To facilitate attendance, the Week is celebrated during the second half of August.

III. Maturity Phase

Fr. Alberto López was designated by the Visitor to direct the Weeks during the next few years. All the Visitors and Visitatrixes from the provinces of priests and sisters in Spain received a survey on the continuity and possible themes of the Weeks. The eight responses received were highly in favor of their continuing.

In 1983 the Daughters of Charity were celebrating a very important event, the 350th anniversary of the founding of the Company. The theme suggested itself: The Vincentian identity of the Daughters of Charity, in keeping with their origins 350 years ago. The title of the publication for the 11th Week is: *God's Gift of Love to the Church and to the Poor.*

The 12th Week was held at our Salamanca House on 20-25 August 1984. In his introductory letter, Fr. Alberto said: "Given the recent approval of the final redaction of the Constitutions and Statutes of the Company of the Daughters of Charity by the Holy See, the studies and reflections of this week will be centered on these in order to achieve a better and deeper understanding of them and to discover the horizons to which they are pointing in these new times, since, undoubtedly, this event will mark a very important milestone in the history of the Company of the Daughters of Charity."

Upon presenting the 13th Week, its director, Fr. Alberto López, stated that: "As in the previous years, it will be held at this House of the Vincentian Family in Santa Marta de Tormes (Salamanca), on the 19-24 August 1985, International Year of Youth. This international climate moved us, with the consent of the participants from the previous year, to gear our reflections and exchange of experiences towards the vital relationship between *The Vincentian Message and Today's Youth.* Undoubtedly, it is a

topic that, for one reason or another, concerns us all and demands our interest and attention.

The 14th Week was held at our Salamanca house on 18-23 August, 1986. The theme was: *Vincentian Missions and evangelizing the people of today*. It centered on Popular Missions, the primary and most important ministry of the Congregation of the Mission.

The conclusions from this period are as follows:

1. Participation continued to be plentiful, especially from the Daughters of Charity. The priests, though in lesser numbers, continued to participate. It is important to note that at this time, the Portuguese priests begin to participate in the Vincentian Studies Weeks.
2. The organizational model of the previous period is abandoned and emphasis is placed on a single person, the Director of the Week.
3. The topics are centered on essential elements in the life and ministry of the Daughters of Charity and the Congregation of the Mission.

IV. Thematic Renewal Phase

During this phase, the director is Fr. José María López Maside. The 15th Week was held in Salamanca from 24-29 August 1987 and the theme was: *Vincentian Answers to the New Forms of Poverty*.

“A new civilization,” says the director of the week, “gives rise to new forms of poverty that affect the traditional poor and create new ones. It is not a matter of forgetting the traditional poor, but rather of placing the emphasis on the new ways that poverty presents itself to the world. This new situation demands new answers from society and from the Church. The Congregation of the Mission and the Company of the Daughters of Charity are called upon by their own charism, to take their place in the forefront of the Church.”

During this week there was a return to the old organizational forms. A delegation from each of the canonical provinces of the Daughters of Charity intervened. We followed the basic plan: conferences, communications and experiences. Special care was given to the liturgy with booklets for lauds, vespers and the Eucharist.

Justice and solidarity with the poor in the Vincentian vocation was the theme of the 16th Week. It was held in Salamanca on 22-27 August 1988. The intention was to respond to the concerns of justice and solidarity as fundamental elements of the Vincentian calling. As in the previous study, the presentations were complemented

with a series of communications and service experiences of the Daughters of Charity. Attention was given to the liturgy and there was a climate of prayer and celebration that greatly enhanced the sense of commitment to justice and solidarity with the poor.

Vincentian Identity in an Unbelieving World was the theme of the 17th Week, celebrated on 21-26 August 1989. "Unbelief is not really a strange phenomenon in our days. On the contrary, it is very common. It has gone from the private spheres to the public domain where it is seen as something so natural. On occasions, some boast of their unbelief while others see it as a sign of being modern.... It has introduced itself into our social fabrics. It is not unlikely that it will also affect our spiritual and communal environment."

In 1990 there was no study week, for the Daughters of Charity were commemorating the bicentennial of the Company in Spain, and on that occasion there was a national encounter in Barcelona on 26-27 May of that year.

1991 was the 4th centenary of the birth of Saint Louise. The theme suggested itself. "Those in charge of the week, in keeping with the guidelines of the Visitors, saw fit to dedicate this encounter to the fascinating figure of St. Louise."

The organization of the 18th Week was begun by Fr. José María López Maside. When he stepped down as Visitor, he placed this task in my hands once again, and I received it with great pleasure. The date was changed so that the final day would coincide with St. Louise's birthday, 12 August 1591. Thus, the week was held in Salamanca on 7-12 August 1991. It brought together the greatest specialists on the life and works of St. Louise.

The theme of a New Evangelization, announced to the entire world by Pope John Paul II, has been studied and continues to be studied by the entire Church. Therefore, we Vincentians, called to evangelize, could not remain on the fringes of this reflexive current in the Church. In this context, the theme of the 19th Week was: *Vincentianism and the New Evangelization*. It was held in Salamanca on 24-28 August 1992.

One of the key Vincentian themes that had never been treated during these study weeks was charity. It had to be studied in depth. So, the 20th Week was dedicated to *Charity, a Vincentian Charism*. It was held in Salamanca on 23-28 August 1993. It was difficult to come up with an adequate development of the theme. After much reflection and consultation with various experts, we decided to follow a rather logical treatment. Beginning with the Old Testament and passing through the New Testament and the Patristics, we arrived at a theology of charity in the Thomistic perspective. Charity is intimately related to justice, it has a political dimension and is the end of all evangelization. And we could not leave out a study of charity in the teachings of St. Vincent de Paul.

I had been asked much earlier to organize a study week on the Foreign Missions. This is a very important topic in St. Vincent's ecclesiological concept as well as in the history of both Companies. The foreign mission is imbedded in the life of the Congregation of the Mission as well as in the Company of the Daughters of Charity from their very origins. So, we chose as theme for the 21st Week *St. Vincent and the Foreign Missions*. It was held in Salamanca on 22-27 August 1994.

The 22nd Week studied a fundamental theme for the Vincentian Family: the Vincentian Spirit. It had as title: *Let Us Rekindle the Vincentian Spirit*, and was held in Salamanca on 21-25 August 1995. The methodology employed was that of conferences, communications and workshops. The conferences and communications were held in the mornings and the workshops in the afternoons.

In 1996 there was no Vincentian Studies Week. The reason was simple: most of the participants in these studies were Daughters of Charity. During the summer of that year, the Daughters held their Provincial Assemblies.

From 30 June to 4 July 1997 the 23rd Week was held. The change of date was due to the fact that the participants in this study were lay teachers from the various high schools run by the Daughters and Priests of the Mission throughout Spain. About 323 teachers attended. The theme was: *Vincentian Charism in Education*. It was one of the most brilliant studies. The book that was published as a result marks a milestone in the history of Vincentian education in our country.

The 24th Week was held in Salamanca on 23-27 August 1998. The theme was: *The Vincentian Family and the Third Millennium. Future Perspectives*. Once the theological and pastoral bases of the Vincentian mission were set, each component of the Vincentian Family reflected on future perspectives for the third millennium. It was a very intense and beautiful week with great participation. The text workshops held in the afternoons greatly enriched our reflections. The published book is also very rich.

In 1999, the theme was *Prayer in the Vincentian Family*. It was held on 23-27 August. There were 320 in attendance. All of the Vincentian movements were represented, although some minimally. In the afternoons there was a new modality: prayer workshops.

V. General Conclusions

1. The Vincentian Studies Weeks are very important events in the life of the double Family in Spain: The Congregation of the Mission and the Company of the Daughters of Charity. They have contributed, unlike any other initiative, to the investigation and study of key topics dealing with the spirit and charism of St. Vincent and St. Louise, as well as to their propagation and knowledge.

2. The 24 published volumes contain a huge array of Vincentian doctrine, a necessary investigative tool for anyone wishing to know St. Vincent and St. Louise. Thus, in all new studies, there is mention of the works published in these volumes.
3. Most of the greatest Vincentianists of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity have passed through the Vincentian Weeks and have contributed, in one way or another, in making Spain one of the most important Vincentian centers.
4. The Vincenian Weeks are intimately related to the Salamanca house, making it the most important Vincentian center in all of Spain during the last 25 years. The most important Vincentian gatherings have been held here.
5. The Vincentian Weeks have been well attended. During the past years, the Daughters of Charity have had greater participation than the Priests of the Mission. More than 320 people have attended the last 10 Weeks and the total number of participants in the 25 Weeks is 6,250.
6. The Vincentian Weeks gave rise to CEME Publications, the most important publishing house that specializes in Vincentian topics. Though small and humble, it has offered a great service in the propagation of Vincentian studies and of the knowledge, spirit and charism of the Founders.
7. With the exception of the first phase, the house and communities of Salamanca have identified themselves with the Vincentian Weeks, and their members have all collaborated in an invaluable way to the good development of these Weeks.
8. The Visitors and Visitatrixes of Spain have given their support and seen these Weeks as an important source of ongoing formation in Vincentian topics. We thank them for their support, collaboration and participation.
9. We regret that the participation of the missionaries has been low especially in the last few years. The greater attendance has been on the part of the Daughters of Charity. Their participation has maintained and given vigor to this very important experience in the evolution of Vincentian studies in Spain. Lately, the event has been open to Vincentian lay people. I believe that little by little there will be a greater participation on the part of this very important group.

(DENNIS KING, translator)

Vincentian Mission and The parish of the travelling people in Ireland

by Frank Murphy, C.M.
Province of Ireland

The Parish of the Travelling People was founded in 1980 by Archbishop Ryan to respond to the pastoral needs of the Travelling People in the Archdiocese of Dublin. He advertised for a Community to take responsibility for administering this special parish as the Diocese did not have the personnel. The Irish Province saw this work as an opportunity to work with the Traveller Community who were, and are, as the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference described them "*the most discriminated against minority in this country.*" The province appointed a parish priest and a curate. These were shortly joined by two catechists, one a Daughter of Charity and the other a Christian Brother along with two parish secretaries.

I. The Traveller Community in Ireland

A) Culture

The Traveller Community in Ireland is an ethnic minority who, according to historical sources has been part of Irish society for centuries. While having much in common with European Gypsies, for example in terms of nomadic lifestyle, they are not the same. They have a long shared history, value system, language, economy, and nomadic tradition which make them a distinct ethnic group. Family life is highly valued by Travellers. They prefer to live together in particular family groupings. It is in and through the family structure that Traveller culture survives, thrives and continues to move into the future. There are about 29,000 Travellers in Ireland (approximately 5,000 families) of whom 50% are under the age of 15.

B) Discrimination

Travellers live out the everyday reality of their lives in a country which discriminates against them as individuals and as a group. They have very limited, if any, access to bars, hotels, hairdressers, discos etc.; they tend to be followed around a supermarket and if a family is given a house in a housing estate the local residents will often block their entry into the house and force them to go elsewhere. They do not have the experience of being treated as equal citizens. As one Irish sociologist stated in a recent study; "*The Irish people's prejudices against the Travellers is one of caste-like apartheid.*"

C) Accommodation

Access to appropriate and good quality accommodation is a fundamental human right. However, well over 1,200 Traveller families (7,000 approx) throughout Ireland live

without toilets, water, electricity and refuse collection. Many others live on sites that have been poorly constructed, badly managed, are overcrowded and are now without basic facilities, due to disrepair. In 1995 the government promised that by the year 2000 every Traveller would be properly accommodated through the provision of 3,100 new units of accommodation. In the five years since only 136 new units of accommodation have been provided. Yet these are the years when Ireland has had the highest economic growth in the European Community in a phenomenon known commonly as the ‘celtic tiger.’

D) Health

Due to the intolerable conditions that Travellers live in, they are at a significantly increased risk of developing health problems. The statistics in respect to life expectancy are startling:

- Travellers have more than double the national rate of still births
- Infant mortality rates are three times higher than the national rate
- Only 1 in 20 Travellers live over the age of 50
- Traveller men live on average 10 years less than settled men
- Traveller women live on average 12 years less than settled women

E) Economy

In the past Travellers were a rural people with an economy based on tin-smithing, seasonal farm labour, flower making, door to door sales, recycling, music and fairs. Today, self-employment, flexibility, nomadism and the passing on of skills within the family are factors which influence Traveller work, which includes buy-and-sell market trading, scrap collecting, tarmac laying and antique dealing. While the Irish economy has been the fastest growing in the European Community, the Traveller Community as a group have not benefited from this growth

II. History and development of the Parish

It is in this context that the parish has grown and developed in response to these needs. Pastoral visitation of sites, celebration of the sacraments and general pastoral care especially in regard to responding to situations of great crises constituted much of the work of the Parish in the first eight years after it was established under the leadership of Fr. Michael McCullagh C.M. Through this work a very clear picture emerged of the serious needs of Travellers; i.e., regarding accommodation, health, employment, personal development, adult education, etc. The relationships that were built up with Travellers through caring for them pastorally formed the basis of the Parish’s *raison d’etre*.

For the first ten years the Parish Office was based in a building called Exchange House which was the home of the Dublin Committee of the Travelling People. The care of Traveller children who were “glue sniffing” on the streets of Dublin was central in the early days of the Parish as these children were based there in Exchange house. In 1989 the decision of the Diocese to sell the property meant that relocation of the Parish centre would become necessary. As the parish was very much interlinked with the Dublin Committee the

change to an independent premises was a radical step and those involved found it very painful. However, under the leadership of the then Parish priest, Fr. Sean Farrell C.M., the move to the new premises in Cook St. ushered in a new phase of development and growth.

A) New premises; new directions

The Parish of the Travelling People now became independent in its own premises of St. Laurence House. The placing of the new Parish under the patronage of St. Laurence was symbolic of its Catholic identity and also signified that its ministry extended throughout the Diocese. The move gave the Parish an opportunity to establish its identity independent of the Dublin Committee for Travelling People. A number of important developments were now made possible especially as this coincided with the development and expansion of the parish team with two extra catechists and a parish sister joining the staff.

The parish team was now able to do its own thinking. It now realised, through appreciation and support of the culture of the Travelling People, its aim to help Travellers to build a strong Christian Community and to develop their own faith from within their culture. Members of the parish who went to Rome in 1990 for the International Meeting on the Pastoral Care of Travelling People heard Pope John Paul II say: " *You have all become especially concerned with Travellers, complete the task of knowing them, and let them be known as they really are and not as they are now so ungenerously imagined to be. Study their history, their psychology, their language, share their joys and their suffering and it is at this price that you can help them achieve their calling in the Church and in the world.*" Coming back with this message the work of resourcing the Traveller community took on a new impetus.

B) A more proactive stance with Travellers

Relocation also enabled the parish team to develop their work with Travellers who had experienced and were experiencing discrimination, racism, prejudice and in some cases addiction. The parish team now had the confidence to work in partnership with Travellers and with other Traveller organisations, an example of which is the "walking pilgrimage" which explored culture, faith and social justice issues and which has become an annual event. This enabled the parish to develop a more proactive stance and to support the growing acknowledgement of Travellers as a nomadic ethnic group.

A project to explore Traveller faith and customs was made possible through government funding. Travellers themselves were enabled to research and produce a book entitled "***Wrapped in the Mantle of God***" in which they explored the faith of Travellers in regard to christenings, communion, confirmation, marriage, funerals, etc. Subsequently they produced a book on "***Drugs and the Traveller Community.***"

C) Pilot projects and publications

Work to help bridge the gap between Traveller and settled people developed and a pilot project at the Marino Institute of Education for trainee teachers led to the publication of "**Do You Know Us at All?**" This was further developed and annual workshops were held at

Maynooth College (the National Seminary) and All Hallows College in order to help those who would be involved with Travelling people on a pastoral level to have some understanding of Traveller culture.

The production of culturally appropriate religious education programmes for use in schools was a constant focus of the four catechists on the parish staff. This resulted in the publication of the book entitled “*Coordinate Programme for First Communion and Penance and Confirmation with Worksheets.*” The programme of religious education for Traveller Training Centres remains the only culturally appropriate materials still available.

III. My arrival in the Parish - A new phase of consolidation

In 1995 when I was appointed as Parish Priest to succeed Sean Farrell another new phase of development and growth began. Like the previous phase this involved pain as new structures had to emerge to facilitate this new growth. When I took up the leadership a number of issues quickly emerged:

A) The national role of the parish

The publication of the Government Task Force Report on the Travelling People in July 1995, a month after I was installed, helped me see that the Parish had a National Role, especially in relation to the Church as we were the only full-time Church group working with the Traveller Community. The Task Force stated that “*The improvement of relationships between the Traveller and ‘Settled’ communities through the development of mutual understanding and respect requires an adjustment in attitudes towards one another and an acceptance of the other’s culture.... The Task Force believes that church groups have a significant role to play in this area, particularly in the improvement of relations between “Settled” and Traveller populations.*” So, within weeks of arriving I wrote to the Bishops’ Conference requesting them to make a response to the publication of this far-reaching charter for the Traveller Community. This role at National level was one that would develop in the years to come.

B) Strategy with local parishes – resource vs service

From its inception there has been a tension between the concept of a special personal parish and the local parish and the role of service versus resourcing Travellers. It gradually became clear to me that we had to work more with local parishes. We had an entry point as a parish into the life of the other 200 parishes in the Diocese of Dublin that no other Traveller group had. In the long run it was crucial for Travellers that they be named and accepted as equal members of their local parish with their settled neighbours. Only then could relationships be built up that might bring about real change in attitudes as both communities came to understand each other better. It became evident that we needed to be less visible so that the local priest and parish team could increase in visibility with Travellers. Every time we did a wedding, funeral, baptism in a local parish we deprived that local priest and parish team from building a relationship with the Travellers in their Parish. Some parish teams saw this clearly, others did not and saw us as the people responsible for Travellers (the weakness of having a special parish, enabling people to avoid taking responsibility). It applied to all

areas of our work; e.g., a member of a local parish was better to instruct a child for first communion rather than a catechist from the special parish as the child and family were linked into the parish structures. Priests and catechists from the parish would resource and help rather than do the service where possible.

C) Naming of the parish as a resource

Further reflection led in most recent years to a clearer focus in the parish on the movement to resource local parishes in enabling the equal participation of Travellers at local level, as part of a horizon shift in consciousness. This move to becoming an organisation whose primary direction is towards becoming a resource to local parishes in efforts to include Travellers in the life of their local parishes emerged and was agreed upon by the Parish staff as the way to proceed in promoting Traveller inclusion and representation in the life of the Church.

D) Provision of more resources

The provision of directives to local parishes in the training of personnel etc. is now an increasing focus of the work along with resources for use locally. These include the production of a Video on Traveller faith called *The Light Within*, the development of a *Touring Photographic Exhibition* on Traveller culture, faith, discrimination, accommodation, etc., the production of a *Pre-Marriage Video* with scenes written and acted by Travellers, and the publication shortly of *The Experience of Death in the Traveller Community* describing their rich customs and traditions around death and drawing comparisons with the North American Indian and aboriginal nomadic cultures. Resourcing the institutional Church in its teachings on Travellers also constitutes much of the work at present, and in partnership with the other national Traveller organisations we are drafting a document on the Traveller Community to be issued by the National Conference of Bishops next year. The tension between the provision of pastoral care in the context of developing relationships with Travellers and responding to their needs, and the increasing profile of the parish as a national organisation that has a role in resourcing local parishes is a constant concern of the parish staff and it is something we try to balance.

IV. Collaborative Ministry

Under Sean Farrell's leadership the parish tried to develop a collaborative model of working together. Sean had put in place the broad strokes of a collaborative approach to leadership and decision-making. In his final years many Travellers were employed in the parish through government funded employment schemes. At the same time funding was provided to employ two extra catechists. From being almost entirely Vincentian, male and religious (two Vincentian priests, a Daughter of Charity and a Christian Brother), women and men, lay and religious were now equal members of the parish team. New challenges and tensions emerged as the group faced the change that was going to be required from the challenge that professional women and men who were not religious posed. More importantly a bigger challenge was posed to all the settled members of the team with the employment of Travellers. Due to the fact that the staff was composed mainly of settled people continual efforts to include Travellers in the life of the parish office and especially in the area of

decision-making became an increased concern in the mission of the parish. The real involvement of Travellers in the parish took a further step in 1999 when Cathleen McDonagh qualified in Theology in All Hallows College and became a full-time member of staff. For me the employment of a Traveller as a professional theologian is a most significant event and one that I hope will have great potential in understanding and giving expression to Traveller faith and beliefs.

A) The challenges involved in working collaboratively

Successful collaborative ministry is built upon good personal relationships. In *“The Sign We Give”* a working party of the Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales stated about collaborative ministry that: *“People who want to work collaboratively need a strong sense of their own identity, of emotional maturity and a desire for mutual trust and commitment.... Sometimes relationships among those working collaboratively break down. It is caused by poor communication, misunderstandings, different temperaments, insensitivity and other human weaknesses.... When this happens, whether in a parish or in a team, a great deal of energy and time can be absorbed in sorting matters out.”* While there was an enthusiasm to work collaboratively the necessary factors to do so were not present. Our attempt to work collaboratively has been a particularly painful struggle for all the team but I now see that four years later there has been great personal growth for most members of staff. This cost a great deal of time and energy but has had very positive results such as in preparation for ministry whether in the parish or outside of it.

B) A time for pragmatism

The desire for shared decision-making is a natural outcome of working collaboratively. This however raised its own difficulties because no clear boundaries in regard to responsibility for decision-making had been in place before this process of collaboration began. There were unrealistic expectations that all decisions could be made by the whole group together. As a result of this and after consultation with the team, I employed two Family Systems consultants to work with the team and compile a report on the parish staff and make recommendations on the way forward. The consultants prefaced their report by describing the different *“Mindsets/Ideologies/Frameworks”* that shaped the way that those involved in the parish or connected to it operate out of. They concluded; *“... a wide variety of ‘mindsets’ are at play within the parish context. This should be a source of richness. It seems however to lead instead to considerable fragmentation because there seems to be no mechanism by which cohesion is easily achieved... in our opinion pragmatism is needed in the parish at this point.”* We were experiencing what parish groups everywhere have and are experiencing; namely, that men and women, lay and clerical, and in our case Traveller and settled, are all coming from different backgrounds and mindsets and so there is a lot of work needed to try and reach a common vision.

Since that report I adopted the “pragmatic approach” to leadership suggested and so my style of leadership has been more consultative, concentrating on what works. Policy decisions are now talked out by all the staff. Decisions are based on wide consultation and I try to get the best thinking applied to a situation. I believe this has been successful and the parish has progressed and grown. The right conditions have been created for individuals to take on leadership in different areas and this is encouraged. There is a desire to move on in a

more open and trusting atmosphere. It should now be possible to start working towards a more realistically collaborative model of leadership.

C) Networking with other Traveller organisations

The Parish is strongly committed to networking with other organisations and people working with Travellers. In striving to create a more just society where Travellers are accepted as equal citizens, the need to work in collaboration with other Traveller organisations has grown. Networking with other Traveller organisations, such as the Irish Traveller Movement and The National Traveller Women's Forum, etc., developed to try and bring about effective change and justice-making structures at statutory, relational and social levels. This added another dimension to the work of the parish. Last year the Parish of the Travelling People took the initiative and invited into partnership the three other national Traveller organisations (Irish Traveller Movement, Pavee Point and The National Traveller Women's Forum) to lobby the government for money to provide a positive media campaign to promote Travellers as an ethnic group. They were successful and the government granted them one million Irish Pounds over a three-year period. This programme is now called "*Citizen Traveller*" to help Irish people recognise and accept Travellers as a separate ethnic minority who are equal citizens of Ireland.

V. Mission

In responding to the experience of being in relationship with Travellers and to their expressed needs, the mission of the Parish includes:

- *Solidarity*: In offering culturally appropriate services to Travellers, the Parish stands in solidarity with them. Justice is a key concern for the Parish who serves a people living on the edge of a society that does not welcome Travellers "with great joy" (words spoken to the Traveller child at baptism). The Parish in its work began to focus on a more profound response to the Gospel message's call for justice echoing in its mission the words of Pope John Paul II when he stated that "all discrimination against Travellers is unjust and harsh, because it is clearly against the teachings of the Gospel, for which each person is a child of God, and a sister or brother of Christ."
- *Positive Christian Community*: We believe in the possibility of both the Traveller and settled communities being a pilgrim people of God journeying together with confidence and dignity in witnessing to the Kingdom of God. In order for this to come about the Parish encourages and develops a positive Christian community through building relationships between Traveller and settled and through challenging the settled faith community about its role in this oppression, so that Travellers do not remain witnessing to the Kingdom in isolated sites on the margins of society.
- *Faith*: Traveller faith continues to be a feature of the culture and way of life throughout the generations. For Travellers, faith is a part of their culture and way of life which flows into and out of all aspects of everyday life. The work of the Parish includes the delivery of traditional and culturally appropriate services such as pastoral care, visitation, the celebration of the sacraments, and the opportunity for faith development. Traveller

culture is a dynamic, not static entity. So too the faith expressions of Travellers are changing.

- *Ethnic Identity*: The Parish works in partnerships with Travellers to help ensure their distinct ethnic identity is valued and celebrated. To bring this about, the Parish constantly reflects on: 1) how to resource the cultural spirituality of this ethnic minority and 2) how to bring about anti-racist practice at Parish level.
- *Local Parishes*: The Parish encourages and resources Church leaders and local parishes to actively include Traveller people in participating equally as parishioners in their local Church. It is hoped that initiatives such as the present Photographic Exhibition, for example, will assist in developing right relations between these two groups of people. This area has developed as one of the main focuses of the mission of the Parish in the last five years.

VI. Vincentian Mission

In 1986 in Rome Pope John Paul II addressed the Delegates to the 37th General Assembly saying “*search out more than ever, with boldness, humility and skill, the causes of poverty and encourage short-and-long term solutions; adaptable and effective concrete solutions. By doing so, you will work for the credibility of the Gospel and of the Church.*” Through the Parish of the Travelling People the Irish Province has been able to do exactly this. Like Vincent de Paul the members of the Irish province who have had the privilege of working with the Traveller Community have come not to bring Christ to the Travellers but to find and make visible the Christ who is already there in very real ways. Through our work with the Traveller Community we are there with a people who are suffering discrimination and prejudice on the margins of Irish society. We work in solidarity and partnership with the Traveller community in their struggle for liberation. We struggle with them in a way that their struggle becomes our own. At different levels we try to change the social, economic and political structures and attitudes of oppression.

For me it has been the most challenging and enriching period of my life in the Community. I have felt that through the Parish and at a personal level I have been able to make a difference to some people individually and to attitudes at a more general level. I have met people who have been daily oppressed as they faced their own personal tragedies of sickness, death, burnings, appalling living conditions and have seen the “face of Christ” and this has humbled and made me more human.

The Traveller community live in the present. Everything is very immediate and so there is a suddenness to everything that happens. I have had to respond at very short notice to requests, deaths, tragedies, to do interviews in newspapers, on radio and television. It has all enriched me and helped me grow as a person. As a leader of the Parish team it has challenged me to grow in leadership skills. I have always demanded high standards of myself and others so that what we do reflects the best we are capable of. I have had to deal with a lot of struggle and conflict at a team level. This has been very challenging and I am gratified to see that over the course of years great progress has been made. In taking responsibility for the pastoral care of the Traveller Community in the Dublin Diocese the

spirit of St. Vincent is very much alive and my hope is that it will become incarnated in the members of the Traveller community in the years to come.