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Vincentian Bishops Reflect on “Evangelii Gaudium”

CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION
GENERAL CURIA

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INTRODUCTION

Editor's Note

John T. Maher, C.M.

A new papacy is always a subject of great interest and discussion. Since assuming the Chair of Peter, Pope Francis has certainly caught the attention of a very enthusiastic audience across the world. Catholics and non-Catholics alike watch his many gestures of good will, listen to his words, and find his way of exercising papal ministry inspiring. When the Holy Father issued his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* in November 2013 to close of the Year of Faith, it seemed a fitting way to inaugurate the themes of his new pontificate. Perhaps it could be called putting the 'Francis effect' on paper!

In this issue, you will find reflections on *Evangelii Gaudium* by seven confreres who serve the Church in the Episcopal ministry as bishops. They were asked to reflect on the relationship between *Evangelii Gaudium* and our Vincentian charism, particularly, the fourth section of the document, which discusses the social dimension of proclaiming the Gospel. These bishop-confreres took time to reflect on their role as shepherds and put to use their rich pastoral experience in service to the universal Church. They have provided us with much "food for thought" on our charism and the social dimension of the Gospel in the light of *Evangelii Gaudium*. Our confreres took Holy Father's ideas and expounded upon them, discussing evangelization, service to the poor, and living our charism today as a Vincentian Family.

Bishop David O'Connell of the USA offers an analogous summary of a progression in papal ministry in *Evangelii Gaudium*. "John Paul II told us *what* to do; Benedict XVI told us *why* we should do it; and Francis is telling us to *do it*". **Bishop Luis Solé Fa** of Honduras reminds us that "all social activity undertaken by the Church should be decisively and clearly a part of the process of evangelization. We are not the only ones who go out to the poor in the name of Christ. They also come to us in the name of Jesus and represent Him to us". **Bishop Vicente Bokalic Iglíc** of Argentina believes that "the poor are the sacrament of Christ. Our option for the poor is not something 'extra', but rather an essential element of our faith. This is a command of Jesus, namely, that we do what Jesus did and teach what he taught".

Bishop Rolando C. Santos observes that: "In today's world, with its emphasis on success and self-reliance, there is not an investment in efforts to help the slow, the weak, or the less talented. Governments

give more attention to the economic development of the people. Little is done for the poorest of the poor”. **Bishop Varghese Thottamkara** notes “Pope Francis urges us to come out of ourselves and reach out to others in love. To preserve our security, remain in our comfort zones, to withdraw from others, or not to reach out to others, is to become spiritually dead”.

Bishop Jorge García Isaza of Colombia believes *Evangelii Gaudium* reminds us that “our life together as members of the Vincentian Family must be carefully cultivated. It is not enough to say so often that we are brothers and sisters. We must accept the responsibility of being a brother or sister to others”. Lastly, **Bishop Georges Bou Jouadé** of Lebanon noted that, “The Pope emphasizes the relationship between evangelization and social involvement. He affirms that religion cannot be relegated to the private lives of people”.

All these essays from our bishop-confreeres treat the “Vincentian angle” of *Evangelii Gaudium* from different perspectives, but with great respect and a thoughtful discernment about how we might integrate this apostolic exhortation into our lives and, by extension to those whom we serve. It is good for reading, reflection, and a fruitful discussion. Hopefully, they will also inspire us into action on behalf of the poor, whom St. Vincent remains us, are always our ‘portion’.

Fr. Manny Ginete is profiled in the regular interview section of this issue. His is a life marked by education, teaching, provincial and Curial administration, and now service to the poor in one of the most volatile regions of today’s world: South Sudan. Fr. Manny’s journey through the Congregation and the various ministries he has undertaken serve to remind us of the many ways our charism can lead us to be “creative unto infinity”.

Our next and last issue for 2014 will be a special one, as it is a publication of the revised *Ratio Formationis*. This long-awaited document, ‘under construction’ for quite some time, is now in translation. A future issue of *Vincentiana* in 2015 will publish a commentary by confreres on the sections of the *Ratio* so we can all benefit from their insights into such an important document.

About our Authors

Vincente Bokalic Iglíc, C.M., is Bishop of the Diocese of Santiago del Estero in Argentina. Born on June 11, 1952, he entered the Congregation for the Province of Argentina on March 1, 1970, and was ordained a priest on April 1, 1978. While serving as Visitor of the Province of Argentina, he was named bishop for the Archdiocese of Buenos Aires, he was ordained on May 29, 2010. On March 9, 2014, he became the Ordinary in the Diocese of Santiago del Estero.

Georges Bou Jaoudé, C.M., the Maronite Archbishop of Tripoli, Lebanon, was born on December 27, 1942. He was received into the Congregation for the Province of the Orient (Lebanon) on November 11, 1961, ordained to the priesthood on February 9, 1968. He was ordained Archbishop for the Diocese of Tripoli del Libano on February 11, 2006. He is a member of the Syriac Maronite Rite, which includes a majority of Lebanese Catholics.

Jorge García Isaza, C.M., Bishop Emeritus of the Apostolic Vicariate of Tierradentro, Colombia, was born on July 2, 1928, and entered the Congregation through the Province of Colombia on July 18, 1946. He was ordained a priest on February 14, 1954. On May 5, 1989, he was appointed Prefect of the Apostolic Vicariate of Tierradentro, and later, he was ordained bishop on March 26, 2000. He retired at the mandatory age of 75 in 2003.

David M. O'Connell, C.M., Bishop of the Diocese of Trenton, New Jersey USA, was born on April 21, 1955. He entered the Congregation through the Eastern Province on July 15, 1975, and was ordained to the priesthood on May 29, 1982. After serving as the President of Catholic University in Washington DC from 1998-2010, he was named co-adjutor Bishop for the Diocese of Trenton NJ, and was ordained on July 30, 2010. On December 1, 2010, he assumed the office.

Rolando C. Santos, C.M., Bishop of the Diocese of Alotau-Sideia, Papua New Guinea, was born on March 21, 1949. He entered the Congregation through the Province of the Philippines on June 18, 1966, and was ordained a priest on June 1, 1974. He served in the International Mission of the Congregation in Papua New Guinea and was ordained Bishop of the Diocese of Alotau-Sideia in Papua New Guinea on July 3, 2011.

Luis Solé Fa, C.M., Bishop of the Diocese of Trujillo, Honduras, was born in Spain on July 23, 1946. He entered the Congregation through the Province of Madrid on April 30, 1968, and was ordained to the priesthood on December 29, 1973. After serving as a missionary in Central America, he was ordained Bishop for the Diocese of Trujillo on June 29, 2005.

Varghese Thottamkara, C.M., Vicar of the Apostolic Vicariate of Nekemte, Ethiopia, was born on June 2, 1959 in India. He entered the Congregation through the Province of India on May 5, 1982, and was ordained a priest on January 6, 1987. After serving on the General Council, he was named co-adjutor bishop of the Apostolic Vicariate of Nekemte, Ethiopia, and was ordained on August 13, 2013. He assumed the office as bishop on November 10, 2013.

FROM THE GENERAL CURIA

Meditation Moment

Reflection on the Vow of Obedience by the General Curia

Introduction

“All the good of creatures consists in the fulfillment of the Divine Will. And this is never better attained than by the practice of obedience, in which is found the annihilation of self-love and the true liberty of sons of God. This is the reason why souls truly good experience such great joy and sweetness in obedience”.

ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

St. Vincent had gained so complete a submission to the Divine Will that he cheerfully obeyed whoever had authority over him, including the Pope, bishops, priests, royalty and civil rulers. He showed special respect for all of them, and wanted his missionaries to be obedient like Jesus, who always did the will of his Father. Thus, our obedience is a constant search to make decisions about our personal goals and community plans. We listen to the voice of God within our hearts, along with the community, for an effective missionary apostolate. This meditation will reflect on the vow of obedience according to our Constitutions and Statutes. Before discussing our Constitutions and the vow of obedience, let us review how obedience is viewed in today's world.

The present situation

The relationship between the practice of obedience and use of authority is a relevant topic today. They are interrelated, so it is beneficial to treat them together. Some refer to our current difficulties in consecrated life as a crisis of obedience, while others define it as the crisis of authority. While some see the shift from a monarchical to a collegial model of authority in consecrated life as a welcome development, others see it as a recipe for disaster. It is good to begin with a philosophical context and acknowledge the monarchical way of functioning will gradually give way to a collegial model of functioning in the Church and consecrated life.

The concept of the *primacy of subjectivity* expounded by philosophers and thinkers in the post-World War II era has been embraced by modern society, and is largely the basis for contemporary thinking. Belief in the *primacy of subjectivity* has contributed to the growing awareness of the value of the human person and the rights of individuals. Respect for the dignity of the human person, and positively fostering one's free development and autonomy has become a significant trait of modernity. The "subject-based" contemporary thinking and the complexity of modern life give rise to new ways of conceiving authority and obedience in society. Slowly but surely, autocratic methods are giving way to democratic styles of governing.

The Church has also been affected by contemporary developments in society. As society moves from autocratic methods to democratic styles of governance, the Church is evolving from a monarchical method to a more collegial model of governance (as seen in *Lumen Gentium*). Alongside hierarchical structures, there is a tendency to promote "grass-root level interactive groupings", at the initiative of the hierarchy itself and because of a demand from below. Most "grass-root level interactive groupings" have already been institutionalized in the Code of Canon Law (diocesan synods, presbyteral councils, and pastoral councils) and in the Constitutions, Statutes, and Provincial Norms of various communities such as assemblies, house meetings, local community plans, and provincial plans. (For further reading, see by ROBERT P. MALONEY, C.M., *The Way of Vincent de Paul: A Contemporary Spirituality in the Service of the Poor*).

This changed mindset of modernity has produced new expectations, including dialogue, consultation, collective decision-making, questioning, and shared responsibility. The Church and those in consecrated life continue to introduce such methods of functioning to address modern expectations. New forms of horizontal structures are being added to the existing structures of governance to address a growing desire for a participatory style of governance.

Today's philosophical mindset generates difficulties in exercising obedience and authority, but it also provides positive opportunity for rediscovering the genuine meaning of obedience. The present-day mindset encourages personal autonomy and fulfillment, thus creating resistance to mortification of one's own will for the sake of the common good. It also threatens the meaning of obedience. As the exercise of authority has been renewed in many places, efforts are being made to see authority as a service to spiritual, apostolic, and fraternal revitalization of persons and communities. This, in turn allows for greater closeness between superiors and subjects, enabling a shift from a passive obedience to an obedience of greater dialogue and participation.

The real problem is that the excessive dependence in former times has often been replaced not by balanced participation, but by independence under the aegis of democratic ideas. Also, there is insufficient attention given to the vow of obedience in its Christological foundation. At times, we can fall into the temptation to see obedience as simply a practical organizational tool and a sociological part of life designed for efficiency, rather than seeing it by its true nature: as a theological and spiritual reality by its nature. If we view obedience and authority only as an organizational tool for apostolic effectiveness, we will encounter difficulties in living this vow.

Our Constitutions repeatedly call us to understand that for us as Vincentians, the exercise of obedience and authority is not simply an efficient, practical organizational tool, but a profoundly theological-spiritual reality by its nature. Our Constitutions call us to obey the will of the Father in the model of Jesus; to obey the human mediation in the person of the superior; to participate in the discernment process; to obey the superiors, even when we think our own opinion better; and to not to embrace obedience passively, but in an active, responsible way.

We are invited to obey the will of the Father in the model of Jesus

Our Constitutions invite us “*to be obedient to the will of the Father manifested to us in many ways*” (C. 36), and also makes it explicit that the way of Jesus must be the model for our way of obedience (C. 36). If Jesus is our model of obedience, our reflection should begin with the nature of obedience of Jesus. What was the nature of Christ’s obedience and how did he obey? The scriptures state unambiguously ways in which Christ obeyed the will of his Father. The many sayings of Jesus about his personal obedience to the Father’s will (especially in John’s Gospel) demonstrate that for Jesus, obedience was not an attitude or element added to his personality. Rather, obedience was intrinsic to his way of life: “My food is to do the will of him who sent me” (*Jn.* 4:34). He lived obedience when it presented a difficult chalice to drink (cf. *Mt.* 26:39,42; *Lk.* 22:42), and he made himself “obedient to the point of death, and death on a cross” (*Phil.* 2:8). His obedience was not passive; it was an active obedience. At the core of Jesus’ redemptive mission lies his unconditional obedience to the Father. Christ’s obedience above all was a commitment to follow a way of life, which resulted in the accomplishment of his mission.

The Constitutions offer us Jesus as the model to be followed in the practice of obedience. Christ’s obedience resulted in the fulfillment of his mission. Following the example of Jesus, we come to realize that our obedience, beyond the obligation to obey superiors, is a commitment to follow a way of life as prescribed in our Constitutions. In other

words, obedience is an intrinsic element in committing oneself to the Congregation. When one enters a community, he binds himself to a definite way of life within the Church. Such a life involves a mission. In our case, it is done to dedicate our whole lives to the service of the poor in the Congregation of the Mission.

In committing ourselves to the Congregation, we commit ourselves to its decisions. If we really wish to belong to a given apostolic society with its given ends, approved by the Church as part of her mission, we commit ourselves to live by the decisions of that Congregation. These decisions over the years are incorporated into the Constitutions, statutes and norms. As Christ's obedience involved a commitment to follow a specific way of life for a specific purpose, our obedience is a commitment to follow a specific way of life as articulated in the above means.

We are invited to obey the human mediation in the person of the superior

The vow of obedience focuses on following Jesus and finds its foundation in the gospels. The scriptures state unambiguously that Jesus always seeks and does the will of his Father (cf. *Jn.* 4:34; 5:30), and calls his followers to do the same. However, there is a giant step from seeking and doing the will of God to seeking and doing God's will as mediated by another person. It is here we come to understand the challenge of consecrated life. It is important to understand that in consecrated life, all are expected to search for the Divine Will. It is equally important to know that we carry out such a search together with our community. Article 37 of our Constitutions makes explicitly clear the communal orientation of Vincentian obedience and its missionary end. *"To participate in this mystery of the obedient Christ requires us all to seek, as a community, the will of the Father"* (C. 37, § 1).

It is true that we owe obedience to God alone, but we cannot ignore the reality of mediation, which guides us in seeking the Divine Will. God manifests his will in the interior motion of the Spirit, who "guides to all truth" (*Jn.* 16:13), but through multiple external mediations. The history of salvation is a story of mediation. The instruction given by The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (*The Service of Authority and Obedience*, 2005) extensively treats the question of mediation, noting, "Mediations that exteriorly communicate the will of God must be recognized in the events of life and in laws that give order to the life of groups of people and the dispositions of those who are called to lead such groupings". It further says, "One remains devoted to the Lord when sensing in some way his presence in human intermediaries, such as in the Rule, the

superiors, the community, the signs of the times and above all, the poor". When one chooses to obey not only God but also others, one obeys God and not just others. Genuine obedience considers not the person to whom it is offered but Him for whose sake it is offered. Thus, we offer obedience to God through human mediations.

We are invited to participate in the discernment process

Since ordinarily we know God's will through human mediation, searching for the God's will demands a process of discernment. A Vincentian needs to listen to God's voice not only in his own heart; he must, also pay attention to how God speaks through the community. In this process of discernment, one does not give up thinking, searching, judging and deciding, but realizes he does not do this alone. He renounces aloneness for the sake of communion. Our Constitutions state that we seek the will of God *"thorough mutual sharing of experience, open and responsible dialogue in which differences of age and outlook interact, so that common directions may surface and develop, and lead to making decisions"* (C. 37). Our Constitutions highlight the importance of discernment in community, a willingness to listen to the inspiration of the Spirit in my confreres and myself in a prayerful manner, rather than focusing on my own ideas or needs.

Persons in authority are at the service of the community as was the Lord Jesus, who washed the feet of his disciples. In turn, this enables the community to be at the service of the Reign of God (cf. *Jn.* 13:1-17). In discernment, those in authority search for the will of God, to ensure that it occurs in sincerity and truth. In his homily at the start of his Petrine ministry, Benedict XVI affirmed this reality: "My real program of governance is not to do my own will, not to pursue my own ideas, but to listen, together with the whole Church, to the word and the will of the Lord, to be guided by Him, so that He himself will lead the Church at this hour of our history".

The role of authority in consecrated life is the same: to follow a style of governance not to do their own will, but to listen together to discern the voice of God with the community. Thus, it is the responsibility of those in authority to introduce structures and communal exercises to support the development of a spirit of dialogue and discernment, such as community meetings, review of life, shared prayer, and reflection. If such practices are to foster the spirit of listening, they need to be mutually agreed upon, not imposed. A challenge facing us today is to not only introduce conducive structures for mutual dialogue, but to faithfully implement that which is already in place in the Congregation to promote listening and dialogue. In some areas, local communities continue to encounter difficulties in engaging themselves in a meaningful dialogue.

We are invited to obey the superiors even though we think our own opinion better

An effective community cannot be in a state of continuous discernment. After discernment comes a time for decision-making. We find in the Constitutions a clear directive for discernment and decision-making. It says that those who exercise authority in the Congregation “*should engage in dialogue*”, but they “*retain the authority to decide and command what is to be done*” (C. 97, 2). Our Constitutions invite all to obey the decisions of superiors in the light of faith, even when we prefer our own opinion (C. 37, 2). According to the theological-spiritual perspective implied in the Constitutions, those in authority indirectly mediate God’s will. This is not to say they are humanly infallible in every concrete decision. Yet, they do their best in journeying with the community to search for God’s will, using methods sanctioned by the Church, such as God’s Word, the Constitutions and Common Rule, and decisions of General and Provincial assemblies.

We are invited to embrace obedience not in a passive way but in an active responsible way

It is clear from that our Constitutions call all confreres to embrace obedience, not as a passive carrying out of orders, but as a conscious commitments done in and for community. Jesus gave himself up to Judas, to the high priests, to his torturers, to the hostile crowd to be crucified. He did so only because he was absolutely certain that everything finds its meaning in complete fidelity to the plan of salvation willed by the Father. Christ’s obedience was not a passive acceptance, but an active, conscious fulfillment of God’s will. Like Jesus, we obey joyfully the decisions taken after a meaningful dialogue, even when it is against our own views and opinions, because the nature of our obedience is not a passive acceptance of orders. It is active, conscious fulfillment of God’s will manifested to us through human mediation by one in authority. That is why when a person or group in the Congregation offers a critique of how we function, as long as charity is maintained, this critique should be seen as a diligent act of love for the Congregation.

We must use the gifts God has given us, such as intelligence and experience, but there are moments in the exercise of obedience and authority when faith and abandonment to God have the last word. It is possible that reason will fail to give us a satisfying explanation how God’s will is manifested in the will of the superior. Yet, it becomes meaningful to us when we see it from the perspective of our faith and abandonment to God. Mary used her human intelligence and questioned the message of the angel Gabriel, but in faith Mary was quick to obey (*Lk.* 1:38).

Core challenges and conclusion

The core challenges confronting the difficulties of our practice of obedience today include:

- Excessive individualism and over emphasis on personal rights that express themselves in resistance to a sense of common projects and mutual charity;
- In moving from a monarchical to collegial style of functioning, the emphasis has shifted to independence rather than balanced participation;
- A failure to view obedience and authority in consecrated life in its proper perspective, by at times falling into the trap of viewing them as merely an effective, organizational tool, thus neglecting or overlooking its theological-spiritual nature;
- The positive effects of encouraging and animating a practice of communal discernment and attentive listening as integral to our community life and living the mission today.

In conclusion, we see that in the modern world the way of viewing obedience and authority has changed, both in the Church and in society. Among other things, this is due to the dominant concept of the *primacy of subjectivity*, which places the individual at the center of everything, fostering the importance of self-realization. This has created difficulties and opportunities for the practice of obedience and authority in consecrated life. We must move beyond seeing the practice of obedience and authority as a mere organizational tool for efficiency, and reclaim it for the value of its theological-spiritual nature. Our Constitutions invite us to render obedience to the decisions of superiors in the light of faith even when we may think our own opinion better (C. 37, 2). While reason takes us to a certain level, where it stops, then faith must carry us forward.

Tempo Forte Summary

June 2014

Rome, 1 July 2014

Dear Confreres,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be forever in our hearts!

This is a summary of our June Tempo Forte meeting. We began Sunday, June 1 with a retreat for ongoing formation. Fr. Matthew Kallammakal, Assistant General, shared a reflection on the vow of obedience as part of our quarterly meditation on the Constitutions. It was well prepared and well received, and will be featured in the September issue of *Vincentiana*.

General Assembly 2016

Our first matter of business dealt with the 2016 General Assembly. We are carefully bringing together different responsibilities, including developing a list of confreres to serve as simultaneous translators during the assembly. We will have four official languages at this assembly: English, Spanish, French, and Italian.

Reconfiguration

We reviewed the status of reconfiguration efforts in the provinces of Italy. The Visitors of the Provinces of Torino, Rome, and Napoli, along with their Councils, submitted a series of questions to which we were able to respond. Our hope is that these three provinces will come together as one province prior to the 2016 General Assembly. In 2015, their next provincial assemblies will be done together, after which they will have a final assembly early in 2016, before the General Assembly. At that time, provincial norms, a name for the new province, and a process for electing a Visitor and Council to govern the newly reconfigured province will be decided. We also spoke briefly about the status of efforts for reconfiguration taking place in the provinces of France, Spain, and CLAPVI-North (which includes provinces in the Caribbean and part of Latin America).

Office of Communications

We received a report from Fr. John Maher, Director of Communications. Fr. Maher informed the Council that the new website for our International Missions was completed and is active. Fr. John Freund and Mr. Thomas (Toma) Zielinski worked with Fr. Maher to make this site an appealing one with current information on the various missions, and to highlight activities of our confreres serving in the International Missions. Our hope is that this new website will help younger confreres and members of the Vincentian Family to become more familiar with the International Missions. The web link for this site is: <http://gospel-joy.org>

Fr. Maher proposed that when the “*Ratio Formationis*” is completed, it be published in one volume, using the three main languages of the Congregation. The General Council agreed, and decided that following this edition will be another comprised of commentaries by confreres on the aspects of the Ratio Formationis. Fr. Maher also noted with pleasure the arrival of Fr. Jorge Rodriguez, Province of Colombia, to serve as assistant director in the Office of Communications.

SIEV, CIF, and VSO

We approved a list of the new members for the SIEV Board who will have their first meeting in Rome October 6-8, during Tempo Forte. They are: Corpus Juan Delgado from the Province of Zaragoza; Nelio Pereira Pita from the Province of Portugal; Neil Hoffman from the Province of Slovakia; Dan Borlik, representing the CIF program in Paris; Andres Motto from the Province of Argentina; Vinicius Teixeira from the Province of Rio de Janeiro; Franciscus Eko Armada from the Province of Indonesia; Jean Rufin Mokelo of the Province of Congo; Javier Alvarez, liaison with the General Counsel, and Agus Heru, the archivist and librarian at the Curia.

We received a report from Dan Borlik, director of the CIF program, and Adam Bandura, sub-director. They noted that a new CIF program was held in Paris from April 25 - May 18 for confreres engaged in popular missions or ‘missions ad gentes’. Its theme focused on the ‘new evangelization’, and effective ways of conveying it through the Vincentian charism. Eighteen confreres from thirteen provinces attended, from all continents where the Congregation serves. At twenty-two days length, it was slightly less than the usual month-long program. It included a pilgrimage to various Vincentian historical sites around Paris, the Berceau in Dax, and Lourdes. After reading and learning about evangelization from official church sources and documents of the Congregation of the Mission, participants were asked to make a presentation on their own missions, provincial projects, and plans, and other sources from their dioceses and countries.

We received a report from Fr. Miles Heinen, director of the Vincentian Solidarity Office. He and his associates, Teresa Niedda and Scott Fina, reported that VSO activity and fundraising efforts in the last three months netted \$ 416,854 USD. One alert: there is only funding left for five more micro projects, so donations to help these projects continue are needed and should be sent to the Vincentian Solidarity Office.

On a related note, I offer my special thanks to Father Sy Peterka of the Eastern Province, USA for once again contributing greatly by raising money for the different VSO projects. The beneficiaries of these efforts by the VSO were the provinces of Ethiopia, Slovakia, Mozambique, Madagascar, Nigeria, the COVIAM mission in Chad, and mission work done by the Provinces of the Orient, Southern India, and Colombia.

Systemic Change Commission

We received a report from Fr. Giuseppe Turati, new coordinator of the Commission for the Promotion of Systemic Change, who informed us of a recent planning meeting at the General Curia between the outgoing coordinator, Fr. Robert Maloney and new Executive Secretary, Mr. James Claffey, who will work with Fr. Turati. Their plans include a workshop for the Province of the Philippines with on-site visits to projects of the province and the Vincentian Family.

Union of Superior Generals

We received a report from the Superior General regarding the recent meeting of the Union of Superior Generals. Included among the many things they discussed were reactions to the November visit with the Holy Father; a presentation from a married couple in preparation for the Year of the Family; a presentation on facilitating and carrying out canonical visits; and a preview of plans for the Year of Consecrated Life, which begins in 2015. The opening of the Year of Consecrated Life will be November 29, 2014 with a vigil, followed by the Eucharist on Sunday, November 30, the first Sunday of Advent. The closing will be February 1, 2016 with the celebration of World Day of Consecrated Life on February 2.

Among the events planned, include an ecumenical meeting of consecrated life in January, a seminar for formators in April 2015 and a workshop for young consecrated men and women in September. At the start of 2016, there will be a week celebrating consecrated life worldwide. Information can be found on "Vidimus Dominum", the website of the Union of Superior Generals. The link is <http://vd.pcn.net/en/>

Education Collaboration Efforts

We discussed a new education project between the Congregation of the Mission and DePaul University (and hopefully other universities affiliated with the Congregation). It involves setting up collaboration between the universities and high schools sponsored by the Congregation. This will provide educational opportunities and cultural exchanges for young people of various nations, enriching and expanding their understanding of the Vincentian charism from high school through college, while providing an opportunity to study abroad. While this project is new, a similar program has already been pioneered by DePaul University for several years. Our hope is to join with them in expanding this wonderful project to help our young people better know and live the Vincentian charism not only in school, but also throughout their lives.

Mission Distribution Fund

In regard to economic matters, we completed our funding allotments for the annual mission distribution fund to help support emerging provinces, international missions, and three Visitors' Conferences in their projects of ongoing formation.

International Missions

With regard to the international missions, we received a report from El Alto, Bolivia. Fr. Aidan Rooney, the Superior, noted that each of the three men there is committed to remaining in this mission for at least three more years. He noted they are looking forward to welcoming in September a new confrere, Fr. Janez Cerar of the Province of Slovenia. The confreres in El Alto shared a community retreat with confreres in the mission of Cochabamba. In 2015, they will do the same but will be accompanied by the Superior General as he visits the mission. As for the mission in Cochabamba, we received a brief report from the Superior, Fr. David Paniagua, who shared his health difficulties, and asked for prayers as he discerns his future in this mission.

In the mission of the Solomon Islands, they are expecting Fr. Varghese Ayyampilly, a confrere from the Province of Southern India. He was the mission superior for a number of years in Tanzania, and was a pioneer in that mission of the Southern Indian Province from its start. In Papua New Guinea, there is a new missionary, Fr. Neil Lams from the Province of Oceania. He will work in a mission station in Papua New Guinea, as the confreres discuss their strategic plan for the mission for the coming years.

We also announce the departure of Fr. Jude Lemeh of the Province of Nigeria from the mission in Papua New Guinea. I thank Fr. Jude

for his generous years of service in Papua New Guinea. He worked in Bomana, PNG as a parish priest while serving as an assistant to the superior for the mission. As Fr. Jude returns to Nigeria, I am sure that he will continue to live the missionary spirit of the Congregation back in his province, and by his example, encourage other young confreres to serve in the international missions.

We also received news that two Polish confreres, Fathers Slawomir Szucki and Marcin Wrobel, are preparing to go to Papua New Guinea and will arrive July 2015. We also announced the departure of Fr. Jean-Pierre Mangulu Mobonda from the mission in Tunisia, who will return to his Province of Congo. In his place will be Fr. Narcisse Djerambete from the Province of Paris, who currently serves in Cameroon. He is from Chad, and speaks Arabic, French, and English. Narcisse is joining the mission in Tunisia with Fr. Firmin Mola Mbalo, Superior of the mission.

I am happy to announce the appointment of Rindo Karippai from the Province of Southern India, who has volunteered as a missionary in the Province of China. In the international mission of Puntas Arenas, two new missionaries have arrived. Fr. Angel Ignacio Garrido Santiago, from the Province of Madrid was formerly a missionary in Madagascar and Cuba. Fr. Margarito Martinez Gonzalez, from the Province of Mexico, has served the Hispanic community in Los Angeles, California, USA.

I am also happy to announce the three confreres who will open the new international mission in Anchorage, Alaska, USA to serve a Hispanic community of over 30,000 people. Up to this point, the main pastoral agent has been a Daughter of Charity. The confreres are Fathers Julio Cesar Garcia Hurtado and Pedro Nel Delgado Quintero, from both the Province of Columbia, and Deacon Arnold Hernando Rodriguez from the Province of the West, USA. Once the confreres from Colombia have their travel visas, the Alaska mission will begin.

We also received offers from confreres volunteering for part-time ministry in the international missions. Fr. Vincent O'Malley, Eastern Province, USA has volunteered to teach at Holy Name Seminary in the Solomon Islands one semester a year, as has Fr. Antony Punnoth of the Province of Southern India. We are investigating this possibility and coordinating the specific details with the confreres working at Holy Name Seminary in the Solomon Islands.

Vincentian Family

We discussed matters relating to the Vincentian Family, reviewing a proposal of the Superior General outlining the creation of an international secretariat for the Vincentian Family, which will be separate from the current office in the General Curia in Rome. The General

Council met with Fr. Jorge Rodriguez, sub-director of the Vincentian Family office to discuss the relationship between the Congregation of the Mission and the Vincentian Family. This was done with the hope to assist the Vincentian Family to eventually become less dependent on the Congregation, and to help them assume greater responsibility to bring the charism forward by including not only traditional family branches, but also other Vincentian groups who strive to live the charism.

Conferences of Visitors

We received reports from the various Conferences of Visitors, from CEVIM (conference of Visitors in Europe). Fr. Stanislav Zontak gave a report on their annual assembly held in May in Jerusalem, where they discussed ways of strengthening collaboration, such as the internal seminary and establishing a common theologate. Fr. Eli Chaves reported on an evaluation done by the Visitors of CLAPVI-South on their new project of popular missions, which is made up of a team of confreres from provinces in CLAPVI-South, including Argentina, Chile, Peru, and Ecuador. These confreres are enthusiastic to serve in these countries, as well as in Bolivia.

The Superior General gave a report on the meeting of the National Conference of Visitors of the United States. Fr. Ray Van Dorpe, Visitor of the Province of the West, was elected president of the NCV-USA. Although comprised of three USA provinces, the Visitors believe it is important to continue as a conference because of the significant sharing that occurs among them.

They are also involved in meetings of various committees of confreres with specific tasks who discuss their findings with the Visitors. Plans to observe the 200th anniversary of the arrival of the Vincentians in the USA were also discussed. It will be observed in 2016, a year before the 400th anniversary of the inspirational founding of the Congregation.

The NCV-USA also affirmed their long-term goal of reconfiguration into one United States province, but the Visitors acknowledged it would take time. The Western Province is still learning from its own recent reconfiguration. Thus, the Provinces of the East and New England will move forward in discussion of coming together prior to an eventual move to one province. The NCV also discussed collaboration, with not only committees for formation and vocation promotion, but an interchange of personnel among Niagara, St. John's, and DePaul universities.

Finally, the NCV announced they have numerous English texts available of the translations of the conferences of St. Vincent de Paul for any interested confrere or province. There is an abundant number of

copies available (almost 3,000!), and they are free of charge. The only expense will be to cover postage and shipping costs. If interested, contact the General Curia at secgen@cmglobal.org and your request will be forwarded to the appropriate office.

Calendar Update

We closed our June Tempo Forte meeting by reviewing our calendars and coordinating our schedules for the canonical visitations, General Council, and Tempo Forte meetings through 2016. The Superior General will make his annual retreat July 1-7 at a retreat house of the Daughters of Charity in Italy. From July 13-23, he will be in Paris for a meeting and workshop for moderators of the Vincentian Marian Youth.

For the month of August, he will be on vacation with his family and confreres in the United States. From August 30 - September 8, the Superior General will visit communities of the Daughters of Charity in Korea and Japan, and visit our Filipino confreres who serve in Japan.

From September 11-25, he and Fr. Stanislav Zontak will visit the Vice-Province of Saints Cyril and Methodius, hoping to visit the Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia, the three countries where the vice-province serves. From September 26-29, he and Fr. Zontak will visit the mission of Polish confreres in Kazakhstan to celebrate the feast of our Holy Founder, St. Vincent de Paul.

As I close this letter, summer has arrived in Rome. I pray that each of you will find the time in this summer season to reflect, relax, and recall with gratitude the gift and promise of your vocation as a member of the Congregation of the Mission.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General

New Appointments at the General Curia

The coming of autumn brings a change of seasons and a time of new community assignments. The General Curia has three new appointments. Father Mario Di Carlo, of the Province of Rome, has returned the Curia as house administrator, where he once served. He replaces Fr. Giuseppe Carulli, who completed his three-year term. Fr. Mario served in various administrative and pastoral positions since his ordination in July 1974. His last assignment was in Firenze. Fr. Mario arrived in time to have confreres celebrate with him the fortieth anniversary of ordination.

Brother Gerardo Fajardo Belcina also makes a return to the General Curia, after having served once before in the 1990's. Br. Gerardo is a member of the Province of the Philippines, where he was received into the Congregation on May 14, 1983. He made final vows on November 15, 1987. Br. Gerardo has served in the various apostolates of his province, including in Thailand, a provincial mission. Br. Gerardo succeeds Br. Leopold Myamba of Tanzania, a mission of the India South Province. Br. Leo returned to Tanzania after completing his assignment at the Curia.

In addition to the departure of Fr. Carulli and Br. Leo, translator Fr. Thomas Lunot has returned to France, after serving at the Curia since 2012. He will continue giving parish missions.

Another welcome addition at the General Curia is that of Fr. Vincent Zontak, C.M. a member of the Province of Slovakia, who will be living with the confreres for the coming year and assisting in house duties. Fr. Vincent entered the Congregation in 1973 and was ordained in 1976. He has served in administrative and pastoral ministries, including as the Visitor. His most recent assignment was a pastoral one in the Czech Republic.

Fr. Gregory Gay, Superior General, thanked Fr. Carulli, Br. Leo, and Fr. Lunot for their time and service to the General Curia and the Congregation. "I am grateful to our confreres for their generous service to the Curia. Fr. Carulli did much to contribute to the smooth running of the house, and Br. Leo was a great help to him as well. Fr. Lunot was helpful in being available for the extensive translation work often needed at the Curia".

He also welcomed the new confreres to the Curia. "I am grateful that Fr. Mario has agreed to return as house administrator, and I also appreciate Br. Gerardo's willingness to return to Rome. They are both familiar with the routine of our house, so it is a great asset for us". He welcomed Fr. Vincent Zontak, saying, "It will be good to have another Zontak brother here in Rome!".

FROM THE SUPERIOR GENERAL

Letter to the Vincentian Family for the Feast of St. Vincent

Rome, 18 July 2014

Dear Members of the Vincentian family,

As we celebrate the feast of St. Vincent de Paul, on behalf of the Vincentian Family and the leaders of our various branches, I write to inform you that we have decided to dedicate this coming year to the “New Evangelization.” We will do so as a Vincentian Family by focusing on three key areas of fidelity in following Jesus Christ, evangelizer and servant of the poor:

- *a need for personal and communal conversion;*
- *a need to go beyond ourselves by listening to the cry of the poor, especially those who live on the periphery of our cities, and on the margins of society today;*
- *a need to evangelize and provide new ways of pastoral care for the family.*

From October 5-19, 2014, Pope Francis will convene a Synod of Bishops to discuss “pastoral challenges of the family in the context of evangelization.” This is a significant theme advanced by Our Holy Father for the good of the Church, as this Synod will demonstrate.

Early in his pontificate, Pope St. John Paul II initiated the call for a ‘new evangelization’ to encourage a fresh fervor and innovative ways to encounter Jesus, to deepen our relationship with Christ, and grow in living our Christian faith. This call of John Paul II came at a time of general malaise among Christians, particularly in countries in the developed world. John Paul II believed Christians were becoming less fervent in their practice of the faith, so he called for conversion and a new evangelization. These dynamics for renewal have been articulated and encouraged by both of his successors, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI and Pope Francis.

A key aspect of this new initiative is to rediscover and re-encounter Jesus with love in our hearts, deepening our relationship with him to grow in discipleship. It is a personal deepening of our faith in the God of Jesus Christ, a fruit of the Holy Spirit. This love guides us on the path

of devotion to God and to others, especially the poor. As truly committed Christians and disciples of Jesus, we share the Good News of God's love, found in the Holy Scriptures and sacraments. The role of every baptized Catholic who lives faithfully is to make Jesus known to all people.

To do so, the Church calls us to conversion, a new way to encounter and believe in God and share the Good News with others. To live this experience of conversion and follow a new way to encounter God, we must leave our comfort zones and listen as the Lord speaks to us in the depths of our hearts. As Vincentians and members of the Vincentian Family, how can we respond to this call to conversion and new evangelization? The charism that St. Vincent de Paul shared with St. Louise de Marillac and that was carried on by Blessed Frederic Ozanam, along with many others in the Vincentian tradition, was to care for the poor and needy. However, this also included the "care of souls" as an essential part of the mission.

In the Vincentian vocation, mission and charity are inseparable. The corporal and spiritual works of mercy and service are always united. These words of instruction to Daughters of Charity in their service of the poor speak to us: a "primary concern to make God known to them, to proclaim the Gospel, and to make the Kingdom present" (*DC Constitutions*, 10a). Blessed Frederic Ozanam stressed that material aid was not the only aspect of the Society's service to the poor. Rather, he reminded them that their spirituality and loving Christian witness to the love of God helped many Christians return to the faith, and served to evangelize many non-Christians. This is a key virtue of our Vincentian spirituality: to develop and deepen our relationship with Jesus, and help others to encounter Christ. This is faith in action.

There are many challenges for us in everyday life. But now is a favorable time to announce the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ. Although we live in the midst of an environment often indifferent to religion, people still have a true thirst for higher values. There is a hunger for God among God's people, especially as they aspire to a new way of life, one different from the prevailing societal norms. We could give in to the way people today live this environment of religious indifference, and acclimate ourselves to accept how little importance people show toward the essential questions of faith and the meaning of life in this world.

But are we aware of the reality of what happens when people forget God? Many times, this is indicative of true spiritual and material poverty. St. Vincent was deeply affected by the situation of people in his day: those who lived in misery and ignorance, and who did not know anything of God, nor of God's love. It was for this reason that Vincent said with strength and conviction, "It is true then, that I am sent not only to love God, but to make him loved. It is not enough for me to love God if my neighbor doesn't love him" (SV, XII, Conf. May 30, 1659).

If we had only a little of this love, would we look away with our arms crossed? Never! Charity cannot be idle. Charity moves us to look for the comfort and salvation of those who suffer. Our vocation as Vincentians is to inflame the hearts of others: to do what the Son of God himself did. He came to bring fire to the world, to inflame it with his love. What should we hope for ourselves, except to burn for Christ and to be consumed by that love.

As members of the Vincentian Family, we are called to be agents of evangelization by providing loving service. Charity is the principal value of life and the challenge for the Christian community to make active in today's world. Never should we separate nor oppose the intrinsic relationship between faith and charity. We are Jesus' disciples when we extend God's love, and commit ourselves to fully participate in the life and mission of the Church. We have been conquered by Christ's love! Accordingly, under the power of that love, we are profoundly open to loving our neighbor in concrete ways. Here, we can recall the motto of the Daughters of Charity, words taken from Scripture: "The love of Christ crucified impels us" (cf. 2 Cor. 5:14).

Faith enables us to recognize the gifts that our good and generous God has entrusted to us. Charity makes them fruitful. Through faith, we enter into friendship with the Lord. In the virtue of charity, this friendship is cultivated and lived out. The relationship between faith and charity is magnified in this intimate link. This is what it means to make the Gospel effective in people's lives. The encyclical *Lumen Fidei* speaks of the repercussions of faith in the world, telling us that, "The light of faith is concretely placed at the service of justice, law, and peace" (LF, 2013, 51). The apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* speaks about the service of charity as a constitutive element of the Church's mission, reflecting the essence of who we are as a Church.

As the Church is missionary by its nature, it is also indelibly linked to the virtue of charity, particularly in providing effective charity for our neighbor. When we accept the challenge of mission imbued with the charity of Christ, we can identify with and serve those living in poverty. Thus, our Vincentian hearts accept with joy the call of *Evangelii Gaudium*, to be instruments of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, to enable them to attain integral promotion into society (EG, 2013, 182). Thus, we should be docile and attentive, listening to the cries of the poor and willing to run to their aid. We do that by leaving our own comfort zones, going to the periphery and the margins to meet those living in poverty.

We go out of ourselves and to the poor with haste with a burning love of God. In the fourth chapter of *Evangelii Gaudium*, we find a number of ideas that are consonant with our charism. The words in this chapter seem to describe the lives and actions of Saints Vincent and Louise, along with our other saints and beati. Here is a sample of what

Chapter 4 tells us: the poor are those preferred by God; the poor occupy a privileged place in the Church; and the poor are our evangelizers. If those ideas from *Evangelii Gaudium* sound familiar to you, they should!

The New Evangelization is an initiative to help us recognize the salvific force those living in poverty have in Christ, and to put them at the center of the Church. We discover Christ in the poor; we give voice to their causes; we are their servants; we listen to them; and they call us to ponder the mysterious wisdom of God, often revealed to us by their very lives.

In the context of the sufferings and struggles that families endure today, the New Evangelization can meet an urgent need, as demonstrated by the preparatory document on pastoral care of the family for the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. The doctrines of the Church regarding marriage must be presented in an efficient and understandable way to reach the hearts of many, and transform their lives according to the will of God made manifest in Jesus Christ. Additional Church documents speak of the pastoral needs of the family as an essential dimension of evangelization. It is a call to renew our understanding of the sacrament of marriage and the Christian vocation of married couples and to strengthen the family for Church and society. As members of the Vincentian Family, we should ask ourselves what we could do to evangelize the families we serve and those with whom we will come in contact.

Here I speak of the families we encounter in our parishes, schools, social services, and many other ministries where we collaborate as a Vincentian Family to serve those living in poverty. Without a doubt, the family is an immense field for mission. Many families whom we serve today need protection, and suffer many disturbances. They are often threatened, even to the point of death. As a Vincentian Family, we can and must move forward to establish “Lines of Action” that give an impulse to pastoral work with families, and in particular, those who live in poverty.

With all the Vincentian Family, we pray the Church will seek authentic ways to adopt the pastoral means to help families cope with their present realities in the light of faith, and with the strength that comes from the Gospel. As we celebrate the feast of St. Vincent de Paul, we must dedicate ourselves in this year to the New Evangelization. We need creative responses to meet the challenges presented by the new evangelization, and personal and communal conversion to meet the pastoral needs of the family, especially those living on the periphery of our society.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General

Letter to the Vincentian Family on the Plight of Christians in Iraq

Rome, 15 August 2014

Dear Members of the Vincentian Family,

A Blessed Feast of the Assumption of Our Lady!

Since the last circular letter a few days ago which I addressed to all branches of our Family, there have been other events that require me to write to you again; I do not want to miss the call for deep reflection and prayer that is made to us.

For months now, we have listened to Pope Francis speak of his concern and sadness regarding the reality of the persecuted Christians in Iraq, along with other situations of famine, drought, war, and disease in many parts of the world, where the poorest always suffer. A few days ago, I received a letter from Michael Thio, International President of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society. He informed me that among those persecuted Christians in Iraq, there are many who belong to Conferences in that country. This makes us even closer to the situation.

On Sunday, 10 August, at the Angelus, Pope Francis said *"We are stunned and dismayed by the news coming from Iraq: thousands of persons, among them so many Christians, expelled from their homes in a brutal way; children who die of thirst and hunger during the flight; kidnapped women; massacred persons; violence of all kinds; destruction throughout, of houses, religious, historical, and cultural heritages. All that seriously offends both God and humanity. One does not hate in God's name! War is not made in the name of God!"*.

As members of the Vincentian Family, let us not ignore the call that the Church and the poor make to us, specifically in Iraq, to unite for this cause. A recent report of the Pontifical Council Cor Unum, noted that they have been providing Iraqi refugees with humanitarian aid since June. Therefore, if we can make a material contribution, let us do so through the national branches of Caritas (Catholic Charities) and the Episcopal Conferences.

But I want to launch a call to all branches, nationally, regionally, or locally to organize a day of Prayer (and fasting) in a creative way, for 22 August, when we celebrate the feast of the Queenship of the Blessed

Virgin Mary. Let us pray, as the Pope has said, “together to the God of peace, through the intercession of the Virgin Mary: Give peace, Lord, to our days, and make us builders of justice and peace. Mary, Queen of Peace, pray for us!”.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General

Sunday Mass Homily for JMV Moderators

Paris, 20 July 2014

My brothers and sisters in Jesus and Saint Vincent:

As you know, we live in an era of instantaneous communication. The digital age has created so many possibilities to be in contact, going well beyond anything imagined in years past. In our time together here, I am sure you have already posted pictures on social media sites and sent text messages to family, friends, and colleagues in 'real time' to tell them what you are doing and how the experience is affecting you. It is amazing how quickly we can communicate today.

But stop and ask yourself: are we really communicating? If so, what are we saying? I know how important quick messaging is in travel, as well as its crucial role in emergencies. That is not what I mean. Today, I am referring to communication that leads to communion, creating in us a deeper appreciation of both the message and the messenger. It allows us to reflect on what we have heard or seen, and to respond in a relational way. It best expresses who we are, and honors the sacred in the other. Here, as the moderators of Vincentian Marian Youth, we see the depth and richness it brings us as disciples of Jesus and followers of Vincent.

However, today's Scripture readings show us two crucial things about real communication: its true meaning and value, which is wisdom, and the ancient method from Jesus' day that still instructs and inspires us; namely, the parables. They are truly a gift that keeps on giving. Let me focus first on the true meaning and value of communication in the Scriptures we share today.

The first reading from the book of Wisdom tells us of a God who communicates by words and deeds, one who is mighty in power, majestic but also deeply involved in the lives of His people. We are told, *"There is no god besides you who have the care of all. Your might is the source of justice; your mastery over all things makes you lenient to all"* (Wis. 12; 13:16). Wisdom shows us a God who tempers justice and judgment with mercy and compassion. In the Old Testament, we often find the phrase "the fear of God". While today that phrase, 'fear of God' can have negative connotations, in the richness of the language of that era, to have a fear of God meant to acknowledge and celebrate God's awesome power and might. Wisdom is God's gift to humanity; to be sought constantly and valued above human achievements and abilities.

The example par excellence in both wisdom and communication is Jesus. There is a constant congruency between his words and deeds.

Jesus shows us true communication begins in communion with the Father, filtering out in words and actions that reflect God's glory and goodness. It brings joy, peace, insight, consolation, challenge, and commitment to live the Gospel and to build up the Kingdom of God. By his words and actions, Jesus affirms the inner dignity of the human person as the center of any formal or informal means of communication.

This is where parables come in. They are Jesus' concrete, practical way to communicate, using ordinary images and ideas of the day to teach discipleship and to make real the Kingdom of God. At a time when the Israelites yearned for a political, military, or royal reign, the parables of Jesus communicate the power and presence of God to his people. These homespun stories allow us to think, reflect, and pray about who we are, how we live, and what we can become.

At first glance, the three parables in today's Gospel may seem disjointed, or thrown together. A good way of summarizing them lies in three words: "**Weeds, seeds, and wheat**". Yet, the real meaning of these parables can be found in what I call the three P's: **patience, providence, and perseverance**. Each parable has something important to say about your role as a moderator of the Vincentian Marian Youth.

The first parable, '*weeds among the wheat*' is about developing the virtue of **patience** instead of applying a hasty solution to a problem. In this parable, weeds threaten the existence of wheat, a valuable commodity in Jesus' day. When confronted with this, the first reaction is impulsive, perhaps even reckless: get rid of the bad weeds, even if the wheat is destroyed. Then find and punish the one who did this bad deed. It is an understandable and all too human reaction!

Yet, the farmer realizes that patience is necessary. Despite the presence of weeds, wheat can still be harvested. **A good end to a bad start is possible, if one is patient and willing to look to the solution instead of being consumed by the problem.** In this parable, Jesus also asks us to come to grips with the wheat and weeds in the field of our lives, and allow him to patiently purify us. Having allowed the Lord to do so with us, we can then be patient with the 'weeds' of others.

Providence is a powerful word. It calls us to remember that God is in charge, and that our ideas, plans, and actions should be conformed to his will. Belief in divine Providence means that we allow God to be God and not let our ego or human needs take the place of the Lord's plan. The second parable of the mustard seed is a perfect example of our need for divine Providence. It reminds us that any effort we make, no matter how insignificant, if done so with God's grace, can bear fruit. So often only God may know the results of our labors. But if we plant seeds of prayerfulness, hope, service, and integrity, divine Providence will do the rest. This mustard seed parable is a call to trust and letting go, so God's Providence may complete what we begin.

The final parable is about **perseverance**. Waiting for yeast to turn into leavened bread is no quick, easy matter. Much care is needed when formulating ingredients, kneading the dough, and the actual baking. And once done, the whole time-consuming effort must start up again. Yet, once successfully completed, the smell and taste of fresh bread is one of life's great pleasures. This parable shows us when we do not readily achieve the end sought; perseverance is still God's gift, bestowed on us through the life, death, and resurrection of his Son Jesus. Thus, no matter how simple or complex a task, no matter how tedious or exciting a duty, whether our efforts are appreciated or taken for granted; when we persevere, we witness to the Vincentian charism.

I have sometimes wondered why Matthew used so many of Jesus' parables in his Gospel. In the other Gospels, Jesus often speaks simply and directly. But Matthew gives us a good insight when he tells us, "He spoke to them only in parables, to fulfill what had been said through the prophet: *'I will open my mouth in parables; I will announce what has lain hidden from the foundation of the world'*" (Mt. 13:34-35). Jesus knew that his people needed stories and personal examples so they could strive to be more in their lives; to console and support them in times of trouble; to drive them into deeper discipleship by identifying with the parable; but most of all, to bring them hope and healing in a world filled with pain, poverty, and random, ruthless violence.

Vincentian Marian Youth is a living example of how **patience**, **Providence**, and **perseverance** can all come together for the common good. Think of the patience St. Catherine Laboure showed throughout her life. After having had the singular honor of a vision and dialogue with Our Lady, St. Catherine labored for decades in a ministry of service to the elderly, living in quiet obscurity. Reflect on how the Providence of God has transformed Vincentian Marian Youth, first known as the *Children of Mary* in Europe, to an international organization witnessing to the Church and our charism on almost every continent in numerous countries. Give thanks for the perseverance of so many past members and moderators of the VMY who first inspired and motivated you to become involved in this great work of God.

As we celebrate the Eucharist together, we know Christ is truly present to us in his Word, sacrament, and in our community of faith, devotion, and service. We give thanks in realizing that Vincentian Marian Youth is truly a work of the Holy Spirit, aided by the intercession of Mary, our Mother, and graced by Saints and Beati of the Vincentian Family. These were and are our first teachers and moderators in the ways of sanctity and service. May they help us to become living parables of **patience**, **Providence**, and **perseverance**.

SPOTLIGHT INTERVIEW

An Interview with Fr. Manuel Ginete, C.M.

Member of Province of the Philippines



John T. Maher, C.M.,
with Manuel Ginete, C.M.

Editor's Note

This interview features Fr. Manuel Ginete from Province of the Philippines. Fr. Manny now ministers in one of the 'newest' countries in the world: South Sudan, which gained independence from Sudan in 2011. It is a country with much unrest, as it transitions to an independent nation. In 2008, the Union of Superior Generals in Rome sponsored an inter-congregational mission effort to strengthen the Catholic Church in South Sudan. At this time, Fr. Manny was Director of the Vincentian Family Office at the Curia, and decided to volunteer for this project in South Sudan. He lives in Juba City, capital of South Sudan. With religious from various Congregations, he assists the Bishops, clergy, and Catholics there to establish programs and structures that will enable them to be a vibrant, active Church.

Describe your family background, education, and how you came to know the Congregation.

I come from a family of nine siblings, with seven other brothers and one sister. All are still living, except my brother Rodrigo, who recently died. I attended a high school sponsored by the Daughters of Charity. Fr. Teodimo Pacis, a Vincentian priest, came to our school on occasion,

so I got to know him. I believe he was the rector of the Archdiocesan seminary. After I graduated, I entered the Vincentian minor seminary, and then I went to the novitiate. Following the novitiate, I was sent to the United States to study, and went to seminaries of the Western Province (at that time, it was known as the Midwest Province). I studied at their college seminary in Perryville, Missouri, and then went onto the Vincentian theologate in Lemont, Illinois.

Even though I was far away from my home, my family, and confreres from the Philippines, I was at peace because of the high quality of community life and good example of confreres in this province. I was ordained on June 5, 1976 in Chicago by Cardinal Cody. In my ordination class were Fathers Dan Borlik, Pat Murphy, and Jim Cormack. At that time, there was much political unrest in the Philippines, so my family was unable to come to the ordination. I went home to the Philippines after ordination, and celebrated my ordination with my family and confreres.

What assignments have you held since ordination? Which had a profound influence on you?

Upon my return to the Philippines after ordination, I was sent to a seminary in Angono, where I served for four years as director of students in both the college and theologate. In 1980, I went to Belgium, where I studied for a doctorate in Theology at the Katholieke Universiteit Lueven (Louvain). I received a PhD Religious Studies (Theology) degree in Systematic Theology. I found the experience of study there to be an excellent one, I recommended it to my confreres, and several did go to Louvain. When I returned to the Philippines, I was assigned to the major seminary in Cebu, where I served as the Rector from 1986 to 1998, after which I was elected the Visitor of the Province of the Philippines.

Being rector was my most important and fruitful assignment because we were able to re-fashion the curriculum and to participate in the Diocesan Synod and the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines in 1991. This was a gathering for the entire Catholic Church in the Philippines. It was an important milestone. The first one had been held in the 1950's, which the CM's helped plan and run. But this one was planned and run by the diocesan clergy and laity. A majority of the people at this Synod were laity, so it was encouraging to see that the seeds planted by our confreres before my time had grown and flourished. A number of bishops at the first Synod were Vincentians, but today Church leadership in the Philippines is truly representative of our people from across the nation. Ultimately, this is a tribute to the work of the confreres before me.

You helped expand the Vincentian Family Office in Rome. Can you describe how this work increased your appreciation of our charism?

I tried to build on the good work started by Father Benjamin Rojo of the Province of Mexico, who founded the Vincentian Family Office under the direction of Father Robert Maloney, then Superior General. I decided to expand by engaging members of the Vincentian Family from Asia and Africa. We developed a great outreach to Africa, Asia, South America, and “new areas” such as the Ukraine, after the Vice-Province of Sts. Cyril and Methodius was founded.

I also focused on developing ties with other religious communities who have appropriated our charism, including the Sisters of Charity in Strasbourg, France, the Sisters of Charity Federation of the USA and Canada, and the Brothers and Sisters of Our Lady Mother of Mercy in Holland. It was an exciting, invigorating six years from 2004-2010. I came to know so many people who were committed to the Vincentian charism and to putting into practice the ways of St. Vincent. The plan at that time was for me to visit annually with Vincentian Family members. I also became spiritual advisor for the international AIC. It was a good experience, as they are a forward-looking, professional organization. Like the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, they are totally committed to our charism.

What led you to undertake your current ministry in South Sudan?

Well, after six years of working with the international Vincentian Family, it seemed like the most logical next step for me, as it is work with the poor in a place where the Catholic Church is resource-poor. It was also attractive to me to work with an inter-congregational group willing to collaborate in assisting the Church in South Sudan. In 2008, I learned the details of a plan to do this; I saw the materials and decided that after my term, I would like to make my contribution to their efforts. The project was founded by the USG (Union of Superiors General – Men) and UISG (Union of International Superiors General – Women), and undertaken in collaboration with the South Sudan Bishops Conference. In 2011, with the blessing of my Visitor and our Superior General, I volunteered and went to South Sudan.

Describe your work in Southern Sudan. What is the status of the Catholic Church there?

The ministry in South Sudan involves training teachers, health care workers (nurses and midwives), and providing programs of ongoing formation for pastoral workers. I am involved specifically in developing

pastoral teams and lay formation. I coordinate the overall pastoral team. Our focus is on capacity-building of diocesan pastoral teams, to provide ongoing formation of priests, religious, and catechists. I am directly mentoring the national pastoral director, a South Sudan priest. We are trying to re-establish pastoral structures for the diocese, and to develop a strategic plan along with developing a funding plan for sustenance.

In a way, this is great time to be in South Sudan, because the Catholic Church has a very high degree of credibility before the government and NGO's (non-governmental organizations). The credibility is there because the Church chose to be an ally of the people for the establishment of an independent nation and a stable government in South Sudan. The Church there is recognized as an organization with a presence and concern for the welfare of all the people of South Sudan.

In South Sudan, 80% of the population is Christian, over half of whom are Roman Catholics. At the same time, the "infrastructure" of the Church is woefully poor, and in some places, it is non-existent. This is the result of ongoing civil war, poverty, and overall instability, all of which has plagued the lives of the people for decades. Being in South Sudan is like starting over from scratch. However, our presence there has encouraged other Congregations to come and help, so I have hope for the future of the Church and its clergy and people of South Sudan.

There are seven dioceses in South Sudan, but only four have residential bishops. The other three dioceses have been run by apostolic administrators for several years. It is not easy to find native clergy for leadership roles because of the past instability in the country. I have been told that Rome is sensitive to the ethnic makeup of various regions and concerned at the lack of available native clergy, so it is a difficult time for the Church in South Sudan. Even its bishops and clergy are not exempt from the post-war trauma that gripped so much of the country. In fact, the workload and demands on their ministry have intensified their own post-traumatic stress.

Can you give a brief overview of how South Sudan came into being as a country?

Sudan has been plagued by civil war on and off since the mid-1950's. Conflicts centered mainly on tribal and religious issues, along with economic issues. The civil war ended in 2005. In 2011, the southern part of Sudan voted for independence, and was recognized the South Sudan by the United Nations and the African Union. The most recent conflict erupted in 2013, with tensions between the President of South Sudan and a former Vice-President whom he had removed. The Presi-

dent said he did so because he feared the deputy was involved in a planned coup. However, as both men are from different tribes and regions, this grew into a national conflict, reigniting ethnic and tribal rivalries and hostilities. There is currently an official cease-fire, but the dispute between the two political leaders is unresolved, and skirmishes continue across South Sudan.

However, the Church has offered to intervene as a peacemaker and is being represented at the negotiations going on in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Can the people of South Sudan live in peace? Yes, but it will take some doing. Tribal conflict is a reality no matter how you look at it, but can the leaders and the people of South Sudan put aside personal, political, and tribal differences for the good of the country? I sure hope so! In addition to these issues, the other major ongoing concern is an economic one. There are conflicts on how both countries (Sudan and South Sudan) will benefit from oil revenues and mineral rights, as the majority of them are in South Sudan.

What is your living and working situation like in South Sudan?

It is a simple lifestyle here. We have four inter-congregational religious communities living and working in South Sudan. I live in Juba, the capital city. Juba is our national headquarters and the 'hospitality house' where most of the pastoral team lives and works. In Juba City, we have a mixed community of six religious men and women. Each day, we gather for prayer and share meals together. We live very simply, as there is not much food to buy! We live as simply as we can in order to show our solidarity with the South Sudanese. Food is expensive, because the South Sudanese do not grow their own vegetables. Like the people, we take whatever we get!

In Juba City, security has not yet been a major problem. We move about freely as of now. But if caught in crossfire, it could be a problem. However, when there is a curfew, we observe it. We are located in the heart of the city, near the airport, but not near military garrisons. While Juba City is a 'big village' of almost a million people, it has only one traffic light, one government hospital, and several colleges, two universities, one of which is Catholic and just opened! As it is the capital, many NGO's have their headquarters there, so that does help the local economy.

We do live with some uncertainty and tension, despite our best efforts. For example, Malakal, a small city in the northeast corner of the country, was closed due to civil unrest, so our personnel working there were transferred. This was necessary after the town was razed to the ground by rebels, and our Institute there was raided. Despite this setback, we moved our personnel to other areas to continue serving the Church in South Sudan. Therefore, the work goes on.

How does the Vincentian charism impact on your work in South Sudan?

I think it has made me appreciate more deeply who I am as a Vincentian, and I realize there are so many good people trying to do what we do as Vincentians and the Family: serve the poor with humility and simplicity. I view this ministry as a continuation of what I did with the Vincentian Family: work with religious and laity in serving the poor. There is a great need to serve the poor and to form priests. As you know, these are the two essential parts of our charism.

Of course, there are poor people everywhere, but there seemed to be so many in South Sudan. There is so much need for bare basic services for people, especially health care and education as the most urgent. The lack of an infrastructure for the Catholic Church here is a great concern. The theologate and college seminaries were in such short supply of teachers and formators that Rome considered closing both, but the Bishops here begged for more time to get faculty and staff in place. Thank goodness, their request was heard for the theologate. The philosophy division was in under individual dioceses, but it is being reorganized, and will reopen in September 2014.

Here we focus on “training the trainers”, preparing teachers, nurses, midwives, pastoral agents and pastoral directors to put the Church in South Sudan on its feet, so it can grow and flourish. We do a great deal of training, and we have graduated several cohorts of teachers, nurses, and health-care workers. We also visit refugee camps to serve the pastoral needs of the people there. Both the government of South Sudan and the NGO’s support us in this endeavor. The biggest needs of the Church in South Sudan can be summarized as seminary professors and formators to educate and form parish priests, lay formation programs, religious to train health care workers and teachers, an infrastructure for diocesan offices, and funds to support all these efforts.

How has your time in South Sudan influenced your ministry as a Vincentian? Do you think it might be feasible in the future for the Congregation to open a mission there?

I think it is a possibility. We need to see what we can do as a Congregation and Vincentian Family to collaborate and expand our charism to South Sudan, which is in great need. I would like to see us assist them. Despite decades of unrest, the Bishops and clergy of South Sudan have been very present and caring to the people. Yet, they too have been traumatized by the violence and civil war. The Bishops started a program (from our pastoral department) on “trauma healing” to help the people and clergy deal with the after-effects of decades of war and civil unrest. The conflicts actually date back as far as the 1950’s, so people feel their effects inter-generationally.

As part of our pastoral duties, we conduct trauma-healing workshops, where we help people understand what has happened, to tell their stories, receive counseling, and engage in certain exercises meant to assist them. It is a carefully developed process, and is constantly monitored and evaluated. We did two workshops in Juba City for religious and clergy who lived through the war and the years of civil unrest. Overall, the reaction has been positive. We sometimes do a trauma-healing workshop as part of a retreat, which has also worked well.

How much longer will I serve in South Sudan? I guess as long as I am needed, or as long as my health will allow. It's a tropical climate without too much humidity. But I firmly believe this is where the Church and the Congregation have called me to be right now.

Our theme for this issue is the relationship between our charism and Evangelii Gaudium. From your experience at South Sudan, do you have any thoughts you would like to share?

Yes, I do. A couple of ideas that struck me as I reflected on the challenges posed to us in the Vincentian Family by *Evangelii Gaudium*. I'll begin with a couple of quotes as my reference.

"Solidarity is a spontaneous reaction by those who recognize that the social function of property and the universal destination of goods are realities which come before private property. The private ownership of goods is justified by the need to protect and increase them, to better serve the common good; thus, solidarity must be lived as the decision to restore to the poor what belongs to them. These convictions and habits of solidarity, when they are put into practice, open the way to other structural transformations and make them possible" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 189).

I am happy that Pope Francis devoted two sections in the exhortation specifically to the issue of "solidarity" (EG, 188-189). I live now in the Juba community of our group. The theme of this inter-congregational mission, as articulated by the UISG, our founding organization, is "Solidarity with South Sudan". It is our expressed intention to help build the capacity of pastoral workers in the dioceses of South Sudan. But it is by no means simply a matter of the "have's" doing something for the "have-not's". We see it more as being with the people, especially the poor, in their day-to-day existence, in their joys and difficulties, and in the conflict and insecurity that they presently experience. We see it also as working and sharing closely with other congregations working for the poor, with the Bishops and the clergy of the dioceses, as well as NGO's and other government organizations who are concerned with the poor. And we trust that as we do this, we are proclaiming the reign of God in our midst.

"For the Church, the option for the poor is primarily a theological category rather than a cultural, sociological, political or philosophical

one... This is why I want a Church which is poor and for the poor. They have much to teach us... We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them. We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them" (EG, 198).

This is another section in the apostolic exhortation that strikes a chord with me. We in the Vincentian Family have often re-echoed what St. Vincent reminded us: we need to allow ourselves to be evangelized by the poor. But what this means cannot be revealed by discursive meditation. Rather it is by patient and faithful contemplation that we begin to appreciate why God chose to be born in our world as a poor person.

Living in poverty gives us an opportunity to experience the depth of God's love for us, the "mysterious wisdom" that has a room for everyone in need. If we are to know what God wants us to do with the poor, we need to go back to our life with the poor. There, the poor will point us to what God wants. Exactly what Vincent experienced! The inspiration for me *Evangelii Gaudium* is this line: "*That is why I want a Church which is poor and for the poor*". Amen! Alleluia!

THEME:

Vincentian Bishops Reflect on “Evangelii Gaudium”

The Social Dimension of Evangelization



Bishop Vicente Bokalic Iglic, C.M.

Diocese of Santiago del Estero – Argentina

1. The Synodal Document

After each Synod, the Holy Father has published an Apostolic Exhortation. Such was the case with *Evangelii Gaudium* (“The Joy of the Gospel”) which will be referenced as “EG” throughout this article. The document that Pope Francis published on November 24, 2013 was developed as a result of the conclusions of the XII Ordinary Synod (October 7-28, 2012) that had as its theme, “The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith”. The Pope took advantage of the situation to elaborate the conclusions of the Synod on Evangelization, and he used this opportunity to present a program of pastoral action. We might even dare to say that he presented “Francis’ Program”, for his pontificate and for the Church throughout the world.

He did this in “Francis’ style”: highly motivational, lively, and bold, although the text itself is quite dense. The document is written in a colloquial manner: as we read *Evangelii Gaudium*, we feel we are listening to a message of Pope Francis. His writing style, which is welcomed by the ordinary people who view the Pope as close to them as he speaks, is little appreciated by certain more learned ecclesiastical sectors.

2. Key insights of EG

For the Pope, the “great danger in today’s world, pervaded as it is by consumerism, is the desolation and anguish born of a complacent yet covetous heart, the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience. Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in

its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor. God's voice is no longer heard, the quiet joy of his love is no longer felt, and the desire to do good fades" (2).

In light of this great danger, Francis proposes that the world participate in an experience like the one that he himself had, namely, to experience divine mercy, the source of true joy and offers people the possibility of a life of wholeness and meaning. Christ, the God who became man, came to bring salvation to all men and women, came to bring people news – the gospel – the good news which results in joy (the title of the Apostolic Exhortation reminds us of that reality).

Therefore, the Pope proposes that the Catholic Church engage in a profound and formidable transformation that makes her a missionary church, that is, a church that goes out to encounter those who do not know or do not accept Christ's message. It is meant to be a church that goes out in a special way to encounter the poor to minister with them and to learn from them.

Thus, the Pope highlights two distinct realities which the church must confront. On the one hand is an internal element which involves those Christian men and women who have lost or have not known the joy of the Gospel. On the other hand is an external element that involves a world that is dedicated to consumerism and individualism. Yet despite the excess of material goods that many people may possess, such a world cannot give meaning to human life.

3. The structure of the document

The document begins with an Introduction, although not labeled as such, but rather with the name of the document: the Joy of the Gospel (1-9). The first chapter (20-49) is a proposal with regard to the Church's reform, a proposal to make the church an authentic missionary Church.

The second chapter (50-109) undertakes a profound and all-encompassing analysis of the present world, especially its message of consumerism and materialism that creates a selfishness, which in turn blinds people to the needs of their brothers and sisters.

The third chapter (110-175) refers to the proclamation of the gospel and is an exhortation to avoid every form of elitism. All the baptized are called to transform themselves into active and not merely passive subjects. More specifically, there is a recognition of the need for the poor to become active subjects in the Church and therefore, not simply the object of attention from other church members.

The fourth chapter (176-258) highlights the social dimension of the proclamation of the Gospel and speaks energetically about the option for the poor and their social inclusion in society and in the Church. This theme will be developed more later in this essay. The fifth chapter (259-288) develops the theme of spirituality and mysticism of the evangelizer, the missionary disciple.

4. The social dimension of evangelization

4.1. *Foundation of the social dimension and the social teaching of the Church*

In chapter four of the Apostolic Exhortation, Pope Francis establishes a foundation for the social dimension of the gospel and the process of evangelization. In this section, we find statements concerning those realities, which the Church must be clear about and often, is quite unclear about. Institutions such as **Caritas** and the **Department of Social Justice Ministry** should not have to exist in a parish or a diocese, because all baptized men and women, with a clear understanding of the Gospel's social dimension, ought to be Caritas or ministers concerned about social justice. (However, those institutions ought to coordinate the diverse activities of the laity).

“To evangelize is to make the Kingdom of God present in our world” (EG, 176). The proposal about the Kingdom of God implies that people love God so God might reign in the world: “To the extent that he reigns within us, the life of society will be a setting for universal fraternity, justice, peace and dignity. Both Christian preaching and life, then, are meant to have an impact on society. We are seeking God’s kingdom” (EG, 180).

We should read paragraph 178 in a reflective manner, in order to understand the faith, which we profess, implies a profound conversion in living the social dimension of the gospel. All this, as the Pope states, arises from several scriptural texts in paragraph 179. Why is there a need to explain the relationship between the Gospel and its social dimension? Because “the message is one which we often take for granted, and one that we can repeat almost mechanically, without necessarily ensuring that it has a real effect on our lives and in our communities. How dangerous and harmful this is, for it makes us lose our amazement, our excitement and our zeal for living the Gospel of fraternity and justice! God’s word teaches that our brothers and sisters are the prolongation of the incarnation for each of us” (EG, 179).

Then, utilizing texts from the gospel of Matthew and Luke, Francis states that those passages express the absolute priority of going forth from ourselves towards our brothers and sisters as one of the two great commandments which ground every moral norm and as the clearest sign for discerning spiritual growth in response to God’s completely free gift. For this reason, “the service of charity is also a constituent element of the Church’s mission and an indispensable expression of her very being. By her very nature the Church is missionary; she abounds in effective charity and a compassion which understands, assists and promotes” (EG, 179).

Just as the clear social message of the gospel has no real impact on the life of many Christian men and women, so also the church’s social

teaching remains as a body of generalities that does not lead people to ask questions. Pope Francis states “the Church’s pastors, taking into account the contributions of the different sciences, have the right to offer opinions on all that affects people’s lives, since the task of evangelization implies and demands the integral promotion of each human being” (EG, 182).

Nevertheless, in a simple and humble manner *Evangelii Gaudium* reminds us that neither the Pope nor the Church has a monopoly on the truth or on solutions to the urgent problems of today’s world. In fact, political institutions bear a responsibility to concretize the just order of things. At the same time, the Church must continue to contribute to the struggle for justice. Therefore, it is recommended that we read and study the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. Pope Francis reminds us of the admirable words of Paul VI in *Octogesima Adveniens*, where he stated that “Christian communities, together with pastors, are the co-authors of the Church’s social doctrine” (OA, 4).

4.2. The social inclusion of the poor

With regard to the social dimension of evangelization, Pope Francis addresses two matters. The first is related to the poor and their inclusion in society, a theme that flows from “our faith in Christ, who became poor and was always close to the poor and the outcasts” (EG, 186). The Pope expresses with conviction and clarity that “each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully a part of society” (EG, 187). When this reality is not understood and people do not listen to the cries of the poor, then “we oppose the Father’s will and his plan... and the lack of solidarity will directly affect our relationship with God” (EG, 187). The text is blunt and forceful, and Francis emphasizes that this is not a task reserved for just some of Jesus’ disciples. Furthermore, we must not only care for those who are hungry and naked, but also work to eliminate the structural causes of poverty and to promote the integral development of the poor (an exhortation that was also made by Paul VI in his encyclical, *Populorum Progressio*).

For the Pope, it is incomprehensible that there are people who live with less dignity as a result of being born in a place with fewer resources. Furthermore, Pope Francis is scandalized by the reality of hunger, especially in light of the fact that there is enough food to feed everyone: “Hunger is the result of a poor distribution of goods and income. The problem is made worse by the generalized practice of wastefulness” (EG, 191).

The challenge is not simply to alleviate hunger and misery. The Pope wants all people to experience prosperity. As Pope St. John XXIII stated

in *Mater et Magistra*, we must be concerned about the “temporal welfare and prosperity of all humankind” (MM, 3). Therefore, “this means education, access to health care, and above all employment, for it is through free, creative, participatory and mutually supportive labor that human beings express and enhance the dignity of their lives. A just wage enables them to have adequate access to all the other goods which are destined for our common use” (MM, 192).

Once again, using Scripture, Pope Francis points out that his ideas are part of the doctrine that arises from the Old Testament and are deepened in the New Testament and the writings of the Church Fathers, that is, the manuscripts of theologians and writers from the first to the eighth century. This is seen when synthesizing the second chapter, when Francis states that his emphasis is new but his doctrine is not. In light of the content of the Apostolic Exhortation, “this message is so clear and direct, so simple and eloquent, that no ecclesial interpretation has the right to relativize it” (EG, 194). The Pope returns to confront those within the Church who seek, through every form of argument, (including theological ones), for some way to escape from their social responsibilities that arise from the Gospel. He states it simply, but directly: “Why complicate something so simple?” (EG, 194).

The option for the poor, as a concrete proposal, was emphasized in the Latin American Church. The documents of Medellín (1968) did not use that phrase but the concept is clearly expressed there. Years later, during the Third General Conference of Latin American Bishops in Puebla (1979), there was a clear expression of the preferential option for the poor. Several years would pass before John Paul II would use that phrase in his encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987). There it was pointed out (with an expression also used in *Evangelii Gaudium*) that the option for the poor is understood as a “special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity, to which the whole tradition of the Church bears witness” (EG, 198). Francis is forceful when he states that this option is primarily a theological category, rather than a cultural, sociological, political or philosophical one (EG, 198).

In light of this option, the Pope repeats a phrase that had a powerful impact on people in the first days of his pontificate, when at an audience with news reporters he said that he wanted “a Church which is poor and which is for the poor”. He repeated that phrase and then went on to say: “They have much to teach us. Not only do they share in the *sensus fidei*, but in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them. The new evangelization is an invitation to acknowledge the saving power at work in their lives and to put them at the centre of the Church’s pilgrim way. We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the

mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them" (EG, 198).

The Pope points out the far-reaching consequences of this option for the poor. Therefore, it is necessary that the Church's ministers (especially those involved in social justice) make a profound examination of conscience. It is relatively easy to obtain food, clothing, and medicine and to bring such supplies to those in need. (It is true some might find this difficult to do). But to integrate the poor into the everyday tasks of the Church, and with their culture and way of living out their faith and then, to allow them to evangelize us... is that possible? Is today's Church capable of something like that? In various places, priests, religious and laity have drawn closer to those who are poor, and those poor men and women have become protagonists in the process of evangelization. Nevertheless, is this also possible on the parish or diocesan level and on the level of the various lay movements? Pope Francis says that "Our commitment does not consist exclusively in activities or programs of promotion and assistance; what the Holy Spirit mobilizes is not an unruly activism, but above all an attentiveness which considers the other in a certain sense as one with ourselves" (EG, 199).

Only with this full integration of the poor into our ecclesial life will it be possible (as John Paul II requested in *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, #50) to insure that "*in every Christian community the poor feel at home*" (NMU, 199). We must also remember that according to Pope Francis, the worse discrimination that the poor experience is not social, but rather the lack of spiritual care. Therefore, "*our preferential option for the poor must mainly translate into a privileged and preferential religious care*" (EG, 200).

This section concludes with a reflection that no one should distance themselves from the poor because they have to take care of other distinct matters: "None of us can think we are exempt from concern for the poor and for social justice" (EG, 201). Even though the Pope, with his keen sense of reality, realizes his words can remain as simply another commentary on evangelization with little practical effect, he nevertheless trusts in the openness and willingness of Christians. He also them to seek concrete ways to put these proposals into practice.

4.3. Concern for the vulnerable

The objective in this next section is to point out a series of urgent tasks that society and the Church must carry out with regard to "the least among us", those with whom Christ identified in a special manner. "We are called to care for the vulnerable of the earth. But the current model, with its emphasis on success and self-reliance, does not appear

to favor an investment in efforts to help the slow, the weak or the less talented to find opportunities in life” (EG, 209).

The list of the marginalized is a long, seemingly endless one: the homeless, addicts, refugees, indigenous peoples, the elderly, migrants, women who are mistreated and excluded from society, as well as the unborn. Others may be also added to the list. Once again, we hear the prophetic cry of the Pope from Latin America: “I have always been distressed at the lot of those who are victims of various kinds of human trafficking. How I wish that all of us would hear God’s cry: ‘Where is your brother?’ (Genesis 4:9). Where is your brother or sister who is enslaved? Where is the brother and sister whom you are killing each day in clandestine warehouses, in rings of prostitution, in children used for begging, in exploiting undocumented labor?” (EG, 211).

All these vulnerable situations are part of our reality as members of society. Therefore, they ought to lead us to question ourselves. The Pope requests we put aside our hypocrisy, and even though he does not use those exact words, he expresses that reality in a more eloquent manner: “*Let us not look the other way*” (EG, 211). He demands that we put our words into action.

Throughout 2014, Pope Francis had denounced corruption, including the Mafia, realities that promote the abuse of men and women. The Pope made these denunciations at places in Italy where those forces have a powerful influence, and often go unpunished. It is not easy to struggle against the Mafia and other examples of corruption, but such a struggle must be undertaken because God continues to ask us the same question placed before Cain: “*Where is your brother? Let us not look the other way. There is greater complicity than we think. The issue involves everyone! This infamous network of crime is now well established in our cities, and many people have blood on their hands as a result of their comfortable and silent complicity*” (EG, 211).

On various occasions – and in this document – the Pope cautions us about focusing all our attention on certain specific themes, such as abortion, bio-ethics, gay marriage, etc. He is not saying that these matters are no long part of the Church’s agenda, but he does not want those matters to be the only points on our agenda, as occurs in certain ecclesial sectors and movements. Finally, among the vulnerable and defenseless individuals, *Evangelii Gaudium* reminds us about creation, and the responsibility of men and women as its custodians. The Pope also places before us the person of Francis of Assisi, the saint of peace and brotherhood and sisterhood, the saint of the oneness of all creation, the saint whose name the Pope took at the time of his election. Pope Francis places this saint before us as the model of our guardianship (EG, 115, 116).

5. Vincentian echoes in the Apostolic Exhortation

Here I will highlight some aspects relating to the fourth chapter. The inclusion of the poor and care for the vulnerable members of society is themes here closely related to our Vincentian charism and the on-going and necessary process to achieve our charism! Vincent placed the poor at the center of his message, his activity, and the program that he passed on to the members of the Congregation of the Mission, the Daughters of Charity, and the Confraternities of Charity. That was Vincent's spiritual experience, one that he shared with the Vincentian Family and with the Church of his era. When we listen to the phrase, *preferential option for the poor* (a constant in the Latin American Church and a reality that is reaffirmed in the life and the teaching of Pope Francis), we begin to recall Vincent's words, teachings, and ministry.

The centrality of the poor in the experience of faith is a *leitmotiv* in Vincentian spirituality. It is true that here, there was an evolution in Vincent's thinking as well as that of the Church: from serving and caring for and providing for the needs of those who are poor, we moved to a vision to give the poor an active role in the process of evangelization. The poor are no longer simply the object of our assistance and care, but they are the subject of their own human promotion and that of their brothers and sisters. There has been a movement away from a passive attitude toward an active attitude in which the poor become protagonists in this whole process. Vincent had similar insights in this regard, for example, when he sought the human promotion of poor people so that they themselves would be able to better appreciate their own worth as human beings.

There is a beautiful phrase in the exhortation: "*To draw closer to the poor, to become their friend, to lend our voice to their cause*"; in other words, we should not look at the poor from afar. This means we become involved in the life of the poor and we allow the poor to evangelize us, and to so with their faith, culture, their understanding of life, and their experience of divine providence and hope. We allow them to evangelize us in their ability to celebrate, even in the midst of poverty and marginalization. Becoming a friend to the poor is a value that should make us raise questions and examine the way in which we live our life: who are our friends? Do we allow the poor to teach us? The poor can teach us: the closer we are to the poor, the more meaningful Vincent's words become, that namely, "*love is inventive unto infinity*".

There are times when we feel powerless and overwhelmed by so much misery and suffering that surrounds us. There are time when our ecclesial communities experience desert moments, monotony, lack of joy; and yet, if we draw closer to the poor in those moments, our missionary spirit and fervor will be renewed. If we become that church

that goes out to encounter the poor, we will breathe in new air and experience new graces that will enable us to continue to renew the Church. It is also true that as we become the church that goes out to encounter the poor, we move out beyond our comfort zone. As we do this repeatedly, we will discover that those encounters with the poor will change our appearance and give us a new vitality.

The poor are the sacrament of Christ. Our option for the poor is rooted in our faith; it is not something 'extra', but rather an essential element of our faith. We could say this is not an option, but a command of Jesus, namely, that we do what Jesus did and teach what he taught. Every brother and sister, every community ought to ask themselves what they are doing for the poor and with the poor. As Vincentians, we cannot avoid such a question. We cannot live our life on the level of beautiful ideas, insightful reflections, and good intentions. A concrete real commitment with the poor is the authentic sign of our faith and of fidelity in following Jesus.

In both our personal and community plans, we are encouraged to move from ideas to action, from affective love to effective love. Such is the personal and pastoral conversion of which Pope Francis refers. Together as a Vincentian Family, we are exhorted to seek out and engage in concrete projects and plans to draw us closer to those who are poor. This means that we must become involved in the life of the poor and allow the poor to interrupt our calmness and security. We are challenged to make this vocation of love manifested in simple, humble, and effective service, to make this vocation a reality that is attractive to others.

In the Diocese of Santiago del Estero, one of the poorest areas in Argentina, as a diocesan church (priests, religious, lay leaders), we are on a path of pastoral conversion. We have developed some concrete plans in the area of addiction. Drugs have become very accessible to the poorest sectors of society and are wreaking havoc. Now with competent individuals and volunteers, we are becoming involved in projects that promote drug prevention and rehabilitation to integrate the recovering addicts back into society. We still have much to do. Yes, there are times we feel as though we are putting out this fast-spreading fire with just a bucket of water. But this reality of drug abuse is a pervasive form of poverty that has touched every home and has made us question our ministry.

The Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis provides us with greater motivation to live out our Vincentian charism. We should feel truly motivated at the present time. As we read and re-read the exhortation, let us discover in the background of that document the life, the spirit and the ministry of Saint Vincent de Paul.

The Social Dimension of Evangelization



Bishop Georges Bou Jaoudé, CM
Maronite Archbishop of Tripoli – Lebanon

Pope Francis presents us with a powerful and compact summary of the Social Doctrine of the Church in the fourth chapter of his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*. In this section, he states, “To evangelize is to make present to the world the Kingdom of God. I would like to share my concerns about the social dimension of evangelization, precisely because if this dimension is not properly brought out, there is a constant risk of distorting the authentic and integral meaning of the mission of evangelization” (EG, 176).

The Holy Father proposes that the *kerygma* “has a clear social content. At the very heart of the Gospel is life in community and engagement with others. The content of the first proclamation has an immediate moral implication, centered on charity” (EG, 177). That social content of the *kerygma* finds its basis in Scripture, particularly Chapter 25 of Matthew’s Gospel in the parable of the Last Judgment. There, Jesus identified himself with the poor, the sick, the hungry, and prisoners – in short, all who are marginalized – to declare that what is done to them is also done to him (Mt. 25:40).

During Jesus’ public life, people wondered how and why He spoke with such authority. It was a question that even John the Baptist asked, as he sent his disciples to ask Jesus, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?” (Mt. 11:3). Jesus answer was direct and affirmative, based on signs and wonders that had a social context: “Jesus replied, ‘Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor’” (Mt. 11:4-5).

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis emphasizes the intrinsic relationship between social action and evangelization. He affirms that religious belief is not meant to be relegated to one’s private life. True faith and religious belief must make a credible communal witness

both in one's personal and interpersonal life. "The Church cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice. All Christians, pastors included, are called to show concern for the building of a better world" (EG, 183). In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis refers to the rich treasure of past encyclicals and other writings of previous pontiffs that shaped the Social Doctrine of the Church as we know it today. From the seminal work *Rerum Novarum* of Pope Leo XIII to the recent *Caritas in Veritate* of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, we see that there is no social issue of the human community not been examined by these papal documents.

The Holy Father is quick to point out the Social Doctrine of the Church is not just based on the teachings of the popes of the last 125 years. It has its roots in the Word of God, in both the Old and New Testaments. The Sacred Scriptures tell stories of salvation and God's constant attempt to break humanity out of the cycle of selfishness and sin. The Bible, along with the writings of the early Church Fathers, shaped the Catholic worldview that care for the poor and the "least among us" is a command of Christ we must readily observe, both as individuals and as a faith community.

In Scripture, Jesus showed us that the poor were always his priority, whether they came to him as grieving widows, lepers, orphaned children, strangers, or others who were living on the margins. He travelled the length and breadth of towns and villages, calling people to conversion and reconciliation with God and one another. Jesus taught them to live a just life based on the moral principles of the Kingdom of God, and to do so with charity and care for their vital needs. Whether by preaching, teaching, healing, or simply caring for their basic needs, Jesus was deeply concerned with "the least among us". Indeed, the "work of Jesus" while on earth is best seen in the parable of the Last Judgment in Matthew's Gospel, summarized in verse 25:40: "Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least of mine, you did for me".

St. Paul, writing to the Philippians, echoes Jesus' all-encompassing gift of himself in the Incarnation: "Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, and born in human likeness; and thus he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:6-8).

The Holy Father mentions many subject areas regarding the social aim of Jesus. I will focus on three:

- The social integration of the poor;
- The common good and the social peace;
- The social dialogue as a contribution for peace.

1. The Social Integration of the Poor

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis writes that, “The task of evangelization implies and demands the integral promotion of each human being. It is no longer possible to claim that religion should be restricted to the private sphere and that it exists only to prepare souls for heaven. We know that God wants his children to be happy in this world too, even though they are called to fulfillment in eternity, for he has created all things for our enjoyment and that of everyone” (EG, 182). Thus, the follower of Christ cannot fail to hear the cry of his brother or sister in need. The Pope also adds, “Who would claim to lock up in a church and silence the message of Saint Francis of Assisi or Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta? They would have found this unacceptable. An authentic faith... always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth a better place than we found it” (EG, 182).

I note here my need to add the example of our Holy Founder, Saint Vincent de Paul and his preferred love for the poor to the sentiments expressed by the Holy Father. Indeed, regarding the section on the social dimension of the Gospel in the apostolic exhortation, I would like to have seen St. Vincent quoted, as the Church has bestowed on him the title “Father of the Poor”. As you know, Vincent often told his confreres that Jesus Christ is the first evangelizer of the poor, and said that he would never be content to love God if his brother or sister did not also know and love God.

According to the Holy Father, the Church is “By her very nature, the Church is missionary; she abounds in effective charity and a compassion which understands, assists and promotes” (EG, 179). Is not that what St. Vincent meant by saying that our charity must become affective and effective? As the Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) teaches us, God’s love for the poor (and St. Vincent’s preference for service to the poor) was not limited to individuals only, but for justice and the human rights of the individual, and the community of peoples (CCC, 157).

Pope Francis poignantly observes that issues regarding human rights are often distorted to justify an inordinate defense of individual rights or those of the wealthy. With respect to the autonomy and culture of all nations, we must never forget that our planet belongs to humanity, and is meant to be shared for the good of all people. That some people are born in places with fewer resources and less development does not justify their having to live with less dignity. To resolve this grave situation, Pope Francis believes “the more fortunate should renounce some of their rights so as to place their goods more generously at the service of others” (EG, 190).

In this way, the Holy Father is without a doubt referring to the experience of the ‘new global society’ where a small group of countries,

(also known as the G-8 or G-9) winds up with the biggest part of world resources. Here, Pope Francis reminds us of the consistent of the teaching of the Church, specifically, the Second Vatican Council. In *Gaudium et Spes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church and the Modern World, it states “God has destined the earth and all that is in it to the use of all men and all peoples, so that all the good of creation must benefit to all men equally, according to the rules of justice, inseparable from charity” (GS, 69). In fact, according to the Compendium, “in the first chapter of Genesis (1:28-29), we see God has given the earth to humankind to make the living of all in it, excluding no one, nor offering a special privilege to anyone” (CCC, 171).

Unfortunately, the principle of social teaching of the Church is not taken into consideration in today’s society, nor in many countries across the world. It is mostly the opposite that occurs, as seen in the fact that a majority of people living in the developing world will suffer and die because of the scandal of hunger. When we see the reality the poor face, listen to their cries, and learn of their suffering, we are shocked by the fact that that there is actually enough food for all. Hunger is due to an uneven and unjust distribution of goods and services. This becomes even worse when we see the actual amounts of waste generated by first world countries (EG, 191).

2. The common good and the social peace

As for the preferential option for the poor and their social integration, Pope Francis speaks about the common good and the status quo, often disguised as a type of ‘social peace’. He declares, “True peace does not act as a pretext for justifying a social structure which silences or appeases the poor, so that the more affluent can placidly support their lifestyle, while others have to make do as they can. Demands involving the distribution of wealth, concern for the poor and human rights cannot be suppressed under the guise of creating a consensus on paper or a transient peace for a contented minority. The dignity of the human person and their common good rank higher than the comfort of those who refuse to renounce their privileges. When these values are threatened, a prophetic voice must be raised” (EG, 218).

3. The social dialogue as contribution for peace

In this era of a globalized world, where we live, it has become a “small village” (according to a phrase used by Pope St. John Paul II), In this Middle Eastern area of Lebanon, comprised of Arabs, Muslims, and Christians where I exercise my ministry as a Vincentian Bishop, we are experiencing a serious crisis. As fanatical groups and other foreign movements spread their power, an important dialogue has

become a necessity and an emergency so that the Christian community can remain in regions where they have lived since the beginning of the Christian era. Fortunately, the majority of Muslims do not follow that flow of fanaticism. Many among them suffer similarly. That fact is of primary importance, and we are called to collaborate with them in a dialogue to mutually enrich our lives and stop the fanatics.

Pope Francis invites and encourages us to engage in this type of dialogue. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, he underlines the significance of inter-religious dialogue, which must be entered into with an attitude of sincere openness and in love. He observes that the teachings of Jesus (as seen in the Gospels) promote such a dialogue, which can be of mutual benefit to Christians and Muslims, while avoiding a type of syncretism that can lead to totalitarianism' (EG, 253). True openness, says the Holy Father, requires each to remain firm in its own religious convictions. He observes that our relationship with the Muslim faithful is a most important priority in this modern era (EG, 253).

In fact, Muslims are today present in numerous countries of Christian tradition where they can freely celebrate their rituals. Unfortunately, it is not the same in some Muslim countries, where Christians cannot celebrate their rituals and are unable to give public witness to their Christian identity and symbols. That is our role and mission: to work together with religious, civil and political authorities, so Christians may freely practice their religion and to remove all religious interdictions. To achieve that objective, we are planning special meetings and encounters in the Archdiocese of Tripoli-Lebanon. This is an important objective to pursue, because religious freedom is considered a fundamental human right, which includes the freedom to choose one's faith and to practice publicly that faith.

Pope Francis agrees with this fundamental freedom to "choose a religion one judges to be true and to manifest one's beliefs in public" (EG, 203). The Holy Father notes that "a healthy pluralism, one which genuinely respects differences and values them as such, does not entail privatizing religions in an attempt to reduce them to the quiet obscurity of the individual's conscience or to relegate them to the enclosed precincts of churches, synagogues or mosques" (EG, 255).

4. Conclusion

Much of the fourth chapter of *Evangelii Gaudium* serves as a small compendium of the social teaching of the Church, and is worthy of our consideration. The three themes discussed affirm that the Church is present to the challenges her members face, and that Evangelization must always have a social dimension. As the opening paragraph of *Gaudium et Spes* so beautifully states:

“The joys and the hopes, the grief and the anxieties of this age, especially the poor or in any way afflicted; these are the joys and hopes, the grief and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of men. United in Christ and led by the Holy Spirit in their journey to the Kingdom of their Father, they welcomed the news of salvation meant for every man. That is why this community realizes that it is truly linked with mankind and its history” (GS, 1).

Translated from French by PROSPER MOLENJI, C.M.

Meditation on “Evangelii Gaudium”



Bishop Jorge García Isaza, C.M.

Bishop-Emeritus, Diocese of Tierradentro – Colombia

There is no doubt that *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Apostolic Exhortation of the Holy Father, published at the conclusion of the Year of Faith, should lead the whole Church, but especially the Vincentian Family, to a state of permanent reflection on our personal behavior and our activities together. This reflection should be done in light of the doctrine presented in this document.

The Holy Father begins the fourth chapter of his message with the words: “*The kerygma has a clear social content: at the very heart of the gospel is life in community and engagement with others*” (EG, 177). Those words lead me to reflect on our beloved Vincentian Family and on our poor brothers and sisters to whom the Lord sends us.

The awareness of the fact that Jesus leads us to discover the other as our brother and sister should also lead us to experience the reality that the Teacher has “captivated” us. We in turn, as disciples of Christ, must also come to experience in the depth of our being the reality that our brothers and sisters have “captivated” us. I believe that this is a process, which we must engage in with tenacity and humility and much prayer. One does not suddenly come to such an awareness, rather such an awareness is the result of the dynamics of faith in Jesus Christ.

I also believe that coming to this awareness has two dimensions: the first dimension is related to those to whom God has joined us as a result of our charismatic vocation as members of the Vincentian Family. This is the foundation of our life together as a family and is the absolute condition for the effectiveness of the mission because as Jesus said: “*This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another*” (Jn. 13:35).

The second dimension refers to those to whom the Lord sends us and with whom we ought to establish a special bond. We are not

"the benefactors" and they are not "the beneficiaries"; we are not the ones "who have" and they are not the ones "who have not". They and we are brothers and sisters and therefore we have to make the effort so that they experience us as such. The Holy Father states: "*How dangerous harmful this is, for it makes us lose our amazement, our excitement and our zeal for living the gospel of fraternity and justice*" (EG, 179).

This leads me to believe that our life together as members of the Vincentian Family must be carefully cultivated. It is not enough to say repeatedly that we are brothers and sisters. We have to express that same reality in our actions. It is not enough to be proud of belonging to a worldwide family, but we must also accept the responsibility of being a brother or sister to others. Vincent de Paul expressed this reality in the Rule that he gave to the Missionaries: "*Love, like that between brothers, should always be present among us, as well as the bond of holiness, and these should be safeguarded in every possible way*" (Common Rules VIII: 2).

In this era of communication, people gather in large cities where organizations and services have been established to provide for their well-being. Yet at the same time, in these same cities, we also discover a most disconcerting paradox: each day these men and women live in greater isolation. Families live together under the same roof, but when one member has to communicate with another member, they do not speak face to face, but will telephone, text, or send an e-mail.

I believe that the various branches of our Vincentian Family have to question themselves, because without even being aware of it we can begin to live our life in an individualistic manner. We can become like those families that have relatives, but never take the time to get to know them. "May the Holy Spirit who possesses infinite love that is proper to a divine person" (POPE JOHN PAUL II, General Audience, April 24, 1991) help us to find those paths that will enable our life together as a family to become that prophetic sign of which Jesus speaks: "I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me" (John 17:22).

Everything the Holy Father stated in his Apostolic Exhortation has made me think that today, like yesterday and tomorrow, we have to learn to live the fine print of the Gospel message. Our love of God can only be expressed by our love for our brothers and sisters. We will never achieve success in our mission on behalf of the poor unless we learn how to live together as a community of brothers and sisters, as a family. Therefore, I believe members of the Congregation of the Mission, Daughters of Charity, and each branch of the Vincentian Family should reflect on this reality. Such reflection must become an everyday

task that enables us to know one another, to understand one another, to help one another and to love one another.

Ministry on behalf of the poor and the activities that this ministry demands of us can become a pretext to isolate ourselves from the Community and the Family. It can become “an escapism” that numbs our conscience to the reality that we are all aware of, namely, that the sign of an authentic disciple of Jesus is love.

The Holy Father, however, not only invites us to reflect but also invites us “to share” the processes by which we serve the poor. Therefore, we need to be convinced that the works we do are not “our works” but rather the works of God, and that the paths that we travel are the paths of God. The best way to become convinced of that is to allow the Holy Spirit to work through the community. Thus, the best way to guarantee success to our ministry is in sharing with other members and branches of the Family, seeking their enlightenment, and affirming their initiatives. How many times in the history of the Vincentian Family has a work failed because others did not esteem the person who initiated the work or others envied such an initiative.

The Holy Father presents another element to us when he states, “Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor” (EG, 187). In the development of his presentation, the Pope highlights the doctrine of solidarity. Although he tells us that the word has become “worn out”, he nevertheless speaks about “participation” and focuses his thoughts on the unequal distribution of the material goods of this world and the cries of the numerous poor people who have nothing, alongside the small minority of rich people who seem to have everything.

Reflecting on the concept of solidarity and participation as related to both the small and the large projects undertaken by the members of the Vincentian Family throughout the world, it seems to me that while we often say that such projects reveal our option on behalf of those who are poor, perhaps we need to take time to listen to what the beneficiaries of these projects think, to allow them to explain to us the criteria they use in making judgments. Perhaps we need to allow the beneficiaries to teach us. As Pope Francis tells us, “We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them... we are called to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them” (EG, 198).

How many times, with the best intentions, have we interpreted events and decided what we believe the poor need, want, or hope for? How many times have we done their thinking and then formulated pastoral plans according to our way of thinking? Yet, perhaps the anguish and the needs of the poor were quite different. In our ministry, the poor have to feel at home and feel that they are free to offer their

opinion. As Pope Francis states, “Only based on this real and sincere closeness can we properly accompany the poor on their path of liberation. Only this will ensure that in every Christian community the poor feel at home” (EG, 199).

To evangelize is to make the Kingdom of God present in our world: this is our task. The Gospel and the Kingdom of God are the same. Jesus has told us: “You always have the poor with you” (Jn. 12:8). But in today’s changing world, the poor are distinct from those of Jesus’ time, and even from the time of Vincent de Paul. Nevertheless, the vocation of the Vincentian Family continues to be one of service on behalf of those who are poor. Therefore, we need to understand the situation of the poor, we need to allow the poor to teach us, and we need to allow the poor to speak for themselves. Indeed, we need to present the poor with the reality of God’s kingdom, one that is grounded on love. In this way, after the poor have been evangelized, they, in turn, will become evangelizers.

Translated from Spanish by CHARLES T. PLOCK, C.M.

The “Francis Effect”: One Bishop’s Impression



Most Reverend David M. O’Connell, C.M., J.C.D., D.D.

Bishop of Trenton – New Jersey – USA

It has been said of recent Popes in the Roman Catholic Church that “John Paul II told us *what* to do; Benedict XVI told us *why* we should do it; Francis is telling us to *‘Do it’* (Bishop Blaise Cupich, “Response to Cardinal Rodriguez at The Catholic University of America”, June 3, 2014)”. While that is an interesting and succinct “sound-bite” it is very difficult to give “Cliff Notes” for the past 36 years of papal history with precision, especially since the papacy of Pope Francis is so recent and is currently unfolding. There is a danger, precipitated by the media, in taking any Pope’s words at face value or divorcing them from his larger message without doing a disservice to the man’s thought. While that is certainly true of the various types of message delivered by any Pope, it is more of a temptation when a Pope goes “off script” or makes brief remarks at a press conference or informal social setting that then flash across the internet without context or nuance.

Such has been the case with Pope Francis since his election to the papacy on March 13, 2013. His predecessors, Pope St. John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI, did not give press conferences and rarely went “off script”. They were deep thinkers, one a philosopher and the other a theologian, who carefully crafted their ideas into sermons, speeches or writings that required equally deep analysis and study. Pope Francis, however, while equally profound in my opinion – a Jesuit by training and experience! – has demonstrated a very different style, one to which we are not accustomed to observe in Popes. We should not mistake a “difference in style” from a “difference in substance” simply because we are witnessing a different manner of communicating. When thinking about Pope Francis, that is an important thing to keep in mind.

No one can doubt – whether a member of the Roman Catholic Church or not – that Pope Francis has taken the world by storm since

assuming the papacy less than two years ago. There is an expression used in the Roman Catholic Church to describe that phenomenon and it is called “the Francis Effect”. People frequently say that Pope Francis has made a real difference in the way that the papacy and, therefore, the Roman Catholic Church are viewed in the world in recent months. I think that is true. But, again, I credit his “style” of being Pope for that more than any substantial difference from the thought or teaching of his predecessors.

I think anyone with experience as a leader will tell you that it is not “what” you say or do that most frequently generates a response – positive or negative – from people but, rather “how” you say or do something. In Pope Francis’ case, his manner of communicating, his “style” if you will, has created more openness or, at least, more interest from the broader public. The media has created more “space” for him in its reporting and that is a good thing – not simply for him personally but for the message, the “good news” he hopes to share.

Let’s be honest, however. Pope St. John Paul II, 59 years of age at his election, was regarded as a “rock star” wherever he went and he was seen by more people than any other human being in history. Pope Benedict XVI, by contrast, much older at his accession to the Chair of Peter, seemed more reserved, more academic, more interested in being heard and read than being seen. Yet the crowds came out for him, too, wherever he went. In either case, there was never a doubt that each was a Pope as the world traditionally considered Popes to be, with some modest innovation here or there.

Pope Francis, only one year younger than Pope Benedict XVI at his election, is seen as simpler, perhaps humbler, clearly softer in tone, much more of a listener than a speaker, more given to open discussion and dialogue than to papal pronouncement. The fact of the matter is that everyone is different, no two people are the same no matter what their role or status might be. When considering papal elections, there is an expression used in Italian that takes such difference into account: “*Papa grosso, Papa magro*”, “fat Pope, skinny Pope”. The current Pope will differ from the past Pope and the next Pope will differ from him.

There is something else that should be kept in mind when thinking about the three Popes of the last 36 years and that is their national origins and cultural backgrounds. Pope John Paul II was a European, born and raised in Poland, who lived through the experience of the Second World War in his native homeland and that background shaped his worldview. He participated in the Second Vatican Council which initiated the Roman Catholic Church into the modern era. Pope Benedict XVI is also a European, born and raised in Germany, also a product of the Second World War in his native homeland and that background shaped his worldview as well; he also was a participant in

the Second Vatican Council. Both of these men became bishops at a young age, John Paul II was 38 and Pope Benedict XVI was 49.

Pope Francis, by contrast, is not European, the first non-European elected Pope in over 1300 years. He is from the Americas, from Argentina. Francis was only 10 years old at the end of the Second World War. He was not ordained a priest until five years after the Second Vatican Council ended, in 1969, and he became a bishop at the age of 56. He was born, raised and ministered in the environment of an emerging Latin American country and culture that shaped his worldview. Unlike his predecessors, he was not a diocesan priest but a member of a religious order, a Jesuit, the first religious to assume the papacy in over 160 years. John Paul II was a poet and an actor, a philosopher and an academic. Benedict XVI was a musician, a theologian and an academic. The two had similar European cultural and professional experiences prior to the papacy. Pope Francis, a Latino, was a chemical technician and an academic as well, although with more limited experience in university teaching. In terms of background, Francis' experience differed from that of his immediate predecessors. That also should be kept in mind.

I had the privilege of meeting all three Popes: Pope St. John Paul II twice; Pope Benedict XVI – who appointed me Bishop of Trenton – many times as Cardinal and Pope; and Pope Francis for several days in January of this past year. Each man radiated holiness and impressed me as men of God and the Church. John Paul II appeared keenly aware of his role and responsibilities and the impact and effect of his “presence”. Benedict XVI was scholarly and intense, very friendly but somewhat reserved. Francis also seems a bit reserved but very interested, very simple, warm and gracious. Unlike his two predecessors, Pope Francis does not speak English easily – “it is difficult”, he told me – which made our conversation a bit awkward. In the *Domus Sanctae Marthae* where he lives rather than in the Apostolic Palace inhabited by his predecessors, Pope Francis is very unassuming, going about his day to day activities without any fanfare but put him in front of a crowd and he comes alive with joy and warmth, almost like a different person. There is something very attractive about him, almost grandfatherly, that draws you to him. That is one aspect of his “style” that has captured the world’s attention and imagination. Add to that his emphasis on inclusivity and broad pastoral understanding and you can immediately see the basis for such interest.

Let’s admit the fact that all three Popes drove around the piazza outside St. Peter’s in a jeep greeting pilgrims after an audience. All three Popes reached out into the crowds, lifted up and kissed babies. All three Popes embraced disfigured and handicapped people. All three Popes visited prisons and hospitals. All three Popes travelled outside of Rome. All three Popes addressed world crises, advocated for the poor

and advanced the Catholic faith. Why is it, then, when Pope Francis does these things he seems to be getting much more attention? Is it simply a matter of style or is there something deeper, more substantial at work? The focus of my reflections here will not be a comparison and contrast among three different papal “styles”. Rather, I would like to concentrate on Pope Francis and the substantial rather than stylistic impact he is making on the Roman Catholic Church and beyond. To accomplish this, permit me to say something about what it means to be Pope, the Bishop of Rome.

The Pope is the spiritual leader of the Roman Catholic Church, roughly 1.2 billion Catholics worldwide. He is called: Bishop of Rome – the title he seems to prefer – the seat of governance of the Roman Catholic Church; Vicar of Christ on earth; Successor to St. Peter; Supreme Pontiff (from a Latin term, “*pontifex*” meaning “bridge builder”); Servant of the Servants of God; Holy Father; His Holiness, the title properly used when addressing him in speech or in writing. He is also the Head of the State of Vatican City, the world’s smallest independent country, an absolute monarchy with the Pope as leader. It is about 110 acres in size, enclosed within a wall in Rome, the size of a golf course here in the United States. Its population is around 830 people, mostly clergy, religious and employees of the Vatican. The Vatican is also called the “Holy See” or “Apostolic See (a reference to the Apostles Peter – the first Pope – and Paul, who were martyred there)”. The Holy or Apostolic See also includes all the offices or departments of the Vatican, in addition to the Office of the Supreme Pontiff.

The Pope’s relationship to the Vatican City State as its national head is probably his least important responsibility since there is a “governor” who runs its daily affairs. The Pope is a “spiritual” or “religious leader”, a person most would acknowledge is the most important, certainly the most visible such leader in the world. The primary focus of his attention is the Roman Catholic Church worldwide and everything connected with it. He embodies, more than any other Catholic, Christ’s three-fold mission: to teach, to govern and to sanctify the baptized people of God. Roman Catholics believe that Christ created the role of Pope when he identified St. Peter as Head of the Apostles and the one to whom he gave the Keys of the Kingdom of God. Hence, the papacy is considered “divinely instituted” as is the Roman Catholic Church founded by Christ. For that reason, the Pope is given – owed really – the respect, reverence and adherence of all the baptized Catholic faithful, especially in the area of faith and morals.

Unlike elections that we are used to in the United States, there are no announced candidates, campaigns, primaries, or conventions preceding a papal election or “conclave”. Elected by the College of Cardinals, the man chosen to be Pope – or those who watch or observe papal conclaves – have no idea who will emerge from the locked Sistine

Chapel as Bishop of Rome once the white smoke rises. There is no campaign agenda or party platform that carries the man through to the papacy. The old saying goes “the man who enters the conclave as Pope comes out as Cardinal”. I am sure that Cardinals have some ideas of whom they like when processing into the Sistine Chapel but the whole process, cloaked in absolute secrecy that each Cardinal vows never to break, is really the result of inspiration. Catholics believe the election to be divinely inspired. Jorge Cardinal Bergoglio – Pope Francis – was not one of the big names on the rumor circuit.

With that as background, you can see why the person of the Pope – whoever holds the Office – carries such sway with Roman Catholics. Whatever he says – whether in official intentional teaching which binds the consciences of baptized Catholics or in other commentary he makes – is important to believing Roman Catholics. It is, therefore, very difficult for Roman Catholics to ignore or dismiss what he says. At the same time, gestures of the Pope, what he does, also have a meaning, sometimes symbolic and other times “instructional” in themselves. The Pope teaches by what he does. Let me give you an example of both.

Like Popes before him, Pope Francis issued a document called an apostolic exhortation ***Evangelii Gaudium***, “The Joy of the Gospel”, on November 24, 2013. In this document sometimes called the “manifesto of Pope Francis”, the Pope presented the major themes for his pontificate, especially regarding social justice and care for the poor. It captured the world’s attention as a major instruction by Pope Francis. Given some of its critique of contemporary market economies as contributing to world poverty and the unequal distribution of wealth, the Pope’s words drew a quick and critical reaction in some corners.

Several months before, Pope Francis issued his first papal encyclical ***Lumen Fidei***, “The Light of Faith”, on June 29, 2013 completing the work of Pope Benedict XVI’s encyclicals on “Charity” and “Hope”. Apostolic exhortations and encyclicals are very important teaching documents issued by the Pope and are meant to be substantial influences applied to shape Catholic thinking. An “apostolic exhortation” usually follows a Synod of Bishops and is addressed to a particular group or groups within the Roman Catholic Church on the topic discussed at a Synod. It advances elements of Church doctrine intended for the group to whom it is addressed. An “encyclical” is a formal letter written by the Pope intended to communicate particular Church discipline, doctrines or moral teaching. It has more weight than an exhortation.

Gestures or actions of the Pope, on the other hand, are also instructive but not in the same way as official papal documents intended to teach the faithful. They convey the Pope’s attitude or disposition toward something important to Roman Catholics. One of Pope Francis’ first such gestures was his choice not to wear the traditional papal vest-

ments when he first appeared on the balcony of St. Peter’s Basilica after his election. On that same occasion, rather than simply offer the traditional blessing, the Pope asked the people gathered in the piazza and around the world to bless and pray for him. Both of these gestures were a departure from papal tradition, symbolizing humility and servitude rather than pageantry often associated with the papal office. Similarly, Pope Francis’ decision not to live in the Apostolic Palace as his predecessors but, rather, in a religious boarding house and hotel nearby were interpreted as a sign of his simplicity and desire not to isolate himself in traditional surroundings considered more triumphal.

On Holy Thursday 2014, in a ceremonial action traditionally reserved to male clergymen of high rank – successors to the Apostles – Pope Francis chose to wash the feet of men, women and even non-Catholics. That inclusion was seen as a radical change from past ceremonial practice at the Vatican, and interpreted as a gesture to be imitated by bishops and priests throughout the world as they celebrated the rituals of Holy Thursday. A difference in style to be sure but perhaps, also a communication of something more substantial.

Words and gestures of Pope Francis have become the prism through which Catholics and non-Catholics alike look at him and the direction of his papacy. They also become a lens for looking at the Roman Catholic Church. Observers of the Vatican have been quick to offer many, varied and even contrasting interpretations of their meanings. One thing is sure, however: neither can be ignored when trying to gain an insight into the “Francis effect”.

Reflection on the Fourth Chapter of “*Evangelii Gaudium*”: The Social Dimension of the Gospel



Bishop Rolando C. Santos, C.M.

Diocese of Alotau – Papua New Guinea

I am writing this reflection in Papua New Guinea, a Melanesian country in Oceania lying just north of Australia. People call it “paradise” country, a place covered with green rain forests inhabited by people with hundreds of diverse cultures and traditions. The first missionaries arrived here about 160 years ago. Today, it is predominantly Christian, with Catholics making up about 35% of the population. However, today Papua New Guinea is still considered one of the least developed countries in the world. In spite of the many wonders the country offers, many tourists avoid it because of news reports about crime, tribal fights, and sorcery-related killings. Does the Gospel have any social relevance to a country like Papua New Guinea? Does the Christian faith concern itself only with the spiritual and the afterlife? Does it have anything to offer with regards the deep human aspirations of people for a better life in this world?

Building the Kingdom of God

The fourth chapter of the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* concerns itself with the social dimension of the Gospel. Pope Francis begins the chapter by stating, “To evangelize is to make the kingdom of God present in our world” (EG, 176). The Gospel has a clear social content. To miss this is to distort the authentic and integral meaning of the mission of evangelization (EG, 177). “The Gospel is not merely about our personal relationship with God. Nor should our loving response to God be seen simply as an accumulation of small personal gestures to individuals in need, a kind of ‘charity à la carte’, or a series

of acts aimed solely at easing our conscience. The Gospel is about *the kingdom of God* (cf. Lk 4:43). An authentic faith always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it. Thus, the Church 'cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice'. All Christians, their pastors included, are called to show concern for the building of a better world" (EG, 180).

These words clearly state the social relevance of the Gospel, which aims to build God's Kingdom of justice, love and peace. Jesus himself said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it more abundantly". In Jesus' ministry, preaching the Gospel and healing the sick always went hand in hand. He preached about love, but he also reached out to people suffering from all kinds of misery. He healed them and made them whole. He embraced them with the liberating and compassionate love of God who is Father, Physician, and Good Shepherd. He sent his disciples to do the same, and to proclaim that the Kingdom of God is at hand. No one was to be exempted from this apostolic duty. The love of God cannot be separated from the love of neighbour. At the end of our lives, we shall be judged by the love we had for the least fortunate: "Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take as your heritage the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food... In so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me" (Mt 25:34-40).

The first missionaries and the Church in Papua New Guinea remembered the social dimension of the Gospel. They evangelized the people, but they also put up schools and health centers for the poor and sick. Almost half the services in the country are provided by the Catholic Church. However, much more needs to be done. As the population grows, so do the needs of the people. With the economic crisis many countries face, helping those in need is becoming harder to do. The Church has to flex its muscles in tapping local resources, the government, and local people.

St. Vincent de Paul said, "We must love God with the strength of our arms and the sweat of our brows." This is made possible through help of the Holy Spirit and the "love of Christ that presses us on". The service of the poor is the responsibility not only of priests and sisters, but also of the lay people. Vincent motivated and organized all three of them during his time to reach out to the least fortunate. In his encyclical, *Populorum Progressio*, Pope Paul VI said that to love God is to truly seek the good of man, the whole man and each and every person. Pope John Paul II in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* spoke of solidarity, a sincere desire to seek the good of the other. This translates itself into effective action. Many times, this will demand a systemic change in economic, political, and cultural structures and values. The poor need

to be involved in making decisions that affect their lives and their future. The integral development of our neighbour is an essential part of the Gospel and of the whole mission of evangelization. Evangelization, liberation, and human promotion are not meant to be separated from one another.

An option rooted in faith

Pope Francis said that “our faith in Christ, who became poor, and was always close to the poor and the outcast, is the basis of our concern for the integral development of society’s most neglected members” (EG, 186). The work of human development and liberation cannot be separated from our Christian faith. It flows directly from our understanding of who Christ is, and our relationship with Him. The Church’s option for the poor is not the fruit of any ideology, nor a desire to gain any political, social, or economic benefit for oneself. The missionary is not a mere social worker or political analyst. He is, first and foremost, a man of faith. The Church’s commitment and preferential option for the poor has theological roots.

Jesus, who became poor and was in total solidarity with the poor, is the center and soul of the Church’s option for the poor and engagement with the world. Through the Incarnation, He took upon himself the poverty and the sufferings of every poor person in this world. He was not content with just sending the hungry away, but told his disciples “you yourselves give them something to eat”. He looked at the poor with great compassion, and made their burdens his own. The Church follows in the footsteps of the Master. The missionary, and every disciple of Christ, sees the poor with the eyes of Christ. Every person in this world, however poor and seemingly despicable, bears an absolute dignity that cannot be removed. All people are created by God, bear His image, and are loved to the point that His Son, Jesus gave up his life for him.

A challenge to all

According to Pope Francis, “each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully a part of society” (EG, 187). The option for the poor is a calling to every baptized Christian and to every person of good will. Christian discipleship is not cheap discipleship. The following of Christ demands a bold and committed option on behalf of the poor. It is not content with providing temporary or cosmetic relief to the plight of the poor and the suffering. Real love and solidarity with the poor demand that we address structural injustices, as well as spiritual poverty and the reality of sin in our

world. According to Pope Francis, this latter is the greater poverty in our world. This can demand heavy sacrifices on our part and a change in priorities and lifestyle. Jesus said, "If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mt 16:24). The option for the poor calls for a change of heart and way of looking at life and one's relationship with others in the world. The focus can no longer be solely me and my family. When we start seeing with the eyes of faith, there are no longer strangers, but only a brother and a sister in Christ. The Gospel transforms our social values and makes us live a more simple life so that others may simply live.

The Gospel option for the poor is for everyone, including those in business and government. People usually regard these last two employments with certain distrust, as though business and politics belong to the corrupt. However, as Pope Francis says, these are noble vocations. Those engaged in business should be challenged by a greater meaning in life. "They can serve the common good by striving to increase the goods of this world and to make them more accessible to all" (EG, 203). In addition, the Pope observes, "politics, though often denigrated, remains a lofty vocation and one of the highest forms of charity, inasmuch as it seeks the common good... I beg the Lord to grant us more politicians who are genuinely disturbed by the state of society, the people, and the lives of the poor... to ensure that all citizens have dignified work, education and healthcare" (EG, 205).

Partnership and solidarity

In Papua New Guinea, we are blessed because there is an established partnership agreement between the government and the churches, especially in the areas of health care and education. We work together as equal partners for the good of the people. The government realizes that they can serve people better if they worked with the churches. At the same time, the churches realize they cannot serve the people without the help of the government. There is need for a joint spirit of stewardship and collaboration. In Milne Bay Province, the government pays the salaries and maintains the facilities of the eight medical centres and hospitals run by the 'Catholic Agency'. The government also helps us with our Catholic Agency schools, which enroll over 150 students in elementary and secondary levels. Four of these are technical/vocational schools and one is for children with disabilities. The proposed St. Mary Teachers College, presently under construction, is also a fruit of the collaboration between the Catholic Church and the government of Papua New Guinea. The diocese erects and manages the schools, while the government pays teachers' salaries and the tuition and fees of the students. The government respects the identity, philosophy and values of our agency schools and health centers, while the

Church abides by the regulations set up by the government. So much good can be done if government and Church work together for the good of the people. They don't have to be at odds with each other. The Church collaborates with the government while maintaining its own freedom and autonomy. This is not always easy. We learned to dialogue and to listen patiently to each other. The Gospel challenges all of us to work together in solidarity for the good of our people, esp. the least fortunate.

Stewardship and sharing

One of the ways solidarity is practised is through the exercise of responsible stewardship. Today there is a temptation to think that poverty will disappear if only governments focus on economic development by increasing their gross national production. Many times this is coupled with programs of population control, assuming it will engender a higher quality of life and service to people. Yet, Pope Francis reminds us: "Growth in justice requires more than economic growth... it requires decisions, programs, mechanisms, and processes specifically geared to a better distribution of income, the creation of sources of employment and integral promotion of the poor, which goes beyond a simple welfare mentality" (EG, 204). There are no easy ways and short-cuts. As the Pope says, "I want a Church which is poor and for the poor" (EG, 148).

There will be times when both Church and government will have to make unpopular and painful decisions to ensure that property and income are well distributed, so that the rich do not have too much, and the poor too little to survive. There is need to protect private property as a right, but there is also a need to educate people on the social function of property and the universal destination of goods, which are the higher values. As Pope Francis noted, "The private ownership of goods is justified by the need to protect and increase them, so that they can better serve the common good" (EG, 189). Profit can no longer be the sole criterion of business. No one has the right to the exclusive enjoyment of the goods he possesses no matter how hard he worked for them. The Lord is the sole master and owner of everything.

We are just mere stewards whose duty is to make sure that everyone in this world has enough of the world's goods to live with dignity as children of God. Governments and multinational companies must insure there are jobs for all. These include migrants, who flee from not only political or religious persecution, but also economic poverty. How some governments deal with migrants today brings shame to humanity. We all have a sacred duty to create a world without borders because the world belongs to God, and every citizen of this world is a child of God.

Spiritual care

While concern for justice and the material well-being of the poor are important, we should not think that this is all that matters in life. As Pope Francis stated: “The worst discrimination which the poor suffer is the lack of spiritual care. Our preferential option for the poor must mainly translate into a privileged and preferential religious care” (EG, 200). Genuine and effective love for the poor is always holistic, and includes the spiritual dimension. This aspect is often neglected, as though the only thing that matters is their material and economic welfare. However, the root of much of the suffering and poverty of people in the world today owes itself to the lack of a spiritual foundation. Sin, which is no other than turning one’s back from God, is the root of all that is evil. Sin makes a person self-centered and destroys love. It also destroys the sinner, while devastating others in the process.

Humanity needs to be saved from its tendency toward sinfulness. It is Jesus and the power of the Gospel that saves. Human promotion and liberation cannot be separated from evangelization. It is primarily evangelization that builds God’s kingdom of justice, love and peace. It is faith in Jesus that makes authentic liberation and human promotion possible. Evangelization is what sets people free. This concerns not only individuals, but also whole communities. It embraces attitudes, values, cultures and social structures. The whole of creation must turn to God and be transformed by the love of Christ. The spiritual builds God’s Kingdom on earth.

Care for the least fortunate

Concern for justice demands concern for the most vulnerable. Here, Pope Francis makes mention of people ‘on the margins’: the homeless, addicted, refugees, indigenous peoples, and the elderly. He calls attention to the plight of migrants, victims of various kinds of human trafficking, prostitution, children used for begging, exploiting undocumented labour, women who endure situations of exclusion, mistreatment and violence, and unborn children (EG, 211). As Pope Francis notes, Jesus identifies himself with the least among us (Mt 25:40). In today’s world, with its emphasis on success and self-reliance, there is not an investment in efforts to help the slow, the weak, or the less talented to find opportunities in life. Government often gives more attention to the youth and the economic development of the people. Very little is being done for the poorest of the poor, the homeless, those with mental disabilities, those neglected and abandoned by their families, and people wandering the streets and sleeping on the sidewalks.

In my Diocese of Alotau, the most destitute are often found at the doorsteps of the priests’ house and my own house. We do what we can. It is not easy because the poor can easily become dependent and

demand more things. A mentally disturbed lady often comes to me begging for food. I feed her, but then, she also asks for a place to stay. I gave her my garage, but then she asked for beddings and toiletries. Later, she asked help for her children's schooling. Finally, she asked if we could provide her with her own house. If only I had the means!

I consulted our Caritas coordinator, and brought this matter up with the government and the Women's Association. They all said that I should not be coddling this woman, but rather make her husband more accountable. She would not live with her husband, who was living with another woman, and who causes her emotional and mental problems. The case is complicated, as are cases of many other displaced people. If only we had a Mother Teresa or a Vincent de Paul in our community! If only people had more faith and love to stretch out their hearts and their arms to people like her. There is need to evangelize and the witness of charity. As Scripture says, "Faith, if good deeds do not go with it, is quite dead" (Jn 1:17). "Though I have all the faith necessary to move mountains – if I am without love, I am nothing" (1 Cor. 13:2).

Care for the unborn

Pope Francis said that care for the most defenseless and innocent among us involves the "conviction that a human being is always sacred and inviolable in any situation and at every stage of development" (EG, 213). I once attended a meeting organized by the United Nations in Port Moresby. It was about the UN declaration on human rights. I noticed that although most of the human rights were given adequate explanation, yet the right to life was only afforded one or two sentences. I asked the facilitator what she understood by the term 'human life'. When does it begin? I knew that certain organizations in the UN are pro-abortion, and I must have caught the UN representative unprepared. She admitted it was a difficult question, and told me she would get back to me. She never came back. In Papua New Guinea, the government has recruited the services of an international NGO to carry out the program of Family Planning and Population Control in the country. In the Solomon Islands, the government has also invited another international NGO that specializes in 'family planning' to do this work for them. These two international organizations are well known for being in the forefront of abortion. Those in charge of the country's planning and development say that there are just too many people and not enough resources to go around. Actually, PNG has only 7 million people. It is larger and richer in natural resources than the Philippines, which has over 100 million people.

Pope Francis says that human beings are ends in themselves and never to be seen as a means of resolving other problems. In many poor

countries, governments and organizations are not doing enough to for their own people, the most important resource in the development of any country. In PNG, government is spending millions of kina to make the contraceptive hormonal implant available to women of childbearing age. There have been reports of women complaining of bleeding and of getting pregnant in spite of the implant. If only no money were involved! If only people were better evangelized to know how to respect the sacredness of the body God has given them, control their passions, and trust in Divine Providence.

Much more can be said about the social dimension of the Gospel as stated in the fourth chapter of *Evangelii Gaudium*. I suggest that you read the whole chapter from beginning to end, to see how it applies to your situation, and what God demands of you. The Gospel cannot be separated from social life, because by the Incarnation, God became human to save us. Evangelization and the witness of charity are God's invitation for our salvation. They also show us God's incredible love for us.

“Evangelii Gaudium” and the Social Dimension of Evangelization



Bishop Luis Solé Fa, C.M.

Bishop of Trujillo – Honduras

The fourth chapter of Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation is entitled, *The Social Dimension of Evangelization*. There the Pope affirms that, “if this dimension is not properly brought out, there is a constant risk of distorting the authentic and integral meaning of the mission of evangelization” (EG, 176). The Pope is insistent on that idea and further states: “The very nature of the Church is missionary; she abounds in effective charity and a compassion which understands assists and promotes” (EG, 179).

I am convinced that this chapter provides us with elements that illuminate an aspect of our pastoral ministry that is not always lived out in an integral manner, namely, in the evangelizing dimension of social action... one that Saint Vincent was most careful in fulfilling.

After reminding us that the Kingdom of God is central to the proclamation of the Good News of Christ, Pope Francis cites the apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, which was promulgated by Paul VI: “Evangelization would not be complete if it did not take account of the unceasing interplay of the Gospel and of man's concrete life, both personal and social” (EG, 29). Pope Francis views this concept of “complete” from the perspective of the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, held in 2007 in Aparecida, Brazil. The Pope refers to that document when he states, “The mission of proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ has a universal destination. Its mandate of charity encompasses all dimensions of existence, all people, all environments of community life, and all peoples. Nothing human can be alien to it” (Aparecida, 284).

The pastoral initiatives of the Church in the area of social action or social-charitable action are an expression of compassion and mercy, but are often not “complete” for two reasons: first, because they are

not the result of true community ecclesial organization, and secondly, as they do not make visible the evangelizing dimension that should be part of all pastoral activity.

The lack of organization

Vincent de Paul spoke about the lack of organization when he wrote the Rule for the Confraternity of Charity in Châtillon: "The poor have suffered a great deal more through a lack of organized assistance than from lack of charitable persons" (CCD: XIIIb: 8). Thus, we can ask the question: does the lack of ecclesial organization in the Church's charitable activity diminish the social dimension of evangelization?

The lack of organization not only diminishes the effectiveness of the Church's charitable activity, but it also reduces the exercise of charity to the individual level of a personal decision of a believer who perhaps is more aware than others. In reality, charitable activity is a community option that involves the whole Church as she accepts and continues the mission of Jesus Christ.

The ecclesial organization of her charitable activity should not be viewed as opposed to the generous gestures that all people are capable of extending toward persons who are in need. Nevertheless, ecclesial organization makes the Church's charitable activity more effective in a twofold manner. First, such organization guarantees the evangelical and ecclesial nature of the service that is being offered, and provides greater resources for the accomplishment of that service. Second, ecclesial organization further guarantees that the Church is "doing the things the loved person commands or desires" (CCD: XI: 35). Those are the words that Vincent de Paul used to describe effective love which he viewed as more significant than affective love. I believe that in those situations in which a person, in an individual manner, reaches out to the poor... in such a situation affective love is more prominent.

Therefore, Pope Francis, after exhorting us to listen to the cries of the poor for justice, clarifies the fact that the command of Jesus, "you yourselves give them something to eat" (Mk 6:37). It means, "Working to eliminate the structural causes of poverty and to promote the integral development of the poor, as well as small daily acts of solidarity in meeting the real needs which we encounter" (EG, 188). The organization of charity promoted by Vincent de Paul, and the work that today is being accomplished by the Vincentian Family is based on the Vincentian charism. This provided the original inspiration for what we call today as solidarity. This solidarity is the social dimension of charity.

Pope St. John Paul II described solidarity as "a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say

to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all” (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 38). This concept enriches the principle of charity, organized in an ecclesial manner, and is in accord with the words of *Populorum Progressio* that state “such activity should involve the participation of those who are poor so that they become the protagonists of their own development” (PP, 15). This can appear as something that is difficult to do. Yet, if we place the poor on the margins of our charity and solidarity or our organization and activity, we have not brought to completion the social dimension to the process of evangelization.

The document from the Bishops’ Conference at Aparecida refers to the preferential option for the poor and for those who are excluded, and stated:

“Solidarity likewise springs from our faith in Christ as a permanent attitude of encounter, brotherly and sisterly spirit, and service, which is to be manifested in visible options and gestures, primarily in defense of life and of the rights of the most vulnerable and excluded, and in continual accompaniment in their efforts to be agents for changing and transforming their situation. The Church’s service of charity among the poor “is an aspect which must clearly mark the Christian life, the Church’s whole activity and her pastoral planning” [*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 49], (Aparecida, 394).

I am convinced that the Vincentian Family is prepared to include the poor in the task of organizing charity in a manner that strengthens the bonds of solidarity. How wonderful if we would share with one another the ways that we do this so that we might learn from one another!

The evangelizing dimension of social action

We exercise the ministry of charity through our social pastoral ministry or, as it is also called, the social-charitable activity of the Church. At times, however, we reduce such activity to simple social activity, which has much merit as it provides assistance and encourages human promotion. But all social activity undertaken by the Church should be decisively and clearly a part of the process of evangelization. For the Church, such ministry must include a preferential option for the poor, which is primarily a theological category and only secondarily a cultural, political and economical category. That fact enables us to better understand that as we evangelize the poor, we must allow ourselves to be evangelized by them as well. As Vincentians, we are not the only ones who go out to the poor in the name of Christ and represent Christ to the poor. They also come to us in the name of Jesus and represent Him to us.

That process of evangelizing the poor and being evangelized by the poor is highlighted in our Vincentian spirituality. Pope Francis also underlines that reality when he stated:

“That is why I want a Church which is poor and for the poor. They have much to teach us. Not only do they share in the *sensus fidei*, but in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them. The new evangelization is an invitation to acknowledge the saving power at work in their lives and to put them at the centre of the Church’s pilgrim way. We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them” (EG, 198).

Pope Francis even more strongly insists that, “the worst discrimination which the poor suffer is the lack of spiritual care... our preferential option for the poor must mainly translate into a privileged and preferential religious care” (EG, 200). In the words of the Holy Father, we can hear the echo of Vincent’s thinking. Here I want to affirm and recognize the fact that there are difficulties in living out such a commitment.

At times, because of the need for specialized professionals in the area of economics, sociology and community development, we place the Church’s social-charitable activity in the hands of very capable people. However, those persons are often not people of faith, lacking a missionary understanding of their vocation, both of which are essential to the poor and the communities that will benefit from their activity. When we are committed to social pastoral ministry, what factors can lead us to neglect the evangelizing dimension of that ministry?

- That neglect can come about as the result of an incomplete vision of the human person, specifically, we have forgotten the principle that Pope Paul VI highlighted in his encyclical, *Populorum Progressio*: “True development must be directed to all persons and to the whole person” (14). The spiritual dimension of the human person will often be ignored or devalued in those pastoral plans that place primary importance on the results desired on an organizational, economical, and political level.
- Such neglect can also occur when we forget Vincent’s image he used for serving the poor, i.e., looking at them as both sides of the coin. When we do not give importance to looking at both sides of the coin, then we place limitations on ourselves and begin to see the situation of the poor as a difficult challenge to confront. Thus, we immediately begin to devote all our energy to that task. However, if we fail to see ourselves in the presence of Christ as

we stand before the poor, it becomes very easy to feel no need to help the poor, and to recognize the fact that they are the beloved of God.

- I believe there is a need for greater clarity in explaining the various dimensions of the Church's pastoral activity. Traditionally, this activity has been analogous to the threefold ministry of Christ as Priest, Prophet, and King, but that does not provide us with a precise understanding of Christ's role in the Church. As the document of Aparecida noted, "Therefore, Christ the Priest is the foundation of the Church's liturgical ministry; Christ the Word-Prophet is the foundation of the Church's evangelizing ministry; Christ the Servant is the foundation of the Church's social ministry; Christ the Good Shepherd is the foundation for the Church's collaborative ministry that creates the Church as communion and the parish as a community of communities" (Aparecida, 169-170).

Christ, the Servant, who came 'not to be served, but to serve' (Mk 10:45). Jesus is not only a model for ordained ministers or consecrated religious, but one for all believers. This is also true of those who are ministers of the Church's social pastoral activity, and those who live the ministry of charity as an expression of the service the Master demands of them (Jn 13:13-17). If we are clear about these dimensions of the Church's pastoral activity, then, as the Church is by nature missionary, we will also learn to make all our pastoral activity an evangelizing activity.

Mercy

Allow me to conclude with a commentary on number 193 of *Evangelii Gaudium*. The Pope begins that section with a reference to the beatitude: "Blessed are the merciful, because they shall obtain mercy" (Mt 5:7). He then cites the letter of James and reminds us that "mercy triumphs over judgment" (Js 2:13). Those words follow the thinking that is expressed in the wisdom literature that attributes a salvific value to mercy. Pope Francis then quotes St. Augustine, who affirmed that, "as in the event of our being in peril from fire we would certainly run to the water in order to get the fire extinguished; so, if some flame of sin has risen from our own stack, and if we are troubled on that account, when an opportunity has been given for a most merciful work, we should rejoice in it, as if a fountain were offered us in order that by it the conflagration which had burst forth might be extinguished" (De Catechizandis Rudibus, 22).

The image of running to put out a fire is very familiar to us as members of the Vincentian Family. Vincent used that image and applied it

to the urgent need to minister on behalf of the poor. What is important here, however, is the motive that should impel us to minister in the manner of mercy. The concept of mercy has been so confused and distorted, as the very origin of that word has been clouded, namely, God is merciful. Jesus demands us to “be merciful as the heavenly Father is merciful” (Lk 6:36). The concept of mercy has also been misunderstood because people have not found a way to live that virtue with the proper balance between affective love (from the perspective of the heart that loves the poor) and effective love (from the perspective of the misery that crushes the poor).

Vincent de Paul’s sense of justice followed that of Thomas Aquinas, and so for Vincent, mercy is not only a question of showing good will to those who are poor. It is also a question of justice. Thus we read and reflect on the well-known words that Vincent wrote to one of his first missionaries: “May God grant us the grace of softening our hearts toward the wretched creatures and realizing that in helping them we are doing an act of justice and not of mercy!” (CCD: VII: 115). The first part of that phrase resounds like an echo in the words of Pope Francis: “We incarnate the duty of hearing the cry of the poor when we are deeply moved by the suffering of others” (EG, 193).

It is hoped that those who read *Evangelii Gaudium* will understand that being *deeply moved by the suffering of others* should not only result in some affective reaction, but should also awaken in people a sense of social justice that leads them to commit themselves to the defense of those who are poor. Such a commitment will enable the Church to be that which she is called to be, ‘*the advocate of justice and of the poor*’, a reality that was affirmed by Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI as he addressed the Bishops who had gathered together in Aparecida in 2007.

Translated from Spanish by CHARLES T. PLOCK, C.M.

“Evangelii Gaudium” and the Vincentian Charism



✠ Abune Varghese Thottamkara, C.M.

Bishop – Apostolic Vicariate of Nekemte – Ethiopia

Evangelii Gaudium is an inspirational document that will have a deep impact on the Church for years to come. It certainly ought to have a big bearing on every Vincentian as it touches the core of our charism itself. Pope Francis covers a much ground in this document. He treats specifically and extensively various dimensions of ‘evangelization of the poor’, the Vincentian charism. The Pontiff begins the document with these words: “The joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ, joy is constantly born anew. In this Exhortation I wish to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy, while pointing out new paths for the Church’s journey in years to come” (EG, 1).

What is this new chapter that he speaks of? Some think it is articulated in paragraph 27: “I dream of a ‘missionary option’, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation” (EG, 27). The Pope says it is time to open a new chapter to channel all the energies of the Church toward evangelization rather than self-preservation. What a big and beautiful statement! Many people believe this statement gives hope to the church and can serve to restore its credibility, as they think that for a long time, the Church has been preoccupied with attempts at self-preservation.

The rest of the document speaks about how this can be done. The document is not just a theological treaty or a dogmatic study but

a way to live our faith and a program for evangelization. Though the document deals extensively with numerous themes in the various chapters, the main ideas with special implications on our Vincentian charism are as follows.

1. The Sources of Evangelization

For Pope Francis, evangelization is a fruit of one's personal encounter and experience of Christ. This is very important for all missionaries and evangelizers to recognize and adhere to as a basic principle. The motivating force of evangelization is the result of one's personal experience of Christ and his love for each one of us. Impelled by this experience, one goes forward sharing that joy, the "Good News" with others, inviting them to have the same personal experience. "I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unflinchingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since "no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord" (EG, 3). Pope Francis points out two key sources of evangelization.

First, we can evangelize only because of God first loved us. An evangelizing community knows that the Lord has taken the initiative, he has loved us first (cf. 1 Jn 4:19); has loved us gratuitously, and has loved us unconditionally. Therefore, we can move forward, boldly take the initiative, going out to others, seeking those who have fallen away, and standing at the crossroads to welcome the outcast. Second, our evangelization depends on our ability to accept the Gospel into our lives. "Here we find the source and inspiration of all our efforts at evangelization. For if we have received the love which restores meaning to our lives, how can we fail to share that love with others?" (EG, 8). It is the personal experience of God's mercy that becomes our driving force in evangelization.

2. The New Evangelization

There are three main components to the New Evangelization: first, it is for the Catholic to begin with himself or herself. The evangelizer must be first evangelized in order to truly witness to the faith. The Catholic should deepen his or her own faith through the varied means provided by the Church to become an effective evangelizer.

Second, it is for Catholics who, although baptized, whose lives do not reflect the demands of baptism. These are Catholics lacking meaningful relationship with the Church. The Church no longer sustains them in their spiritual journey and the practice of the faith. The Church calls them to conversion, and priests should reach out to them so they can rediscover the joy of the Gospel and the faith in which they were

baptized. The call for conversion is for all Catholics irrespective of their state. Conversion, as a radical change of heart, is an ongoing aspect of the spiritual life. The New Evangelization calls for conversion of all Catholics, laity, and clergy as well.

Third, it is the proclamation of the Gospel to those who do not know Jesus Christ, and those who have always rejected him. This task is a mandate entrusted to all Christians in virtue of their baptism and confirmation. Paul, the great missionary to the Gentiles, understood very profoundly this mandate when he said, “Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel” (1 Cor 9:16). Also, the apostle says, “If I proclaim the Gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel” (1 Cor 9:15-16). Thus, it is incumbent on all Christians to grasp the gravity of this mandate. The Second Vatican Council teaches that “each disciple of Christ has an obligation to spread the faith to the best of his ability” (*Lumen Gentium*, 17). Pope Francis challenged all Catholics to be actively engaged in person to person preaching “on the street, in a city square, during work, on a journey” (EG, 127).

Pope Francis believes evangelization begins by sharing the basic message of the Gospel.

“In catechesis too, we have rediscovered the fundamental role of the first announcement or kerygma, which needs to be the center of all evangelizing activity and all efforts at Church renewal... On the lips of the catechist, the first proclamation must ring out over and over: Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you” (EG, 164).

He goes on to note the importance of the ‘kerygma’ throughout the life of a Christian: “It is first in a qualitative sense because it is the principal proclamation, the one which we must hear again and again in different ways, the one which we must announce one way or another throughout the process of catechesis, at every level and moment” (EG, 164). He insists that every baptized person is called to be agents of evangelization, as one should be eager to share the good news one has received with everyone he comes in contact. The content of the proclamation is basically the unconditional love of God for every human person created in the image of God.

3. Missionary Disciple

The term “missionary disciple” is used throughout the document. The two terms hold in tension the need both for a relationship with our Lord and the need to go to the outskirts to preach the Gospel. One thing is very clear. Every baptized member of the Catholic faith is called to evangelize and to be a missionary disciple. By virtue of

their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt 28:19). "All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization" (EG, 120). Every baptized person has this right and duty to be a 'missionary disciple', to be an evangelizer. All have to think of the ways and means of fulfilling this in one's own life-situations.

The right and duty to evangelize is rooted in the call and identity of every Christian. For the Pope, the Church exists to evangelize, "The Church is herself a missionary disciple" (EG, 40). Having affirmed this, he describes the approach of the missionary disciple, "What I would like to propose is something much more in the line of an evangelical discernment. It is the approach of a missionary disciple, an approach nourished by the light and strength of the Holy Spirit" (EG, 50).

4. Pope Francis' vision for the Church

Pope Francis states categorically his vision for the Church:

"Here I repeat for the entire Church what I have often said to the priests and laity of Buenos Aires: I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security. I do not want a Church concerned with being at the centre and then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures" (EG, 49).

This remark of Pope Francis says it all. He wants us to return to a Church that looks like the early Church, one without much property and worldly wealth, but with a great evangelizing spirit, one that continuously witnessed to the Lord Jesus to the point of death. The Holy Father has told bishops to get out of their offices, go out to the streets, and meet up with their flock. He also told them not to become 'airport bishops', but to be always present to their flock.

Pope Francis urges all Catholics to come out of themselves and reach out to others in love. To preserve our security, to remain in our comfort zones, to withdraw from others, not to reach out to others, is to become spiritually dead. As Christians and Vincentians, we find fulfilment when we reach out to others and embrace them, allowing them to touch our lives. To be closed in and look only inside ourselves is to be selfish, narcissistic, and filled with dryness and spiritual aridity. The nature of the Church and the identity of a Christian is to reach out to others in love and concern, and to be at the service of the other. The Pontiff touchingly states: "If we wish to lead a dignified and fulfilling life, we have to reach out to others and seek their good" (EG, 9). He also advises

us, “If we are to share our lives with others and generously give of ourselves, we also have to realize that every person is worthy of our giving” (EG, 274).

5. The Pastoral ministry

Pope Francis spends a considerable amount of time on pastoral ministry as he looks to see how a missionary impulse would change parish life. For him, the parish should encourage and train people to live the gospel values and be proclaimers of the Gospel:

“In all its activities, the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers. It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and are a centre of constant missionary outreach. We must admit, though, that the call to review and renew our parishes has not yet sufficed to bring them nearer to people, to make them environments of living communion and participation, and to make them completely mission-oriented” (EG, 28).

It is not enough that we are concerned about the liturgy and doctrines, but our actual concern should be whether the Gospel is effectively lived and whether it makes any change in the life of the faithful. “In some people we see an ostentatious preoccupation for the liturgy, for doctrine and for the Church’s prestige, but without any concern that the Gospel has a real impact on God’s faithful people and the concrete needs of the present time” (EG, 95).

As for sharing the message of the Gospel, the Holy Father says: “Pastoral ministry in a missionary style is not obsessed with the disjointed transmission of a multitude of doctrines to be insistently imposed... the message has to concentrate on the essentials, on what is most beautiful, most grand, most appealing and at the same time most necessary. The message is simplified, while losing none of its depth and truth, and thus becomes all the more forceful and convincing”. The Pope is so concerned about the transmission of the message that he later spends several paragraphs (EG, 135-159) just on preaching homilies.

6. Church which is poor and for the Poor

We all know that Pope Francis wants “a Church which is poor and for the poor”. The poor took up a huge section in this Apostolic Exhortation and his words are consonant with the goals of being a Vincentian. That is why one is inclined to think that he is a Vincentian in spirit. He notes: “We have to state, without mincing words, that ‘there is an inseparable bond between our faith and the poor’. May we never

abandon them” (EG, 48). The Church has a special place for the poor because of the generosity of our Lord Jesus who “although he was rich, he became poor for your sake, so that you should become rich through his poverty” (2 Cor 8:9).

Pope Francis considers the work of evangelization closely connected to the daily concrete life of the person. “Evangelization would not be complete if it did not take account of the unceasing interplay of the Gospel and of man’s concrete life, both personal and social” (EG, 181). The evangelizer has to take into consideration the human person, and see that the Gospel message addresses all the personal and social dimensions of the life of the poor.

He invites everyone to be involved in the mission of the integral development and total liberation of the human person. Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully a part of society (EG, 187). It is by this conviction that the Church: every Christian and especially the consecrated persons must make an option for the poor, understood as a “special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity, to which the whole tradition of the Church bears witness” (EG, 198). This vision moves the Vincentian to be at the side of the poor addressing their needs – spiritual and material. It is the essence of the mystery of salvation and the mission of Christ himself. God’s heart has a special place for the poor, so much so that he himself ‘became poor’ (2 Cor 8:9). The entire history of our redemption is marked by the presence of the poor. “Salvation came to us from the ‘yes’ uttered by a lowly maiden from a small town on the fringes of a great empire” (EG, 197).

Pope Francis states very clearly what kind of Church he desires: “This is why I want a Church which is poor and for the poor. They have much to teach us. Not only do they share in the *sensus fidei*, but in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them” (EG, 198). Vincentians are familiar with these words and ideas, for they are very similar to the words and deeds of St. Vincent.

For the Pope, the preferential option for the poor is an essential aspect of the proclamation of the gospel and cannot be separated, lest it be misunderstood and go fruitless. “Without the preferential option for the poor, the proclamation of the Gospel, which is itself the prime form of charity, risks being misunderstood or submerged by the ocean of words which daily engulfs us in today’s society of mass communications” (EG, 199).

7. Conclusion

Reading the document '*Evangelii Gaudium*' a Vincentian gets the feeling of talking similar language and walking through familiar territories. In his spirituality, priority, attitude, and dealings he gives a lot of importance to the themes of 'evangelization' and 'service to the poor'. Therefore, he is a Vincentian in spirit according to me. Pope Francis's thoughts and lifestyle are similar to that of a Vincentian. His message has been heard loud and clear through his lifestyle, even before he communicated it through this document. As Vincentians, we can be proud that Pope Francis has taken up our charism, our mission, and our lifestyle as the vision and mission of the entire Church. In mission territories, the message of the Pope becomes particularly clear as a road map of evangelization. Every Vincentian missionary bishop will feel very much included and encouraged by this document.

His thoughts on evangelization are particularly relevant for Vincentian missionaries, especially those entrusted with the task of guiding ecclesiastical jurisdictions as Vincentian bishops. The Pope speaks of not only what evangelization should consist, but also provides a road map of how to proceed. The Vincentian theme of interconnection between charity and evangelization is particularly noteworthy in Pope Francis' writings. In mission dioceses and vicariates like those in Ethiopia, this document is a working program. His love and concern for the poor needs particular mention. Here he follows the path of the great saints like Francis of Assisi, St. Vincent de Paul, and Mother Teresa who took up the mission of Christ as theirs. Pope Francis, like these patrons of charity and champions of the poor cannot imagine of a church without the poor.

I am also very much inspired and motivated by the new vision he has for the church. This certainly will restore back some credibility to the Church, which is badly needed. Each Christian, Priest, Religious and Bishops should not forget that this vision of Pope Francis can be accomplished through each one of us. It is this great vision that he is entrusting to each one of us as a mission.

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Editor

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Editorial Board

Jean Landousies, C.M.
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Publication

General Curia
of the Congregation of the Mission
Via dei Capasso, 30
00164 Rome (Italy)
Tel. +39 06 66 13 061
Fax +39 06 66 63 831
vincentiana@cmglobal.org

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info@tipografiadetti.fastwebnet.it

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**In our next
issue...**

The Ratio Formationis

