

VINGENTIANA

39th year- N° 4-
5: July/October 1995



FEATURE:
The Vincentian Laity

October 20, 1995

To the members of the Congregation of the Mission

My very dear Confreres,

May the grace of Our Lord be always with you!

I write to you today to appeal once again for volunteers for our international missions. A few days ago, at the very same meeting of the General Council in which we discussed this year's appeal, we also approved the new instruction on the vows. In reflecting on the vows in recent weeks, I was struck by how missionary an orientation St. Vincent gave them. He speaks eloquently of the need for mobility in the Company: "Let us imagine that He (Christ) says to us: `Go forth, missionaries, go forth. What, are you still here? Look at the poor people who are awaiting you...!'" (SV XI, 134). He holds up before the eyes of the Company the great missionaries of other communities who have gone to the Indies, to Japan, to Canada "to complete the work which Jesus Christ began on earth and never abandoned from the moment he was called" (*ibid.*). He is intensely aware that some things will hold the missionaries back, particularly the desire to have abundant material goods, pleasure, and honor (SV XII, 367). For that reason, he sees the vows as a liberating force in the life of the missionary:

Those who become detached from the desire for worldly goods, from the longing for pleasure, and from their own will become children of God. They enjoy perfect freedom. For it is only in the love of God that real freedom is found. They are people who are free, my brothers, who know no law, who fly, who go left and right, who fly still more. No one can hold them back. They are never slaves of the devil nor of their own passions. O, how happy is the freedom of the children of God! (SV XII, 301).

As I travel to visit our various missions, one of my great joys is to see so many confreres and Daughters of Charity who love so deeply that they are truly free.

Today, let me first give you a little news about the growth of our international missions over this past year. Then I will present my hopes for the coming year.

SOME NEWS

Last year I made an urgent appeal for help in Tanzania. I am very grateful to so many of you who responded. In a particular way I want to thank the Province of India, which has agreed to take on a special responsibility in regard to the mission in Tanzania. You remember that, at this time last year, Fr. Chacko was alone there. He is now accompanied by three confreres: Fr. Myles Rearden from Ireland, who will be working as Spiritual Director of the rapidly growing Sisters of Mercy of St. Vincent de Paul, and Fr. James Theikanath and Fr. Tirkey Prakash, who will be laboring among the poor of that area. The latter two have just completed the language and inculturation program in Morogoro. A fifth confrere, Fr. Johnson Nedumgadan, is arriving there from India as I write this letter.

Just this past month we opened a new mission at Charkib in the Ukraine where there are three missionaries: Frs. Jaroslav Jaššo of the Province of Slovakia and Jacek Dubicki and Jan Trzop of the Province of Poland. They are experiencing the usual start-up difficulties, but have been generously helped by others in finding lodging and in renovating an old building that will soon become a center for the apostolate, where the confreres will be working with the Daughters of Charity. I just received a very up-beat letter from the three confreres, filled with missionary enthusiasm!

As you know, the Province of Naples, with the help of the other provinces of Italy, has now taken over responsibility for the new mission at Rrëshen in Albania, with assistance too from the Province of Poland. I receive very positive reports from our missionaries and from the Nuncio, who hopes that we can expand our presence there. I continue to receive volunteer letters too.

I had the happy opportunity last June to visit the new mission at Xai-Xai in Mozambique, for which the Province of Mexico has taken responsibility. I spoke with each of the four missionaries there: Frs. Jorge Pedroza, Jesús Arzate, José Ramírez, and a lay man, César Alonso Saldaña Moreno. They are very happy in their new work at the minor seminary, even though they have had to struggle with malaria, lack of water, and slow progress in the construction of the seminary. The seminary is already filled, with the prospect

of many more candidates to come! The local bishop is delighted with their presence.

There are now four missionaries in El Alto, Bolivia, where Frs. Aarón Gutiérrez and Jorge Homero from the Province of Mexico have now joined Frs. Bernard Massarini and Bogus_aw Sroka. This is an extremely difficult mission. Since it lies at almost 13,000 feet above sea level, physical conditions are tough; apostolic conditions are even tougher. The missionaries wrote to me recently to tell me how shy the people are about contacting and communicating with them. They also related a painful story about a village celebration in which the people drank heavily and worked themselves up into a dancing frenzy in which they beat a local woman in the public square; the woman ultimately died from the abuse.

I receive very positive reports from Fr. Hugh O'Donnell, the Visitor, about our new missionaries in Taiwan, who are taking part in a language and inculturation program to prepare for possible future ministry on the mainland: Frs. Thomas Sendlein, Anton Budianto, Joseph Loftus, Peter Solis, and Dario Pacheco. I will be visiting them in January.

Just this morning I had a letter from Marcello Manimtim, who is the superior at our mission in the Solomon Islands. He tells me that Tom Hynes and Stanislaus Reksosusilo (who arrived just recently from Indonesia) are doing very well. Construction work on the seminary has begun. Several other confreres have offered to go there to teach specialized courses that are needed from time to time. I was delighted when, just a few days ago, Serafín Peralta, the Visitor of the Province of the Philippines, offered to take over responsibility for this entire mission. We will be discussing this matter in an upcoming meeting of the General Council.

As you can see, the news is mostly good. The confreres are enthusiastic. The missions are growing. Progress is being made in inculturation and language. At the same time, not all have found it possible to adapt to new cultures. Two of the new missionaries, after struggling to adjust, decided to undertake other works in the service of the poor. I am very grateful to them too for their efforts.

AN APPEAL FOR THE COMING YEAR

I continue to receive many appeals from bishops throughout the world (right up until yesterday at lunch, when an Asian bishop whispered in my ear that he needs missionaries for a minor seminary!). Many of the requests focus on formation personnel. Let me relate to you some of the most urgent needs. I know that I do not need to appeal to your generosity, since I have found that this is abundant in the Congregation. Rather, I ask you to weigh these needs before God in the context of your own life, your health, your gifts, the Lord's urgings, and the needs of your own province. If you should sense that the Lord calls you to respond to one of these needs, then please do not hesitate to write, following the guidelines given at the end of this letter.

1. **Rwanda** - As I make this appeal, I feel as if I am calling for martyrs since, as you know, many missionary men and women have died there, including two postulants for the Daughters of Charity. Recently, the Mother General asked me if some of our priests could accompany the sisters in Rwanda. Thirty-four Daughters of Charity work there and in the refugee camps at the border of Zaire. At the beginning, our ministry might take the form of a small missionary parish near the Daughters, with outreach into various villages. As the number of volunteers grows, we might be able to staff a minor seminary. The language is French.

2. **Mozambique** - As mentioned above, I visited Mozambique last June and July. I was deeply moved by the poverty I saw. After so many years of civil war the basic structures of the country have been destroyed. Even though there has now been peace for three years, conditions are still dreadful. Schools and hospitals are in terrible disorder. Tuberculosis, dysentery, and AIDS are rampant. Things are so bad that Mozambique is now often described as the poorest country in the world. Our confreres there have huge needs. Their numbers are very few (there are only 18). Some are experiencing health problems. Others find themselves worn out and rather isolated. I am very eager to send them reinforcements. The prospects for ministry are enormous, but the laborers are very few. There are a good number of students in formation. The start-up language is Portuguese. In many places, one must also learn the local language.

3. **Cuba** - Here too, as in Mozambique, the people, as well as the confreres and Daughters of Charity, suffer under very trying economic and social conditions. Food is scarce. Ministry is difficult. Our confreres are very few (there are only nine), whereas pastoral opportunities are increasingly great. Huge numbers of people come to our churches and centers. Land and a

building for a house of formation have just been purchased. The language is Spanish. A missionary should have very good health, since life is quite tough.

4. **Cameroon** - Here too, for various reasons (societal conditions, health problems, etc.), our numbers are very few. There is urgent need for a French-speaking confrere who has pastoral experience and who would be capable of animating a parish center with outreach into a series of small village communities. The mission has a number of students in formation and could also use the help of a French-speaking confrere with experience as a formation director.

5. **Siberia** - At the most recent meeting of our General Council we accepted Bishop Joseph Werth's offer to send a team to Nizhniy Tagil at the foot of the Ural Mountains in Siberia. The Provinces of Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia have generously pledged their assistance in staffing this mission, but it would be very helpful if the team could have members from other nations. The initial language for pastoral contact in that region is German; at the same time the learning of Russian is indispensable. Living conditions there are rough, because of the cold and the isolation.

6. **Zaire** - The new Province of Zaire has a large number of candidates in formation for the Congregation. It has appealed to me several times for help in providing experienced formation personnel to collaborate with our Zairian confreres in the formation of our seminarians. The language is French.

There are many other needs. Our confrere, Demerew Souraphiel, who last year was named Prefect Apostolic of Jimma-Bonga in Ethiopia, has very few priests. There is also a request for confreres to work in Denmark, where until now the Province of Holland has been sponsoring a mission. The Bishop of Trujillo in Honduras is also seeking help for the region of La Moskitia, a very poor mission area where confreres from the Province of Barcelona, as well as Daughters of Charity, are already working.

I am deeply grateful to you, my brothers, for your generous response to the appeals that I have made for the missions over the last several years. It is wonderful to see how strong the missionary spirit is within the Company and how willing confreres are to go to distant, often difficult, parts of the world. I ask your help once again today. As we prepare for the canonization of John Gabriel Perboyre, which will probably take place toward the end of 1996 (the date is not yet certain), we have been focusing on his vocation both as a formation director and as a missionary. Many of the appeals above, you will

note, coincide with that vocation. I hope that the year ahead, with its various celebrations and reflective moments, will be a stimulus to all of us to follow in the footsteps of this heroic brother of ours. He will be canonized not simply because he laid down his life in the service of the gospel, but because he lived it to the full in the Vincentian tradition.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.
Superior General

SOME INFORMATION AND CRITERIA FOR THOSE WHO WRITE

1. If you should wish to volunteer, please send your letter in time to arrive in Rome by December 15, 1995.

2. So that I might read the letters all at once and so that they might be carefully organized, would you please address the envelopes as follows:

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.
MISSIONS
Congregation of the Mission
Via dei Capasso, 30
00164 ROMA
ITALY

3. It is, of course, helpful to know the language beforehand, but it is not absolutely necessary. A period of cultural and language training will be provided for the missionaries. Details will vary according to the particular mission.

4. While we have decided that no automatic age cut-off would be established, it is surely necessary that the missionary have reasonably good health.

5. Confreres who volunteer, by sending a letter to the Superior General, should inform the Visitor that they have done so.

6. Your letter should give some background about your person, your ministerial experience, and your training. It should also express any particular interests that you have, such as what mission you would like to take part in.

7. Even if you have already written in the past, please do not hesitate to contact me again.

To the members of the Congregation of the Mission

My very dear Confreres,

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

Joseph receives little attention these days, even in Advent. I have surely been slow to think about him myself, having turned, when I wrote past Advent letters, first to Mary the Mother of Jesus, then to John the Baptist, and last year to Isaiah. But if we read Matthew's infancy narrative carefully (this year, in the A cycle of readings, we shall hear it proclaimed on the Sundays of Advent and Christmas), Joseph stands right beside Mary at the center of the stage. In fact, his is the major role in Matthew's story.

We know very little about the historical Joseph. His beginning and his end are shrouded in obscurity. The gospel stories about him are a theological portrait, painted with delicate shadings, so that we, the readers, might learn from Joseph how to walk with God. In the light of the New Testament, let me share with you, as an Advent reflection, some thoughts about this great man, whom Mary chose to accompany her through life.

First of all, he knew how to listen to God's word. Matthew tells us of Joseph's four dreams (I sometimes wish mine were as clear as his!). Through these dreams, God speaks to Joseph at critical moments in the history of Jesus. In each instance, Joseph responds immediately and does what God asks. When the angel tells Joseph not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife, as soon as Joseph awakes he does as the angel of the Lord has directed him and receives her into his home (1:24). When the angel warns Joseph to take the child and his mother and flee into Egypt because Herod is seeking to kill Jesus, Joseph gets up and leaves that very night (2:14). When after the death of Herod the angel directs Joseph to set out for Israel, he departs immediately (2:21). When he is warned in a dream not to go to Judea, he changes his route right away and settles in Galilee (2:22). In his faithful response to God's commands, Matthew's Joseph parallels Luke's Mary. Both know how to "listen to the word of God and act upon it" (Lk 8:21).

Secondly, it is clear in Matthew's gospel that Joseph stands, with eager expectation, at the threshold of transcendence. From the darkness of his own limited understanding, he is continually peering into the mystery of God. Surely he cannot fathom the virginal conception of Jesus that the angel announces, but as a "just man" (1:21) he tempers the strict observance of the law with loving compassion and bows in reverence to God's incomprehensible ways. Surely he does not understand how this child, who seems like any other, could be "God with us" (1:23), but he abandons himself, in faith, to the task of loving the child and educating him. There is something very beautiful about Joseph's contact with the transcendent mystery of God. He was not a monk. He did not live a life cut off from ordinary daily contacts with the world. In fact, he was a carpenter (Mt 14:55), a neighborhood craftsman who did woodwork and made furniture, and he raised

his son in the same trade (Mk 6:3). Yet in the midst of his daily manual labor and family life, Joseph was surrounded by the mystery of God and he penetrated it with faith. He trusted in God's daily providence. He believed in God's revealing word. When he read the signs of God's will, he rushed to put them into practice.

For those who live in the Vincentian tradition, Joseph has much to say during this Advent time. Let me offer two Advent suggestions that flow from the life of this deeply believing man.

1. Could not all of us try to renew our love for the word of God this Advent. For Joseph, as for Mary his wife, the word of God is paramount. This word, as St. Vincent puts it (CR II, 1), "never fails." The clearest thing about Joseph in the gospels is that he was always listening for what God wanted to tell him and, once he knew it, he put it into practice. Abelly says a similar thing about St. Vincent: "He seemed to suck meaning from passages of the scriptures as a baby sucks milk from its mother. And he extracted the core and substance from the scriptures so as to be strengthened and have his soul nourished by them.... And he did this in such a way that in all his words and actions he appeared to be filled with Jesus Christ" (Abelly, Book III, 72-73). Is the word of God really central for us, as it was for Joseph and for St. Vincent? Is it water that gives us life, as Isaiah puts it (55:10-11), when our hearts and minds are dry? Is it a hammer for us, as Jeremiah puts it (23:29), when we are complacent, too set to budge? Is it food that is sweeter than honey, as the psalmist puts it (Ps 19:11), when we are hungering to know what God is asking for us? Is it a two-edged sword, as the author of Hebrews puts it (4:12), so that when we preach to others, it cuts into us too?

2. With Matthew's Joseph, I want to urge you this Advent to gaze into the mystery of God with courage. I say "with courage," because it is no easier for us to believe than it was for Joseph. Many of the outward signs that he saw seemed to contradict the promises that God was making to him. It is often that way for those who serve the poor. While there are many joyful moments in our ministry, there are also dark, fearful ones. The beatitudes tell us "happy are the poor," but we often see them oppressed and beaten down by injustice, as in Mozambique, Albania, and many other places. The word of God says that "the meek shall possess the land," but we often witness violent, even fanatical, strife that takes the lives of countless innocent non-combatants, as is occurring in ex-Yugoslavia and Rwanda. The gospels tell us that "those who are persecuted for justice sake will inherit the kingdom of God," but we often observe, as in China, that persecution is long, painful, and discouraging. Joseph knew similar experiences. He knew the pain and embarrassment of poverty when there was no room in the inn and he had to place his infant child in a manger. He witnessed violence when Herod unleashed his wrath against children in Bethlehem. He felt persecution, when he fled to Egypt with Mary and Jesus, and later to Nazareth. Yet he believed. He believed that God walked with him, that God is faithful to promises, that God is alive, that we can find God not only in the light but also in the darkness. He lived on the edge of mystery and was not afraid to gaze into it with courage in order to find God.

Advent is upon us. Imagine how Joseph felt as the birth of his mysterious son approached: puzzled, excited, awed. Yet, in his puzzlement, this carpenter of modest

means had enormous resources. The word of God was his strength. Deep faith was his light in the darkness. It enabled him to see the presence of God even where suffering, privation, and violence appeared to reign.

If love for God's word and lively, penetrating faith were indispensable tools for Joseph the carpenter, they are likewise so for all of us missionaries.

I pray that this Christmas time will bring you abundant peace and joy in the Lord.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.
Superior General

Appointments and confirmations by the Superior General

DATE	NAME	OFFICE	PROVINCE
10/07/95	Miguel García Padilla	Visitor (1st mandate)	Barcelona
26/07/95	Antonio Elduayen	Director D.C. (2nd mandate)	Chile
26/07/95	Celestino Fernández	Director D.C. (2nd mandate)	Granada
26/07/95	Naoum Atallah	Director D.C. (2nd mandate)	Near East
18/08/95	Jesús Arellano	Director D.C. (2nd mandate)	Pamplona

THE LAITY AND M. VINCENT

*by J-P Renouard, C.M.
International Center
of Formation, Paris*

When M. Vincent arrives in Paris in 1608 a seething shakes the Church of France from the fall-out of the Council of Trent. Facing the Protestant Reformation which pleads for an integral priesthood of all the baptized, Catholic leaders are tempted to push for the ministerial priesthood. But by their action, men and women restore the balance of this reaction to the Catholic Reformation. For example, pious lay persons assiduously frequent the Salon of “la belle Acarie”, Blessed Marie of the Incarnation, her own daughters and Charlotte de Gondi, Marchioness of Maignelay, Mme Jourdain, the Princess of Longueville, Mme Billard, Michel de Marillac, Mme Sainte Beuve, Mme de Breaute. At the Salon, Vincent de Paul meets these people of merit and also encounters his teachers: Benoit de Canfield, Andre Duval, Pierre de Berulle and Francis de Sales...

With them, Vincent is going to hold a foremost place in the religious renewal of the seventeenth century. He encourages the apostolic spirit of his time by introducing the Laity as a source of evangelization and other services to the poor of the Church of France. Thus he remains a model and beacon for us today.

Vincent acts **thanks to the laity and with them.**

Vincent **arouses the responsibility of the Laity for the service of the poor.**

In so doing, he brings into play **an intuition**, peculiarly his own which we shall try to make clear.

I. AN ACTION THANKS TO AND WITH THE LAITY

Origins

Too often we forget. It is the Laity, and particularly women, who encourage the still young man, Vincent de Paul, when he takes the sharp turn in his life as a priest. “I believe that the Pope is not as happy as a pastor in the midst of such a good-hearted people.” This Clichy experience becomes the priestly and missionary mold his soul will always long for. He will speak of it with warmth forty years later. For the time being he obeys M. de Berulle who offers him entre to high society. He becomes the private tutor of the de Gondi

children, whose father is General of the Galleys of France, and whose mother entrusts to him the care of her soul.

In January 1617 he is at Gannes, thirteen kilometers from the Chateau at Folleville. A dying peasant pours out his soul to him and is deeply grateful for having avoided damnation. The saintly woman is so astonished that she urges Vincent to capitalize on the event. On the very next day, at Folleville, our saint admits what he has done and seeks help from the Jesuit fathers at Amiens. Quite obviously nothing could have happened without Mme de Gondi's persuasive help. She is indeed the prime cause of discovering the urgent need of missionary activity needed for the spiritual distress of her peasants.

M. Vincent is doing a bit of missionary work everywhere in the de Gondi estates. At Chatillon-les-Dombes, a parish suggested by de Berulle, Vincent is stirred by another happening: feminine goodwill is brought into action on a Sunday by the needs of a sick family. On the next day, eight women put their heads together and formed an organization. On 23 August St. Vincent gave them their first rule. Chatillon is "the first place where the 'Charity' was established". Following this place, Vincentian in the highest sense of the word, the "Charities" have not ceased to develop, based on the definitive Rule drawn up by M. Vincent and given to the first Ladies of Charity in the Chapel of the hospital of Chatillon on 8 December 1617, shortly before he takes final leave of his parish on Christmas Eve. For the second time it is women, lay women - with the support of their husbands - who determine St. Vincent's action.

The two pillars of M. Vincent's activity owe their existence to lay persons. In our day it is well to emphasize and highlight this. Surely he will one day say to the ladies of Paris while in the mood for confidences and perhaps a bit of boasting: "For 800 years or thereabouts women have not held public office in the church; there were some in the past called deaconesses; now look: Providence speaks to some of you today to make up for what the poor sick at the Hotel Dieu need". Exaggeration or prophecy?

From now on the journey is pursued with relentless logic: it is necessary to be sent, to announce the Good News, free consciences, join them solidly to Christ, and to organize "Charities" as the purpose of Mission, because hearts can adhere to Jesus only if they be somewhat freed from earthly needs - "Mission and Charity" are inseparable from Vincentian thought and action. What is at stake cannot exist without the laity.

Women and Men

Here we witness the willingness of Villepreux (in 1618) with, notably, Jean Coqueret, doctor of theology, Messrs. Berger and Gontiere, counselor clerks of the Parlement, ready to roll up their sleeves to help the women of the parish; those of Joigny (1618), where two nurses are active; those of

Montmirail (1618); those of Folleville, Paillart and Serevillers (1620) where men's "Charities" are organized. At Joigny and Montmirail, where - as we know - St. Vincent tries without success to join the women's and men's groups. However, the attempt to form a mixed group of "Charities" will succeed at Macon (1621) where all the notables of the city will mobilize against extreme poverty with an eye to help the 300 poor of the town, even though this resulted in the great confinement of the poor. It is not fitting to wipe out these collaborative efforts or to be utopian. For the time being, he is declaring war on misery and he does know how to get help.

The Ladies of Charity

St. Vincent also knows, for about two years, another woman of rank: Louise de Marillac. To help her get her mind off herself, he quickly assigns her as "inspectrix" of the "Charities", which are always founded at the close of each mission. In her we find a pious woman, molded through prayer and the trials concomitant with the opening of a "Charity". She travels through the dioceses of Paris, Beauvais, Soissons, Meaux, Chalons and Chartres. She renders an account of her visits to M. Vincent, whose time is absorbed by the Missions.

In 1629 she insists on the "Charity" being instituted in St. Savior, her own parish. This is the first Parisian breakthrough. St. Vincent charges across the frontier of the great city and its countryside to attack its destitution. In 1631 four other Parisian parishes will have their "Charities" - St. Nicolas, St. Eustache, St. Benoit and St. Sulpice.

Louise federates the fine volunteers. The impetus of charity, aroused by Vincent de Paul, win over the parishes of Paris - Marchionesses, countesses, duchesses and even princesses, all want to enter the ranks of the Ladies of Charity. Evangelical emulation, very much in the spirit of the Catholic Reformation, they discover poverty and those who are burdened by it. Filled with generosity, they open their purses.

Father Coste enumerates some forty women and ladies of rank who cooperate in M. Vincent's work, and even increase it tenfold by their own spirited and material involvement. (GSGS, I, ch. XII, p. 271)

Gaston PARTURIER attempted a significant classification:

"The nobility rose one above another in all degrees of the aristocracy:

Baronesses de Renty and de Mirepoix;

Countesses de Brienne, de Breguelonne,

Marchionesses de Laval, Viean, de Pienne, de Palaiseau,

Duchesses de Sully, de Veneuil, de Lude.

The military nobility was represented notably by the wife of Field Marshall Schomberg.

The nobility recruited from the legal profession included the Presidents de Nesmond, Tubeuf, de Brou, Amelot, de Mauperou du Sault.”

A few famous names

To honor their memory let us cite: Mme Goussault, the president, Mlle du Fay, cousin of Mlle Legras and a choice spirit, Mme de Lamoignon, “the mother of the poor”, and her daughter Madelein, the duchess d’Aiguillon, great donor and founder, Marie de Maupeou, specialist in medicine, the Princess de Conde, the Duchess de Nemours, Marie Louise de Gonzague and Queen Anne of Austria, and so many more - more than forty - as noted by Pierre Coste.

The “foundresses” in the real sense of the term, deserve a place apart: Mme de Miramion and the “Holy Family”, Mme de Villeneuve and the “Daughters of the Cross”, Mme de Pollailon and the “Daughters of Providence”. They expand Vincentian charity.

Other Associates of M. Vincent

Well known is the fact, as Bernard Koch points out, that St. Vincent belonged to the **Compagnie du Saint Sacrement**. Founded in 1629 by the Duke de Ventadour, Henri de Levis and the Jesuit Suffren, it brings together pious persons of high rank, as well as tradesmen and craftsmen. The goal of the secret association is entirely devotional and evangelical activity. We know it does much for the poor and St. Vincent could not do other than support it and...make use of it! Let us cite among the famous laymen of this **Compagnie**: the Prince de Conti, the Duke de Liancourt, the Baron de Renty, Elie Laisne de la Marguierie, Guillaume de Lamoignon.

M. Vincent will think up temporary networks closely connected to the **Compagnie** to help the noble Lorraine or the Catholic Irish.

He organizes his own collection network to transport supplies and funds. He gives a choice place in this service to the brothers of his Congregation, such as Matthew Regnard or John Parre. In 1650 we find seven brothers involved in this work!

How can we fail to note the valuable role played by Charles Maignart de Bernieres (1616-1662), treasurer of the **Compagnie du Saint Sacrement**,

former master of petitions and completely dedicated to the poor, who becomes the editor of “**Relations**”, sort of a periodical designed to encourage the rich to donate funds. Each issue consists of eight pages. About 400 are printed, as shown by the account book of M. De Bernieres. The “**Relations**” begin, following the meeting of the Ladies of Charity in July 1650. It seems the ladies cooperated with the **Compagnie du Saint Sacrement** as Pierre Coste comes close to proving in his **Grand Saint du Grand Siecle**. This seems like a modern and helpful way to assist provinces that have suffered a disaster.

He also makes use of the Jesuits and their **Congregations de Messieurs**, notable former students of theirs, who live in prayer, moral rigor and involvement.

We must also recall the influence St. Vincent has over the life of the church in France for the nine years he is a member of the **Council of Conscience**. He is consulted on doctrine, gives authentic advice on episcopal nominations, even feeling obligated to intervene politically while running the risk of displeasing the powers-that-be.

II. AN ACTION FOR THE SERVICE OF THE POOR

The Role of St. Vincent

From the establishment of the “Charities” it is clear that St. Vincent becomes through them, the great “Animator” of the laity. He inspires them with sacred fire! He communicates the **zeal** which is the mover of his missionary and charitable activity. He lives by his **passion** for the poor. They are constantly present at his foundations and with his acquaintances.

How, for example, does he deal with the ladies? As an animator and a responsible leader, Gaston Parturier speaks without exaggeration of the “court of M. Vincent”. Today, the word is too ambiguous! The hard core is formed by “the group of 14”, sort of a governing body under the presidency of the “Director for life” who is M. Vincent and with a staff usually united around Louise de Marillac. St. Vincent federates these volunteers. In the reports of the meetings still available to us we observe his diplomacy, his politeness shaded with respect, his capacity to instill trust, his way of leaving the initiative and especially his tendency to exhort, to inspire with energy; for example:

“Now then, ladies, compassion and charity have made you adopt these small creatures for your children; you have been their mothers according to grace since their mothers according to nature abandoned them; see now if you also want to abandon

them. Stop being their mothers to become now their judges; their life and their death are in your hands; I'm going to take the opinions and the votes; it is time to pronounce their judgment and to know if you no longer want to have mercy for them. They will continue to live if you continue to take charitable care of them; and on the contrary they will certainly die and perish if you abandon them; experience does not permit you to doubt it." (XIII 801)

There are those who questioned, and not without malice, whether M. Vincent was trying to charm or be cunning with these ladies. This is not at all impertinent. St. Vincent had a special oratorical talent. His successes at Folleville and Chatillon owe a great deal to his eloquence. But he captivates by his way of life, his conviction, his personal aura, his sensitivity, his poise and his judgment. In a world steeped in duplicity, he brings a simple and fresh spirit. It is true. And the ladies of the nobility accustomed to the tricks and the wiles of the Court are not mistaken: his testimony sounds just and they are magnetized by his uncommon personality. Above all his spirituality. He lives his faith and communicates it forcefully and authentically.

The Spirit of Work

No element essential for a pastoral of today's Church is lacking in the organization of the "Charities". In the Rule produced in December 1617, at Chatillon, can be found all the constitutive elements of every pastoral of the Church:

Working together is clearly stressed as if M. Vincent foresaw difficulties in the rule of mixed "Charity" groups, like that of Joigny in 1621:

"It will be composed of men, women and girls, of which the latter shall be admitted only with the consent of their husbands, fathers and mothers. The men will take care of the able-bodied and the crippled, and the women of only the sick. The poor sick will be received into the bosom of the association by the prioress, on the recommendation of the rector and assistants" (XIII, 446, 449).

Note also this detail, which does not lack charm, unless it be inappropriate:

"And because the association of men and that of women is but one association, having the same patron, the same goal and the same spiritual exercise, and because only the ministry is divided, the care of the able-bodied belonging to the men and that of the sick belonging to the women, and because our Lord does not receive less glory from the ministry of the women than that of the

men, even if it seems that the care of the sick is preferable to that of the healthy, for that reason the servants of the poor will have equal care in the conservation and augmentation of the association of women as of their own; and for this purpose will put a fourth of their annual revenue, and more, if it is necessary, in the hands of the first assistant, who keeps the women's money, in case the revenue from the collections which the women take up is not sufficient; which can be known by means of the rector, as being the superior of both associations. And in order that the aforesaid directors know the state of affairs of the women's association, they will assist in the rendering of their accounts." (XIII, 455)

Charity unites them, brings them together and makes them live almost like a family, attentive to the joys and sorrows of each other. (XIII, 517 for example)

Integral Development is really essential for M. Vincent, as in this same **Rule** of Joigny:

"The directors of the association will put the poor children in a trade as soon as they will be of suitable age. They will distribute weekly to the poor, the crippled and the old who cannot work, what will be necessary for them to live; and as regards those who earn only a part of what they need, the association will supply the rest." (XIII, 447)

The reports on the state of the works are also very eloquent.

If the words seem obsolete (and how would they not be?), they do convey an ever-present meaning: "pass through the bodies to reach the souls", "the claim to announce the Good News is permitted only to people who are alert":

"Oh, ladies, how you must thank God for the attention that he had you give to the bodily needs of those poor sick people; for the assistance of their bodies has produced this effect of grace, of making you think of their salvation, at such an opportune time, that most others never have to prepare themselves for death; and those who have just recovered from an illness would hardly think of changing their lives without the good arrangements where we try to put them." (XIII, 804-& July 1, 1657)

The **Archives de la Mission** have preserved for us a non-localized **Rule** which deals with a factory for young boys with precise instructions for the almoner, the master craftsman, the apprentices themselves and the daily routine (XIII, 507-510).

The report to the **Bishop** expresses what is set up with the pastor. All the rules stipulate that the establishment and the election are made in the presence of the pastor and we note that the approval of the diocesan bishop of the place is needed like the one Madame de Gondi sought from the **Archbishop of Sims** for the parish of Joigny (XIII, 442sq), or from the **Bishop of Amiens** for the “Conferences” of Folleville, Paillart, Serevillers (XIII, 482-483). We even have the register of the capitular deliberations concerning the mixed “Charity” of Macon (XIII, 503-504).

As for **administration**, it is always there! St. Vincent does not leave this matter to anyone else! All is foreseen with minute detail. At the very outset, in December 1617 as Chatillon, he insists on the key positions: the administration of the temporal, the rendering of the accounts, the role of the pay-mistress, the prioress with her cost book, the contributions in the Church’s collecting-box, etc...(already!-XIII, 431-432). And in 1657, in his report on the state of the works (forty years later!) it is noted:

“M. Vincent then read before the assembly the state of the receipts and expenses. Since the last general assembly, that is to say for about a year, we had spent 5,000 pounds for the lunches for the poor sick of the **Hotel-Dieu** and received to this end 3,500 pounds. The deficit amounted thus to 1,500 pounds” (XIII,803).

And to speak plainly to these ladies: it is necessary to think over the problem!

Finally, **formation**. It is especially spiritual, for it is well stipulated, in all the rules, that the undertaking has also a personal finality. The first beneficiaries of the “Charities” are the members of the **conferences** themselves. M. Vincent foresees a monthly meeting and a reading of religious works each day for those who know how to read. Why? To put them in a position to catechize the poor! He who does not perceive this total dimension of St. Vincent curtails him seriously and relegates him to the poster “benefactors of humanity”!

Finally, last but not least: the restoring of the ministry of **women** in the Church. He dares to bring up the prohibition of St. Paul who denies women the right to speak in the church: that women be silent in the churches; he did not permit them to speak there. And in the first to Timothy, Ch.2: Meanwhile, I do not permit women to teach. The quote does not lack charm and humor!

The Maid Servants

These are the unknown, the outcast young women who have no stature in society, looked down upon as trash, not afraid to roll up their sleeves and empty the chamber pots. They do all the practical and difficult jobs. They are the ones who really do serve the poor, perhaps without enthusiasm, often with anger, at times conniving and joking with them.

The first persons called upon to assist the ladies of rank are their female and male servants. When a noble or a middle class woman decides to take care of the poor the whole household is conscripted; the servants must roll up their sleeves whether or not they like it.

As early as the **Rule** of Chatelaine we observe that some volunteers receive designated duties:

Moreover, the conference will choose two poor women of honest and devout lives, who will be called caretakers of the poor sick, because their duty will be to watch over those who will be alone and not able to move, and to serve them, according to the orders which the prioress will give them, by paying them decently according to their work, and in this way will be considered members of the aforesaid conference, will participate in the indulgences and attend the assemblies, without nevertheless having a deliberative voice.” (XIII,425) (same indication in XIII,441,179,515,530).

The mixed “**Charity**” of Joigny speaks of “an associate servant” remunerated and dispatched according to the needs (XIII,449, see also XIII,513).

Thus, and this fact merits great attention, service is the distinguishing feature of the “**Charities**”. Service is given in every way: by choice, by designation, either free or paid; but it is at the disposition of the sick or the dispossessed. It’s their needs which command and which finally are going to develop a spirit of service.

The Care of the Poor

The poor are always present in all the letters, rules and reports. They are the actors and the principal subjects of all this consultation and this systematic procedure of the activity the laity engaged by St. Vincent. They are the sick, needy, beggars, shamefaced, galley-slaves, prisoners, victims of wars, foundlings, able-bodied, invalids, the unfit or the fit to work...

Let us look at them with the eyes of the municipal magistrates of Rethel who write of their needs to the ladies of the “**Charity**” through the intervention of St. Vincent, to whom the letter is addressed, as was usually done:

“So many blessings received would give respite to our importunities; but the deplorable abandoning by fathers and mothers of their children, by husbands of their wives, girls standing dishonored, overwhelmed with misery, the tyrannical extortion of those who assume the right to levy the sustenance and taxes in unwarranted ways, the deportment of partisans who would gladly break the bones of the peasant in order to sell their marrow, added to this the highway robbery and universal disorders of the undisciplined soldiers, they have caused us such great compassion and such sensitive regrets, that we are obliged by law and necessity to have recourse to the continuation of your charities...” (XIII,829)

The Spirituality of Support

The poor cannot be separated from Christ. They are the way to him and the surest way of honoring him, of rejoining him. The strongest text at this level is taken from the **Report** on the state of the works of July 11, 1657. It is interesting that it is given to lay persons. Also it assures much help when we think that it could be received by the Daughters of Charity or the Missionaries with the same intensity:

“The third motive which you have to continue these holy works, is the honor which Our Lord draws from them. How is that? Because it is to honor Him by entering into His sentiments, to esteem them by doing what He did and by carrying out what He ordered. Now His greatest sentiments were for the care of the poor in order to cure them, console them, help them and advise them; that was His affection. And He Himself wanted to be born poor, receive poor in his company, serve the poor, put Himself in place of the poor, so far as to say the good and evil we do to the poor He will hold done to his divine person. What more tender love could He have shown to the poor! And what love, I ask of you, can we have for Him, if we do not love that which He has loved! The fact remains, my ladies, it is to love Him in the right way by loving the poor; it is to serve Him well by serving them well, it is to honor Him properly by imitating Him...” (XIII,811)

III. The Intuition of St. Vincent

St. Vincent's genius for bringing the laity into prominence in the charitable activity of the Church is so well demonstrated by the facts and their results that a **modest synthesis** is now in order.

1) For Vincent the Church continues Christ. She is Christ. But in his time, all men are Christians and thus the poor and the rich form the "Mystical Body" of Christ. It is impossible, thinks and says St. Vincent, not to share. All the disciples of Jesus Christ are bound by the same baptism and if the rich do not serve the poor they are but "christians in name". The ministry of "compassion and mercy" is typically Vincentian. The power of this ministry is found in Mt. 40,25: "...Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me".

The urgency of charity pushes him to organize and diffuse it throughout the Kingdom. Women, in particular, are best ambassadors of this charity because of their availability, their savoir-faire, their natural disposition to be in sympathy and a link with those who suffer bodily. Their sensitivity, as well as their capacity to give, draws them closer to the poor.

For it is necessary to give oneself, to consecrate oneself in some way to charity. The verb most often used by St. Vincent is "to give oneself". It is the gift which leads to service. The priority of the members of his institutions, including his priests, must be to serve. All receive a mandate to be the representatives of the goodness of God in favor of these who suffer.

Natural talent and service culminate in the Eucharist, "center of devotion and place of charity" par excellence. Place of perfection also, summoning all one's strength, because of one's baptism. We must die like Jesus Christ to live in Jesus Christ. Such is the burning obligation of everyone, the call to holiness: "all Christians are obliged by it". In Vincent's way of thinking, because of this there is no need of the cloister! Day after day one can sanctify oneself in normal events and even in the banality of material works or administration. God Himself looks after the world through His Providence! Who does not see the reality of such a life project?

2) The other point of emphasis of St. Vincent is the Announcement of Salvation. For it is a question of saving human kind and especially the poor. Two adverbs hammer out the rules in his institutions: "spiritually and corporally". We must, with all our strength, struggle against the miseries of poverty. Yet it is no less urgent to announce Jesus Christ. The preaching of the Gospel to the poor is the obsession of M. Vincent. In no case, does he want the poor to damn themselves and die of hunger. His great plan is the proclamation of the Good News, in the image of Christ the Evangelizer, in the synagogue of Nazareth (Luke 12, 49). To catechize is the responsibility of each lay person. The idea is to do it in a sort of natural way without being afraid to share in the lives of the people. To take part in their lives, we say today. It is necessary to spread the Gospel and to tell people that God loves them. Jesus himself came

“to set the earth on fire and how I wish it were already blazing” (Luke 12, 49). This divine fire must set ablaze and consume everything. A Vincentian maxim recaptures all that in a marvelous way: “It is not enough to love God if my neighbor doesn’t love him”. That is why each one is invited to live love daily, as a group, as a community. To live together having but one heart and one soul. Witnessing is more eloquent than any preaching! It is like an image of the “unity God” in the Trinity.

Passion of human kind, passion of God. Such is the Mission of the Laity in the time of St. Vincent as well as in our own time.

I would wish, in closing, to summarize the ideas of the Vincentian involvement with the Laity by this well known expression of St. Vincent de Paul:

“The Church is like a great harvest which needs laborers, but laborers who work. There is nothing more consistent with the Gospel than to amass insights and strengths for one’s soul through prayer, reading and solitude, and then to go and share this spiritual nourishment with women and men. This is to do as our Savior did, and after Him, His apostles. It is to join Martha’s duty to Mary’s. It is to imitate the dove, which is to digest half the food it has caught and then, with its beak, to nourish its little ones. That is how we should do, that is how we must witness to God, by our works, that we love Him. All our work is in action” (XI,41).

NOTES

1. M-D Poinssenet - “France religieuse au XVIIeme siecle” - Casterman 1952
2. The XIIIth volume of the texts of M. Vincent which Pierre Coste has preserved for us of the reglements de charites mixtes. Too often we forget them!
3. Elizabeth Charpy “Petite vie de Louise de Marillac” - DDB 1993
4. Gaston Parturier, Ancien interne des Hopitaux de Paris, Professeur a la faculte libre de medecine de Lille “Saint Vincent de Paul et les dames de son temps” - edition Cartier- Lyon 1945

5. Bernard Koch "Le tissi des relations de Saint Vincent" - Session europeenne 1993 - Polycopie
6. Alain Talon "La Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement" - Cerf 1990
7. GSGS II, pp 625sq
8. For example: La Compagnie des dames de la Charite de l'Hotel-Dieu, des quelles vous etes des plus ferventes" (XIII,763). To Madame de Nemours in regard to perseverance: "Madame, has some good way come to mind?" (understood: for the maintenance of the Compagnie des Dames de la Charite - (XIII,819).
9. In 1657, we even see that St. Vincent must moderate their involvement because they are doing too much; they "go twice a day to the Hotel-Dieu" to visit the sick, console, instruct. There is also the "assistance of the frontiers and the ruined provinces": "We constitute virtue where it isn't: there can't be too much of it"...(XIII,817) and to enumerate as if to put on the brake: "Here is the light lunch and instruction of the poor of l'Hotel-Dieu, the food and education of the foundlings, the care of providing for the corporal needs of criminals condemned to the galleys, the assistance of the frontiers and the ruined provinces, contributions to the Missions of the East, North and South" (XII,818).
10. Beware of the too fundamentalist reading of the famous "more" invented by M. Anouilh. St. Vincent says here: "Don't presume to be able to do more" (XIII,818)! We note his peasant sense of balance and human wisdom. He is in keeping with the popular, common sense expression: "grasp all, lose all" (XII,816). These pages can always be brought up-to-date and taken up with profit.

(John O'M. Sharpe, C.M., translator)

THE VINCENTIAN FAMILY, A CONTINUAL RENEWAL.

by José-María Román, C.M.

The first problem which arises when trying, however briefly, to describe the Vincentian Family, is to set proper limits to the object of this study. What does Vincentian Family mean? Who are its members? These questions can be answered in a broad sense, or in a restricted sense. The Vincentian tree has continued to give birth, down the years, to so great and so varied branches, that it is very difficult to discriminate between them so as to include some and exclude others.

All those institutions which in a direct or indirect way found their inspiration in St. Vincent at the time of fixing their aims and defining their spiritual character; all these can be called branches of the Vincentian Family, in a broad sense. Some examples of this broad sense would be: the Religious of St. Vincent de Paul of John, the Prevost, one of the first members of the Conferences; the Brothers and Sisters of St. Joseph, founded in Mexico by Father Joseph Vilaseca, C.M.; the little Sisters of the Cross, founded by Sister Angela of the Cross, D.C.; also more than fifty Religious Congregations of men and women, during the last two centuries founded under the direct or indirect inspiration of the Saint of Charity. One feels tempted to say that, in this broad sense, the Vincentian Family has no limits.

In the strict sense, the Vincentian Family is confined to those Congregations and Associations which owe their birth to the direct initiative of St. Vincent, or to one of his successors, or which have explicitly declared their wish to regard themselves as spiritual descendants of St. Vincent.

Here we make a distinction between Congregations or Communities on the one hand, and lay Associations on the other. In this sense, the Vincentian Family is comprised of the Congregation of the Mission, the Company of the Daughters of Charity, the Association of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul (today A.I.C.), the Association of the Children of Mary (today Marian Vincentian Youth), the Association of the Miraculous Medal, and another pair of Associations born in the 19th Century, by their title, their origins and the express will of their Founders; The Society of St. Vincent de Paul, and the Confraternities.

In this essay, I am going to limit myself to tracing briefly the historical character of the lay Associations which belong to the Vincentian Family in the

strict sense, and to show the Vincentian roots common to all of them, and how that character is the product of a continuous renewal, and which in every age has given rise to the initiative which has made the ancient Vincentian tree to bud forth with new and unexpected vigour.

I. The Origins of the Vincentian Laity

The first important observation which ought to be made about the origins of the Vincentian Family is that initially it was born as a lay association. Actually, the first formally created institution by St. Vincent de Paul was the Confraternities of Charity. This event took place in Chatillon on the 8th of December, 1617. However, eight months previously, the 25th of January of the same year, Vincent had preached, in Folleville, what he called the first sermon of the Mission, and which he always considered as the beginning of the Congregation of the Mission. But, in fact, on that day he did not find anything. He simply discovered his vocation, that is, the way by which, in the future, his Apostolic work had to develop. The formal Foundation of the Congregation would not take place until eight years later, on the 17th of April 1625, by means of a contract signed by him with the de Gondi family. On the contrary, the preparation and establishment of the Confraternities of Charity took place much more speedily. The story is well known, but perhaps it would be good to repeat it so as to understand the essential features which from the beginning formed the spirit of Vincentian Action. Let us retell it in the words of St. Vincent himself:

"When I was living near Lyons, in a small town to which Providence had called me to act as parish priest," he said to the Daughters of Charity one day, "on a certain Sunday just as I was vesting to say Mass, a person came to tell me that, in an isolated house a quarter of a league away, the whole family lay ill, so that not a single one of them could come to the assistance of the others, and they were in such dire straits as cannot be expressed. It moved me to the depths of my heart. I did not fail to speak feelingly about them during the sermon, and God, touching the hearts of those who were listening, caused them all to be moved to compassion for the poor afflicted people.

"After dinner, a meeting was held in the house of a good lady in the town to see what help could be given and every single one of those present was quite prepared to go and see them, to console them by talking to them and to help them to the best of their ability."

"After Vespers, I took a good, honest man, a native of the town, as my companion and we walked along the road together to go and pay them a visit. We passed on the road some women who had gone in front of us, and a little farther on, we met others returning. And as it was Summer and the weather was very hot, these good women were sitting down by the road to rest and refresh themselves. And in fact my Daughters, there were so many of them that you would have said it was a regular procession.

"When I arrived, I visited the sick and went to look for the Blessed Sacrament for those who were in most urgent need, but not in the Parish Church, because it was not a parish, but depended on a Chapter of which I was the Prior. So then after hearing their Confessions and giving them Holy Communion, the question arose as to how we could help them in their need. I suggested to all these dear, good people whose charity had induced them to visit the family, that they should take it in turn, day by day, to cook for them, and not only for them but also for other cases which might arise. That was the first place in which the Charity was established."[fo1]

The facts thus narrated by St. Vincent, according to my calculations, took place on Sunday, 20th of August 1617. Three days later, 23rd August, a certificate of the formation of a confraternity was sealed. More exactly it was *"a Corporation which in time could be raised up as a confraternity, with its own rules, subject to the approval of the Archbishop, to whom it would be submissive totally."*[fo2] After three months, on 24th of November, the new association and its rules were approved by the Archbishop of Lyons and fifteen days later, on the 8th of December 1617, it was formally erected as the First Confraternity of Charity, with the election of its Officers and other matters connected with the Rules.

Let us now see the distinctive features of the first Vincentian foundation which can help us to understand its spirit as it was called in the 17th century, or its style as we might call it today.

Above all, we have to stress the ecclesial character of the association. It was born within the Church, and as a service of the Church. Hence its submission to the authority of the Bishop.

But with no less emphasis we must point out that the association was born or established with a determined lay vocation although, because of the restrictions of the times, it would have as procurator, some pious and devout ecclesiastic, ordinarily the parish priest of the place, but chosen by the members

and replaceable by them; *"They shall elect an ecclesiastic who will be called rector or spiritual father of the said association, to carry out his duties as rector for as long as the members think suitable."*[fo3]

The first association, that of Châtillon, was exclusively made up of virtuous women, both married and single, with the consent of their families; only as regards administrative affairs (another tribute to the customs of the times) it was established that, as it was not deemed proper to administer financial affairs alone, they should elect a good ecclesiastic, or a pious and devout layman as procurator, devoted to the welfare of the poor and not overburdened with temporal matters, who will be considered as a member of the said Confraternity.[fo4] Later, having learned from experience, St. Vincent came to the conclusion that not only were women not inferior to men in administration affairs, but that they far surpassed them; *"The men and women together do not agree on matters of administration; the men want to take charge of everything, and the women will not accept this. The Charities of Joigny and Montmirail were governed on the lines of both sexes, the men took charge of the healthy poor, and the women cared for the sick poor but as they had a common fund, it was necessary to let the men leave. And I can give this testimony in favour of women, that there can be nothing to say against their administration, as they are. most careful and reliable."*[fo5]

Later foundations: Montmirail[fo6], Joigny[fo7], Mâcon[fo8], Courboin[fo9], Montreuil[fo10], and many others[fo11] continued this custom of men and women together. They established an order of sharing the works; the men were to care for the healthy poor, while the women took care of the sick. But still it can be said that St. Vincent showed a certain preference for the women, *"since Our Lord did not receive less glory from the ministry of the women than that of the men during his life on earth, and he himself considered the work for the sick to be preferable to that for the healthy. Therefore the servants of the poor should have the same interest in the preservation and increase of the association of women as of the men."*[fo12] With the passage of time the mixed confraternities and those of men only were losing their vigour, and after the death of the founder, they ceased to exist.

Another distinctive feature of the association is the simultaneous preoccupation for both the material and the spiritual welfare of the poor being assisted by it. *"Two ends are set before you; to assist the body and the soul; the body by providing food and care, and the soul by preparing the dying to die well, and those who recover to live a truly Christian life."*[fo13] Both of the above services are to be carried out by the members of the association personally. St. Vincent did not want a mere mercenary service nor an economic collaboration. He set it down in the rule: *"The sisters of the Confraternity, on*

the day agreed, will service the sick poor, bringing the food and drink to them as prepared".[fo14] He insists that the normal way to do this was by the visit to the house of the sick. "These good pious women undertake to visit and serve the sick poor, and do all this on a purely voluntary basis".[fo15]

Another Vincentian preoccupation, which was in stark contrast to the mentality of the times, was the almost universal illiteracy of women. The members of the Association were to undertake the instruction of little girls. In the rules of the Confraternity of Neufchatel we read: "*Besides the exercises already mentioned the officers of the Charity will depute one or two women or young girls of the Confraternity of Mercy to instruct the little girls of the village and the neighbourhood, who will be obliged to teach the poor without recompense except that which they can hope for from the goodness of God, and in case there is no suitable person in the Confraternity, the officers shall make every effort to engage some externs to undertake so important a work for the glory of God and the salvation of souls in the full confidence that they will receive a magnificent recompense in this world and in the next, for the service they will have rendered to God both in the sick poor as in the education of these little girls*".[fo16]

In a similar way, the young poor boys are to be instructed in a trade or craft so that they will be enabled to earn a living. "The directors of the association will set the young poor boys to work in some office as soon as they are old enough for it".[fo17] While being trained they can help to provide funds for the Association and when fully qualified they can set out to earn a living for themselves.[fo18]

Let us also notice that the foundation of the Confraternities obeys the Vincentian conviction that in the Church of that time, apart from individual charitable persons, there was no organisation of charity. The poor "at times had to suffer much more from lack of order and organisation than from lack of charitable persons. But, as it could be feared that after beginning a good work it could collapse in a short time, if for its maintenance there was no union and spiritual bonding, it was determined to unite the Confraternities into a corporation".[fo19] For this purpose the number of members in each Confraternity should not be in excess of twenty members. [fo20]

Likewise a characteristic of this first Vincentian Association was the preoccupation for the spiritual formation of the members. At least once a month they should meet to listen to a "*brief exhortation with a view to the spiritual progress of the whole Company and to the conservation and prosperity of the Confraternity...*". The saint also adds "that it is supremely useful for all communities consecrated to God that they meet from time to time in a

particular place in order to discuss their spiritual progress".[fo21] Do we find in these words the seed of what the Annual Conferences will be in the years ahead?

Finally, it is noteworthy that St. Vincent had a determined interest that the Associations of Charity would depend organically on his main foundation, the Congregation of the Mission. In the Papal Bull of approbation, it is laid down that one of the ministries of the Missioners was the foundation of the Confraternities: "In the places where they carry out the functions of catechesis and preaching, they will take steps to found, with the approval of the Bishop, the Confraternities of Charity as a help for the sick poor[fo22]. And in the Common Rules of the Congregation itself, he lays down the duty on the missionaries "to establish the Confraternities of Charity"[fo23] and to place "the greatest emphasis on founding and visiting the Confraternity of Charity". [fo24]

The Charities spread a lot even during St. Vincent's lifetime. Vincentian documents make reference to about sixty parochial Charities. There were far more than that. A veritable network of Charities covered almost the whole of France. Abelly, the saint's first biographer, says that "*they are now found in so many places that no one knows their number*".[fo25]

We also know that some of them failed to function properly.[fo26] This fact and the increasing spread of the Confraternities obliged St. Vincent to face up the problem of how to coordinate them and watch over the good spirit of each of them. He did not however have the good fortune to set up a centralised organisation, something like what we would call a National Council. He confined himself to sending visitors to the different local Confraternities to oversee their progress. For this work he chose Ladies of the Paris Charities, and in particular his principal collaborator, Louise de Marillac.[fo27]

On the contrary, what he did was to create a higher class of the charity, which would take charge of problems on the wider circuit, in contrast to the merely parish charities. This was the role represented by the Association of the Ladies of Charity of the Hotel Dieu, who little by little, took on the management and the handling of practical details in the running of all the Vincentian enterprises: the galley slaves, the abandoned babies, the North-African captives, the foreign missions, the regions devastated by the wars... This Association and not the Confraternities of Charity, which St. Vincent normally called by the simple name of the Charities, was the Association of the real Ladies of Charity.[fo28]

The Confraternities and the Ladies of Charity were not the only lay enterprises undertaken by St. Vincent. Linked to them must be placed other

associations of a more ephemeral nature; the one made up of a group of the nobility in which were such men as the Duke of Liancourt, the Count of Brienne, the Marquess of Fontenoy, and especially, Baron Gaston de Renty. The object of the association was to assist the nobles of Lorraine ruined by the wars. From it they received, in a discreet manner, from their French colleagues, the help they needed and which their condition prevented them from seeking publicly. Years later he used the same means to assist British and Irish nobles fleeing from the persecutions of Cromwell. [fo29]

From this brief survey of the origins of the lay charitable associations founded by St. Vincent, it is true to say that the diverse branches of the Vincentian Family find their source or roots in the personal activity of the saint. All was prefigured in it. The passage of time will go on giving birth to new types of organisation, to new initiatives, but all of them will receive their life-giving sap from the tree planted by St. Vincent.

We lack sufficient data to follow the evolution of these associations, and in particular, of the Confraternities of Charity, during the century and a half following the death of St Vincent up to the French Revolution. We do know that they continued to be founded systematically in the missions preached by the missionaries of the Vincentians in France and in other European countries like Italy and Poland. It is hard to understand why they were not founded in Spain in spite of the fact that the Congregation of the Mission itself was founded there in 1704.

II. The Rebirth of the Vincentian Laity in the 19th Century

Providential Events

The French Revolution brought about the total suppression of the great system of public assistance invented and set in motion by St. Vincent. Nothing remained in place. The Confraternities, like all the ecclesiastic institutions which did not submit to the schismatic revolutionary purpose, were suppressed and their goods appropriated. When the Restoration came, the splendid flowering of Vincentian Charity was reduced to ashes. But then, it began to produce a rebirth of itself which allows us to describe the history of the Vincentian Family as a continuous renewal. The years between 1830 and 1840 constitute a period which could be described as simply astonishing.

As I understand it, at the base of this rebirth one must acknowledge two events; one planned by men, and the other by Divine Providence.

The one planned by men was the translation of the relics of St. Vincent to the new mother-house of the Congregation of the Mission recently restored, which took place on the 25th of April 1830. The Archbishop of Paris accompanied by a numerous representation of French bishops, the King, Charles X, and the whole Royal Family came to venerate the remains of the humble Founder of the Mission. The Vincentians and the Daughters of Charity interpreted it as the return of the founder to the bosom of his family. With his presence, the restoration of the two communities was finally accomplished. St. Vincent became the fashion, if such an expression is fitting, and the numerous biographies of the saint published during those years, as well as other things, bear witness to this fact.

The providential event was the Apparitions of the Miraculous Medal which took place between July and November of the same year. The Vincentian Family recovered the awareness that their vocation was still alive and cherished by God. Still more they realised that they were specially favoured by the Mother of God and under her special protection.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul. A New Creation.

On the other hand, the Vincentian laity remained defunct. In Italy, a few Confraternities escaped with difficulty the destructive force of the Revolution. However the activity of that lay Vincentian work, in those middle years of the century, was more needed than ever. The various revolutions had created a society in which appeared forms of poverty unknown to any other time. On that account, therefore, the hour of its resurrection was about to arrive also for the Vincentian laity. But, curiously the merit of its revival ought not to be attributed directly to the Congregation of the Mission, but to a group of lay Catholics headed by a young student of the Sorbonne called Frédéric Ozanam (1813-1853), and meeting around a modest Parisian printer called Emanuel Joseph Bailly (1794-1861).

I am not going to enter into the famous dispute about the founder of the Society, which arose at the death of Ozanam. Suffice it to say that both Ozanam and Bailly had honestly recognised the contribution of each, and they both admitted that without the intimate collaboration which they gave to each other, the Society would not have been possible.

What interests me most is to underline the Vincentian source or roots of the inspiration which animated them both. In Bailly, especially, the Vincentian inspiration is clearly visible. This was true, not only because it was he who suggested that St. Vincent was the patron of the Society, but also, and especially, because from the beginning, the Vincentian direction served as a

model for defining the spirit of the Society, the setting out of its ends and the drawing up of the Rules.

This is not surprising. Bailly had been in his youth, together with his brother Ferdinand, a novice of the Congregation of the Mission. Both had been born in the little town of Briar in the Artois, in the bosom of a humble country family, who during the sad days of the Revolution had frequently given shelter and hospitality to the Vicar General of the Vincentians, Fr Hanon, there being no Superior General in those years. The two boys rivaled each other in serving Fr Hanon's Mass, said in secret. In 1817, when the Congregation was scarcely restored, the two boys entered it as novices. Emmanuel withdrew after a few months, but we do not know the reasons. Ferdinand persevered, and in those years of the founding of the Society, was an outstanding member of the Congregation, rector of a seminary in Amiens and with serious probabilities of becoming Superior General, a thing which was about to happen in the General Assembly of 1835. Emmanuel directed himself into other paths but it is true to say that he always remained spiritually faithful to his initial Vincentian vocation. He gave the name of Vincent de Paul to his eldest son, who in course of time was to become the famous Assumptionist, Vincent de Paul Bailly, considered as one of the pioneers of the apostolate of the Press.[fo30]

But really, his father was the true pioneer. As the owner of a student hostel and a printing press, Emmanuel Bailly dedicated himself to a distinguished editorial activity by his untiring Catholic propaganda. He founded the periodical *La Tribune Catholique*, which, by uniting later with *L'Univers Religieux* of Abbé Migne, gave rise to *L'Univers*. This in turn would become, at the end of 1842, under the direction of Louis Veuillot, the great organ of expression for the more militant French Catholicism. The press was not the only apostolic activity of Bailly. Between 1820 and 1830 he encouraged and directed various student associations whose deliberations concerning academic and apologetic matters found an ideal place for expression in the ample pages of his newspaper. It was there that the conferences of literature, of philosophy, and of history originated, during which controversial themes were debated with non-Catholics.

There were other circumstances which influenced the choice of St. Vincent as model, master and patron of the Society. It is well known how from a desire of seeing themselves free from the passion aroused in the historical conferences, there arose in some of the students, but especially in Frédéric Ozanam, the idea of forming an association, or more exactly, a conference, exclusively composed of Catholics and oriented towards the strengthening of their faith by means of the practice of works of charity. In the historical context in which these events took place, the memory of the translation of the

relics of St. Vincent was fresh and recent and so the reference to St. Vincent was unavoidable. As we have seen, devotion to the saint reached, at that time, its highest point of historical importance. It should not surprise us, therefore that the young students led by Ozanam who, by their university condition had a keen awareness of the extreme plight of the poor amidst the prosperous society of that time, saw in St. Vincent the model of Christian action. Ozanam, besides, had more personal motives. As he writes on the occasion of his visit to the Berceau, he had with the patron saint of the Society a debt of gratitude for the many dangers from which he was preserved in his youth.[fo31] In fact, before the end of the year of the foundation of the Conference, on the 12th of April 1834, all the members, already seventy in number, visited the chapel where the relics reposed, and venerated them there. This took place on the eve of the new feast of the Translation of the Relics of St. Vincent. At the end of the Mass, joined together around the shrine which contained the bones of the saint, they recited the prayer of St. Vincent which would later preface their Rules, and devoutly kissed his feet. The anniversary of the Translation of the Relics, (then on the second Sunday of Easter, Good Shepherd Sunday) and the Feast of St. Vincent (on the 19th July) became in the Rules two of the four days of the year on which the Conferences held an Extraordinary Assembly.[fo32]

The Vincentian inspiration of the Conferences cannot be reduced merely to the invocation of the saint nor even to the intention of imitating his example; it was something much deeper than that. First of all must be noted the determined intent of the founders to lay hold of the Vincentian spirit so that it would impregnate the entire activity of the new association. The *Règlement* of 1835 is the best proof of this. The preliminary considerations, drawn up personally by Bailly, are, in fact, nothing more than an adaptation of the Common Rules written by St Vincent for the Congregation of the Mission, even to the extent of copying down the original literally at times. It begins like this: "*Here at last in writing is the principle of the organization, which we have so much desired*". And the final exhortation: "*Let us love our rules and believe that in faithfully keeping them they will keep us and keep our work*".[fo33] These are not the only ones.

But more important than the letter is the content, This follows with total fidelity the structure and the spirit of the Vincentian Rule.

The first of the ends of the Society is to preserve its members in the practice of the Christian life, just as the first aim of the Congregation of the Mission is the sanctification of its members, and then the works of charity, every kind of works of charity, amongst which the personal visit to the poor holds pride of place. We could ask why this was so. As I understand it, in the eyes of the pioneers of the Society, the personal visit was the bridge for

crossing the gulf which in the middle-class society of the 19th century separated the social classes from one another. Let us not forget that Ozanam, at the time, wrote a clear-sighted analysis of the social problem: "*In our days, the danger resides in the spread of abject poverty among the lower classes; treating of rectifying the ancient social injustices is the same as treating of voluntary self-denial, of renouncing oneself, and of brotherhood. Here we find real Christainism, we recognise the questions which the Gospel had formulated*".[fo34] In that, both he and his companions were splendidly modern. This was also true of their preoccupation with professional formation of children and young boys. Without expressly saying as much to themselves, they were placing St. Vincent at the apex of their charitable work for the poor.

In the format of the Society, there were two classes of member (as in the C.M. priests and brothers). There was an exhortation to the practice of the evangelical virtues, those more suited to those who dedicate themselves to works of charity and apostolate: "*self-denial, Christian prudence, and effective love for the neighbour, zeal for the salvation of souls, gentleness of heart and above all the spirit of fraternity*". All of these coincide almost literally with the enumeration of the Vincentian virtues which compose the spirit of the Mission: simplicity, prudence, humility, gentleness, mortification and zeal for the salvation of souls.

There was also a brief explanation of each one of those virtues based at times on explicit quotations from the saint, as well as the reason for the submission which the members of the Society owed to the ecclesiastical authorities: "*St. Vincent de Paul did not wish his disciples to undertake any good work before obtaining the permission and blessing of the local Parish Priests*".[fo35] Also the rule of avoiding all political discussion: "*St. Vincent de Paul did not wish his priests to discuss those questions which oppose leaders against each other, nor the causes of rivalry which divide the nations*".[fo36]

A further trait was the adoption of one of the most distinctive virtues of Vincentian spirituality, namely collective humility, which urges the members of the Society to love their Association not because of its excellence, or through pride but "as good children who love their mother, though poor and ugly, more than all other mothers however rich and beautiful they may be".[fo37]

One last link of union of the Conferences with the Vincentian tradition was the relationship maintained by the founder members with an outstanding Daughter of Charity, Sister Rosalie Rendu, whom it would be wrong to name as one of the founders of the Society, but neither can it be denied that she had an important influence in its orientation towards the poor and to the work of home-visitation. [fo38]

It has sometimes been said that the Conferences were just a restoration of the original Vincentian work of the Confraternities of Charity. I have many reservations about that. I would almost rather be inclined to say that the Conferences were, in the 19th century, the lay form of the Congregation of the Mission itself. Between the Conferences and the old Charities there exist any notable differences.

The first and perhaps the most important difference is that the Conferences never wished, by the express will of the founders and of Ozanam in the first place, to be a canonical society, that could be absorbed into a confraternity, or any other pious association. When Gregory XVI granted the first indulgences to the Society, referring to it as "canonically erected", it was Ozanam himself who respectfully made it clear to him that the Society of St. Vincent de Paul was not canonically erected and never intended to be such. Neither was it ever admitted, in contrast to the Confraternities of Charity, that it be presided over by an ecclesiastic or that parish priests would decide on what works the Society should undertake or which poor the members should assist. Without doubt, it was influenced by the profound process of secularisation brought about by the French Revolution. Evidently the fact of not being a canonical entity did not prevent it from being religious and, if I may dare to say so, radically Catholic. Neither was recourse had to priests, religious or secular, in search of direction or spiritual advice.

Another important difference was that the Conferences were exclusively masculine. Until quite recently the Manual of the Society made clear that women could not belong to it, neither as active or honorary associates. By the same token the works of the women, even if based on a similar rule to that of the men, cannot be united to those of the Society.[fo39] In fact, the Conferences of women formed a parallel organisation which only in recent years was admitted on the same terms as that of the men.

On that point it is worth mentioning that the societies of women did arise a few years after those of the men, especially in Spain. In 1856, a few years after Masarnau had set up the first Conference in Madrid, a group of women approached an eminent Vincentian professor, Father Gonzalez de Soto[fo40], complaining of the male exclusiveness of the Conferences and asking for their right also to be followers and disciples of St. Vincent. In support of their claim, referring to the Vincentian Charities, they affirmed the fact that "our Sisterhood is the eldest daughter of the whole family of St. Vincent.. ". This was surely the first time that such an expression was used in reference to the spiritual descendants of the saint, comprehending as it did the lay associations. Father Gonzalez welcomed the suggestion of those ladies and that same year he

published a pamphlet called *A Review of the Sisterhoods of Charity and a set of Rules for them*. [fo41] It was a proposal for the restoration of Confraternities which included the primitive Vincentian rules with some slight modifications. The proposals of Father Gonzalez de Soto did not succeed, perhaps because the author felt himself obliged to leave the Congregation, as a consequence of a conflict between the Spanish Vincentians and the then Superior General in Paris. By contrast the Conferences for women were set up almost immediately, and on the 22nd of April 1857, they received the Brief of Pius IX granting them the same indulgences offered years previously to the Conferences of men, and in 1868 they had the rules published which were almost a copy of the rules of the Society. [fo42]

The Restoration of the Charities

The restoration or renovation of the Vincentian Confraternities of Charity: How it happened. In 1839 a French lady, the Countess La Vavasour, during a visit to the Berceau of St. Vincent de Paul, had the idea of re-establishing the ancient Vincentian institution. With this project, she went to the Procurator General, later the Superior General, of the Congregation of the Mission, Father Jean-Baptiste Etienne. He welcomed the idea with enthusiasm. A few months later, in 1840, the first confraternity of the new age was established in Paris. [fo43] Father Etienne gave it the Rules drawn up by St. Vincent for the Confraternity of Chatillon.

It is worth asking why the Congregation of the Mission, directed by Father Etienne, preferred to restore the Confraternities rather than accept for itself, and support with all its power, the Conferences recently established. Were they not, in one way or another, the modern version of the Vincentian institution? Doubtless there were good reasons for this. The Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and many Vincentians considered that they had a duty to restore Vincentian work in its integrity, just as they had restored the Congregation itself. But other motives also must have had an influence, e.g. the initial masculine nature of the Conferences already alluded to, the conflict confronting followers of Bailly during 1836 with the authorities of the Congregation which had to be resolved before the tribunals. [fo44]

A further reason may have been what I called in another place "the Vincentian mimicry" of Father Etienne, who was impelled to repeat somewhat mechanically the deeds and actions of the Founder. The fact is that the Charities did revive under the inappropriate name of "Ladies of Charity", and that the Vincentian family and the Church were enriched by them.

At any rate, with the restoration of the Charities, which spread very rapidly over the whole of France, and later over other countries, the Vincentian Family

gave new proof of its enduring capacity for renewal. In Spain the Confraternities were somewhat late in arriving. They did not exist until the beginning of the 19th century, towards the year 1915. Why? The question is not easy to answer. As a hypothesis I guess that the good relations which, from the beginning, existed between the Conferences and the Congregation of the Mission played a major part. The central house of the Vincentians in Madrid was the place where ordinarily the members of the Conferences, with Masarnau and Lafuente at their head, held their spiritual exercises, and very often those religious acts, organised by the Society, were directed by Vincentians. Perhaps, because of that the Vincentians did not feel the necessity of establishing an institution whose ends seemed to be sufficiently attended to by another already existing.

The Family Grows. The Children of Mary

In those same years, a third association was added to the Conferences and the Confraternities. It was going to constitute a new branch of the luxuriant Vincentian tree. For those who know about and believe in the Apparition and Manifestations of the Blessed Virgin Mary to Catherine Labouré, the heavenly origin of the Association of the Children of Mary offers not the least room for doubt. About this particular event there are two very precise texts from the visionary herself. They are almost identical, and the one appears to be the rough copy of the other, written by Saint Catherine on the 30th of October 1876 at the request of her spiritual director, Father Jules Chevalier, C.M. The second of these documents is as follows: "*One day I said to Father Aladel: The Blessed Virgin wishes you to set up a new society and you will be its founder and director. It is a Confraternity of Children of Mary. The Blessed Virgin will grant you many GRACES. There will be indulgences granted to you*".[fo45]

Docile to the request of Our Lady, those responsible for its fulfilment, and in particular Fr. Aladel, set themselves to the work immediately without thinking about ecclesiastical approval, high or low. In this way they established the first groups of Children of Mary. The first one was formed on the 8th of December 1838 in Beaune, and was formally erected on 2nd of February 1840. Other centres followed in various towns of France: Bordeaux, Dax, St Flour, Paris, and Toulouse. [fo46]

There were twenty centres functioning when the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, Fr. Etienne, saw that the time had arrived for asking the Holy See to erect the Association as a canonical institution. To this end he asked His Holiness, Pope Pius IX, for "*the faculty of establishing in the schools of the Daughters of Charity a pious society of young girls with the title of the Immaculate Virgin Mary, with all the indulgences granted to the*

Congregation of Mary in the colleges of Se Jesuits established in Rome for boys".

The Pope kindly granted the faculty requested, making it clear that the grant was perpetual. The document bears the date of the 20th of June 1847. It is the date of the official birth of the Children of Mary for girls. Three years later the masculine branch of the Children of Mary was established.

Juridically and historically, the Association of the Children of Mary from the beginning was established as a branch of the Vincentian Family. Was it also such from the charismatic point of view? Sometimes the Association of the Children of Mary was classified as a mere pious association. It is an error. Even if it were only considered by its connection with the Daughters of Charity and the Congregation of the Mission, the new association is spiritually Vincentian. But it is so also because it preserved an intimate relationship with the most essential core of the vocation of St. Vincent. In the roots of the Association - allow me to say - is the interest of the Blessed Virgin in the Christian formation of young girls and boys. But that preoccupation precisely had dictated the Vincentian words of the Rules of the Charities which I have already cited: they will have the grandest recompense in this world and in the other for the service rendered God as much in the sick poor as in the education of these children"[fo49]. Neither must we forget that amongst the works of charity which the members of the Conferences sought to perform, already in the first edition of the Rules: "the instruction of poor children, abandoned or in prison" is mentioned. [fo50]To form children and young persons as Christians, and also create an environment in which that function can be carried out in a harmonious and balanced way, is exactly the true purpose of the Association of the Children of Mary. And that objective is clearly Vincentian. The development of that aim, accommodated to modern times from the idea proposed by St. Vincent, and from him, by the founders of the Conferences, has been the work of the respective Associations. A typical characteristic of the Vincentian Family, namely to be a continuous renewal, is reproduced in the Association of the Children of Mary.

The Association of the Miraculous

The Association of the Miraculous Medal can be considered as a movement derived from the Association of the Children of Mary, and especially from the Apparitions of Our Blessed Lady to St. Catherine Labouré in 1830. It is centred on the Immaculate Conception of Mary and veneration of her medal, which is called "miraculous" by the people in recognition of the many graces obtained by means of it. It extends to families the spirit of St. Vincent - his Charities were established under the patronage of Mary on the

Feast of the Immaculate Conception - and his understanding of the Christian life as one of charitable works for the poor. Arising spontaneously in the second half of the 19th century, the local and diocesan Associations of the Miraculous Medal received Pontifical approbation in 1909 by means of a brief of St. Pius X, Pope.

Vincentian Charity broadens its horizon

In the 19th century the fanning-out of Vincentian lay movements will be further enriched by two other associations: **La Sainte Agonie** (The Holy Agony) and **La Très Sainte Trinité** (The Most Blessed Trinity). There is a tendency to consider these also as mere pious associations. A quick examination of their aims will show that they spring from the inexhaustible source of Vincentian charity which seeks to diversify itself so as to come to grips with needs, or, it would be better to say, with specific forms of poverty. The association of *La Sainte Agonie* aims at helping, consoling, strengthening and converting people at the point of death by the prayer and good example of its members. The association was founded in 1661 by Fr Antoine Nicolle and canonically erected by Pius IX on 14 March 1862.[fo51]

The *Association de la Très Sainte Trinité* was the work of a poor domestic servant, Marie Pellerin, who, around 1854, decided to tell her friends and acquaintances of her worries about the souls in Purgatory, those poor invisible beings who suffer in silence while awaiting their freedom from all misery. Under the direction of the French Priests of the Mission Marie Pellerin obtained from the Holy See in 1856 the brief of Pius IX "Expositum est" by which the work which was just beginning was adopted by the Congregation of the Mission.[fo52]

Because of lack of space I will not speak in detail of the development of each of these Vincentian branches born or re-born in the 19th century. I will limit myself to saying that all had a rapid and widespread expansion which, above all in the case of the Conferences and the confraternities of Charity, could be called lightning-like. All of them also experienced a retrenchment caused by political vicissitudes. But all of them, more or less, kept faithful to their Vincentian vocation, but little by little, as the 20th century advanced, became estranged from the real world in which they should be working.

III. Post-Conciliar Renewal in the 20th Century

As with the Church itself, in the second half of the 20th century, the Vincentian Family also needed a complete reform. It had reached a situation of

actual separation between the ecclesial institutions and the world they were called on to evangelise. That was the conviction which impelled Pope John XXIII to convoke the Second Vatican Council.

From the Council, in theory, the Church emerged entirely renewed. But it was precisely the work of the many organisations of which the Church is constituted, to make that renewal a reality.

The Vincentian Family, and in particular the lay Associations, were no exceptions. They had existed for more than a hundred years without the least alteration in their structures as regards practice and pastoral orientation. They had rendered splendid services and had spread over the entire world. But, after Vatican II they found themselves, if it is not an exaggeration to say, hide-bound in a world which had changed prodigiously in the last hundred years. They needed to be adapted to the new ecclesial situation and to the new role resulting from the technical, social, economic and religious transformation which had taken place in society.

The Council Decree, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, concerning the apostolate of the laity, pointed out the ways in which the necessary adaptation ought to be effected.

The four great lay institutions of the Vincentian Family were prepared for making the necessary changes. Each of these Associations -- the Confraternities, the Conferences, the Children of Mary, and the Association of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal -- sought renewal in conformity with their particular characteristics.

I will begin with the oldest of the Associations, namely the Confraternities of Charity. Perhaps the first sign here was the change of name. In the 19th century it had been revived under the name of "Ladies" of Charity. Now it was changed to Vincentian "Volunteers". This change illustrates what the institution thinks about itself, what it wishes to be, and what it proposes to do. Then followed a long thorough examination of its situation in the Church.

Those deliberations resulted in the decision to end the role exercised, from the beginning, by the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, as Director. In future, the supreme authority in the Association would be discharged by a lay member. The Superior General of the C.M. and previous national and local directors would be merely counsellors or spiritual directors. It was a decided step on the road to the autonomy of the secular lay person. Almost at the same time it was adopted as a member of the worldwide International Association of Charity (A.I.C.). There followed a profound

revision of its rules and statutes which would permit the Association to play a greater role in relief work and assistance on a worldwide basis. As a symbol of its new international status, the Secretariat was transferred from Paris to Brussels.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul followed along similar lines. While they did not consider a change of name necessary, they undertook a complete remodelling of the old Regulation. This, after a trial period of about ten years, was approved in the General Assembly held in Dublin in 1973[fo53]. In it, among other things, the principle of admitting women to full and equal membership was decreed, leaving the way open for the fusion of the male and female branches of the Conferences. It was left to the free will of the different National Councils to accept or reject this fusion. Little by little the change has been effected in almost all countries. Other statutory modifications have democratised and made much more participative the governing or ordinary running of the Society. It is also significant, that while the Society maintains its Catholic character, as it could do no less, it foresees that, in some countries, circumstances could counsel and welcome Christians of other confessions, and even members of other beliefs, depending on whether they adhere to their principles. The ends of the Society are adopting a more flexible formulation. The ancient priority of house visitation is disappearing, while preserving person to person contact. The universality of the vocation of charity is stressed; already present in the original Rules: "No work of Charity is alien to the Society and the extension of its action is to all men and women, without distinction of religious opinions, colour, race, origin or caste. This same Charity is brought to its ultimate consequences by declaring that the Society must work not only to relieve misery, but also to discover and remedy the causes of that situation.

No less has been the change effected in the Children of Mary. Here it began by seeking a new name. After a period of experimentation with different titles, the name "Marian Vincentian" has been adopted, especially in Spain and Spanish American countries. The change of name put an end to the old form of separate Associations for boys and girls. Under the new name they have been fused together very successfully into one single Association for both sexes. But more important than all that has been the enforcement of the charitable-social commitment of the Association. The introduction into the title of the word *Vincentian* obeys exactly the desire to underline this commitment.[nota54]

And the Association of the Miraculous Medal also set out bravely on the road to modernisation, though perhaps somewhat late in comparison with its sister associations. In Spain in particular, with the adopting of new statutes in 1986, the way was opened for an in-depth renewal. On the one hand the

juridical structures were strengthened, and on the other the association's apostolic and social plan was emphasised.[nota55]

Neither the Association of Marian Vincentian Youth nor the Association of the Miraculous Medal have found it necessary to end the role as Directors, assigned by the respective Pontifical decrees of approval, to the priests of the Congregation of the Mission, and in particular to the Superior General.

I would not like to finish without referring to what I consider to be the key to the renewal of the whole Vincentian Family. This is nothing less than the renewal of the members themselves. Without a bold Plan of Formation, both spiritual and intellectual, for the associations, it is impossible to achieve any renewal. And it must be stated that the four great Vincentian lay associations have zealously set about this great work.

The Conferences of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, both at national and international levels, have set in motion ambitious programmes of Formation. In Spain, such a programme has been inserted into "The General Plan of Revitalisation" approved in the National Assembly of 1988[fo56]. It gathers and projects into the future a whole range of Formative plans, especially the new manner in which the Society should confront the challenges of our times. Some of these Plans, like the "Ozanam Study and Formation Centre", have already proved their effectiveness during several years of experimentation.

As regards the new form of the Children of Mary, namely The Marian Vincentian Youth Association, its programme of renewal has been the most radical of all the Associations. Its whole Formation programme is based on the lines and the method of the Catechumenate. Detailed programmes have been prepared for the different age groups of young persons. These catecheses tend as much to the deepening of the Christian life as to the widening and enriching of the religious knowledge itself. The addition of the name Vincentian has had an explosive effect in directing them to the needs of the poor, but also to the work of the missions in foreign countries. (In the short period of its existence it already has more than seventy thousand members and is one of the great examples of the continuous renewal of the Vincentian Family in modern times. Its School of Catechists has appeared as the formidable instrument for carrying out the M.V.Y. programmes. *Floreat*).

The Congresses celebrated by the Miraculous Medal Association[fo57] represent a contribution of great importance for the renewal of the understanding and spread of the ideas which ought to animate the members at the present time.

In conclusion I would like to indicate where the fundamental means is to be found: That means which has made possible the longings for and results of renewal, which has enthused the whole Vincentian Family, including the Daughters of Charity and the Congregation of the Mission. This means is nothing less than a RE READING of St. Vincent de Paul in the light of Vatican II. St. Vincent has proved to be a very modern saint. His vital commitment to the poor is the commitment of the Church of our day to the poor and the marginalised. All Christians are to live that commitment, and to live it in the manner and by the paths which the society of our time demands. Ours is a society which feels more keenly that the present profound injustice of poverty and marginalisation is the inescapable task of all, but especially of the members of the Vincentian Family. It is a task which for being in harmony with the Church of today, and of being faithful to its Vincentian roots, has to find ways which bring us to combat poverty in its causes, and to combine preoccupation in helping the destitute with that of procuring that they may be the ones to help themselves; that is, to assist them to move on from assistance or hand-outs to participation in improving their own condition.

For having understood the situation in this way is the reason why the Vincentian Family lives an hour of hope, an hour which allows it to be faithful to what it has always been, namely A Family of Continuous Renewal. Perhaps the best expression of this idea has been implanted in the second article of the Manual of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul: "*Faithful to its Founders, the Society has a constant preoccupation of renewing and adapting itself to the changing conditions of the times*".

Seamus O'Neill, C.M.
Translator

- [nota1] SV IX, 243-244
- [nota2] SV XIII, 423
- [nota3] SV XIII, 447
- [nota4] SV XIII, 424
- [nota5] SV IV, 71
- [nota6] SV IV, 71
- [nota7] SV XIII, 446
- [nota8] *ibíd*, 490-502
- [nota9] *ibíd*, 511
- [nota10] *ibíd*, 521
- [nota11] *ibíd*, 504
- [nota12] SV XIII, 455

- [nota13] SV XIV, 126
- [nota14] SV XIII, 421
- [nota15] SV XIII, 500
- [nota16] SV XIII, 422
- [nota17] SV XIII, 447
- [nota18] SV XIII, 500
- [nota19] SV XIII, 423
- [nota20] SV XIII, 424
- [nota21] SV XIII, 430
- [nota22] SV XIII, 260-1
- [nota23] RC I, 2
- [nota24] RC VI, 1
- [nota25] L. Abelly, *La Vie du vénérable serviteur de Dieu Vincent de Paul, Instituteur et premier Supérieur Général de la Congrégation de la Mission. Messire Louis Abelly, Evêque de Rodez.* - Paris : Florentin Lambert, 1664. - 1 v. (XVIII, 260; 480, 274) I. 2, ch. 8, 340
- [nota26] L. de Marillac, *Écrits Spirituels*, 703-704
- [nota27] SV I, 73-74
- [nota28] SV XIII, 761ss.
- [nota29] Abelly, o.c. I. 1, ch. 35, 167-169; I. 2., ch. 11, 387
- [nota30] R. Kokel: *Vincent de Paul Bailly, Un pionnier de la presse catholique.* - Paris : Éditions Bonne Presse, 1957
- [nota31] *Lettres de Frédéric Ozanam. Tome 4e. Les dernières années (1850-1853).* - Édition critique par Christine Franconnet avec la collaboration de Bernard Barbiche, Magali Brémard, - Etienne Diebold, Marie Laporte, Élisabeth Meignien, Didier Ozanam - Paris : Klincksieck, 1992. - 719 ; 26 cm. 446 ss.
- [nota32] *Massiliensis seu Parisiensis. Beatificationis et canonizationis servi Dei Friderici Ozanam, patrisfamilias, primarii fundatoris Societatis conferentiarum s. Vincentii a Paulo, disquisitio de vita et actuositate servi Dei.* - Roma : Tipografia Guerra, 1980. - XLVIII, 1255 ; 32 cm. vid. 177 ss. (D.V.A.)
- [nota33]: Quoted according to the first Spanish edition of the *Règlement*, actually printed by the Bailly printing house in Paris in 1847. This translation antedates the foundation of the Society in Spain.
- [nota34] D.V.A., 837
- [nota35] *Règlement...* ed. cit., 20
- [nota36] Id. 22
- [nota37] Id. 17
- [nota38]: At the time of Sister Rosalie's death a contemporary witness, Léon Aubineau, wrote in *L'Univers*: "She did not merely love the works which she herself had undertaken, she loved all those which could do good, and she helped them all... She was one of the main instruments used by Providence to establish and develop the Conferences of St Vincent de Paul... When the

Society of St Vincent de Paul decided to visit the poor they consulted Sister Rosalie. She indicated to them the first families to be visited, and she advised them to bring their help in the form of bread coupons. That is why the Conferences owe this custom to her, one which they hold so dear. The Sister did still more: for a long time she lent what she had to the Conference... Sister Rosalie loved the Conferences with real tenderness, and naturally she had affection for the children at whose birth she had been present. In the early days of the Society she used to say: 'Ah!, how good these young men are, how good!'. She used to add that she never felt more joyful than when seeing them". [nota39] Reglamento y manual de la Sociedad de San Vicente de Paúl. - 4 ed. à partir de 1941. - Madrid : Consejo Superior de España, 1963. - 575 ; 14 cm. Vid. 46

[nota40]: For the life of Gonzalez de Soto see the work of B. Paradela: *Un gran pedagogo desconocido. Apuntes biograficos del Julian Gonzalez de Soto*, Madrid, Imprenta de Tajado, 1868.

[nota41] Barcelona : Pablo Riera, 1856, 49

[nota42] Reglamento de la Sociedad de señoras de San Vicente de Paúl. - Madrid: Imprenta de Tejado, 1868. - 96 , 17 cm.

[nota43] [Rosset, Edouard]: Vie de M. Etienne, XIVE. Su Général. - Paris : Gaume, 1881. - VI, 576 ; 21 cm. Vid. 239-249.

[nota44]: The conflict between Bailly and the CM Superior General has not been seriously investigated up to now. The documentation which survives in the archives of the General Curia and the Maison-mère is, however, abundant. Cf as regards what is of interest to us here: *Exposé des faits relatifs au procès intenté à la Congrégation de Saint-Lazare par M. Bailly, exclu de la meme Congrégation* (Archives de Saint-Lazare, dossier Nozo-Bailly).

[nota45] Edition critique de René Laurentin: Catherine Labouré et la Médaille Miraculeuse I, 357.

[nota46] E. Crapez: La Vénérable Catherine Labouré, Paris, Victor Lecoffre-J. Gabalda, 1911, 152-157

[nota47] Bullae, Brevia et Rescripta in gratiam Congregationis Missionis. Litt. introd. E. Boré. - Paris : Georges Camerot, 1876. - XVI, 301 ; 30 cm. 253-254

[nota48] Id. 261

[nota49] SV XIII, 422-423

[nota50] Règlement, art. 2

[nota51]: Nicolle, M: *Petit Manuel de la Sainte-Agonie de N.S.J.C. établie à Valfleury au diocèse de Lyon*, Lyon, Pélagaud, 1864. According to Fr Jacinto Fernandez neither the *Association de la Sainte-Agonie* nor the *Association de la Sainte Trinité* should, according to the 1917 Code of Canon Law, be considered as confraternities or archconfraternities, but as associations. Cf Fernandez, Jacinto: *Asociaciones eclesíasticas instituidas y dirigidas por la Congracion de*

la Mision, Madrid, La Milagrosa, 1962. There are historical and canonical details on each of these associations in that work.

[nota52] *Notice sur l'archiconfrérie de la Sainte Trinité, en faveur des âmes du purgatoire, établie à la Maison-Mère, à Paris.* - París : Georges Chamerot, 1874. - 15; 14 cm.

[nota53] *Reglamento de la Sociedad de San Vicente de Paúl en España...* - Madrid : Ind. gráf. España, 1975. - 63 ; 15 cm.

Nota 54: Cf the many publications of the National Secretariat of JMV on the Formation Plans for the different stages, with the general title: *Un proyecto de catequesis juvenil en línea catecumenal.*

[nota55] *Estatutos de la Asociación de la Medalla Milagrosa.* - Madrid : [s.n.], 1986. - 16 ; 17 cm.

[nota56] *Seglares cara al siglo XXI. Sociedad de San Vicente de Paúl. Plan general de revitalización.* Madrid : La Milagrosa, 1989. 159

[nota57] *II Congreso Mariano Nacional de la Asociación de la Medalla Milagrosa.* Abril 1994. - Madrid : La Milagrosa, 1995. - 247 , 6 h. (de himnos); 24 cm.

AIC: INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CHARITIES

Dilde Grandi
Outgoing International President

AIC - The oldest lay association of women:

AIC is the oldest lay association of women in the history of volunteerism. It dates back to 1617 when, for the first time, Vincent de Paul gathered a group of women in Châtillon-les-Dombes (France) and gave structure to their first initiatives to come to the aid of the poor families in the parish. To this first group and those that followed, St. Vincent gave the significant name of "Charities".

St. Vincent encouraged the spread of the "Charities" not only in France, but gradually, also in Italy and Poland thus creating an international association. In a desire for unity in this new foundation, St. Vincent drafted common rules, to find the best possible ways to help the destitute, based on the imitation of Jesus Christ, on evangelical love that goes beyond borders, and on organization and creativity. Furthermore, in a desire to ensure communication among the different groups making up the "Charities", St. Vincent wrote numerous letters and even edited a Bulletin entitled "Relations" which is not very different from our AIC Bulletin. Therefore the Bulletin of St. Vincent not only organized the charity, but also established a means of communication, one of the features of the genius of our Founder.

Saint Vincent de Paul's first foundation becomes international:

After the death of Vincent, the Charities spread to many countries thanks to the efforts of the Priests of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity. National associations were created, linked together and coordinated by the President of the French Association. At the same time, in other countries, groups which sprang up spontaneously, were integrated into the association of Charities as they realized they shared common goals. This international collaboration was interrupted during the XVIII century when, because of the 1789 French Revolution, the French association was obliged to discontinue its activities. Nonetheless, as early as 1840, contact was renewed with the other associations. The first international congress of the Charities took place in Paris. Other congresses followed. During the Second World War (1939-1945), international activities were discontinued. After the war, congresses were resumed.

1971 - Renewal of AIC along the lines of the Second Vatican Council:

During the 1960's, the association began to feel the need of renewal. In many countries, the word "Ladies" which appeared in the title was seen to be no longer suitable and so was dropped. Being attentive to the signs of the times, the associations in many countries acknowledged the changes undergone in society and in the post-conciliar Church and therefore, in fidelity to the teachings of St. Vincent himself, they decided to change their methods and structures and to request international status in conformity with the circumstances of our times.

In 1971, delegates from 22 associations met in an Extraordinary Assembly and voted a new Constitution and By-Laws and officially adopted the name International Association of Charities (AIC). By deciding to maintain the word "Charities" in the new name, the members wished to emphasize the fact that their organization is a direct descendant of the Charities created by St. Vincent and to give proof of their fidelity to the prophetic teaching of their Founder.

1971 was a turning point for the Association. Its recognition as an international association and its adherence to the innovating spirit of the Second Vatican Council gave a breath of new life to AIC. Since that time, it has continued to develop and grow, thanks to continuous renewal of reflection and action, and also thanks to its awareness of its own role within civil society, the international community and the Church.

With the theme "Against all forms of poverty, acting together", AIC became a network of projects throughout the world:

AIC is now present in many countries of Europe, Latin America, North America, Asia and Africa. It counts 42 associations, with more than 250,000 members, all committed to carry out, in a way adapted to our times, the fundamental plan of St. Vincent de Paul, their Founder **"Against all forms of poverty, acting together"**.

To further this common goal, AIC is committed to form volunteers, by organizing seminars at the world and regional level, by visiting the associations, and by publishing and distributing reflection and formation documents. It coordinates the activity of volunteers for more effective action in favor of the poor and the marginalized; by so doing, it also helps these volunteers to carry out local projects, to find subsidies from international bodies and to encourage exchanges and collaboration among similar projects.

AIC asserts itself as a world network in the combat against all forms of poverty and in favor of the promotion of the poor. It endeavours to share this same conviction within its associations.

Finally, concerned by the situations of poverty, AIC strives to create new groups in countries where the association is not yet established. In these countries it is often necessary to have the presence of well-prepared volunteers, such as provided through the inestimable collaboration of the Daughters of Charity whose support in this field is determinative.

Aware that problems of poverty are worldwide, AIC is part of the life of important international organizations:

As a worldwide association, AIC is conscious of the fact that it has a role to play on the international level. To fulfill this role, its associations are represented with governmental and nongovernmental organizations. AIC has consultative status with UNESCO, ECOSOC and the European Parliament. It collaborates with many other bodies, at a supranational level and it participates in networks and exchanges. It is a member of CIAS (International Committee for Social Action), the ICO Conference (International Catholic Organizations), and of WUCWO (World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations).

AIC, as an association of women, pays particular attention to the problems of women:

Participation in initiatives in favor of women is coherent with AIC's goals. Being from its origin an association of women, it pays particular attention to the situation of poor women, doubly penalized because they are women and are marginalized. AIC always strives to gain greater knowledge of the needs of these women, as well as the situations of injustice and violence in which they live. To remain faithful to this option and aware of its responsibility, AIC participates in all the important world initiatives in favor of women. Through its representatives, it collaborated in the initiatives of numerous nongovernmental and Catholic bodies, in preparation for the World Conference of Women which took place in September 1995 in Peking. AIC knows that it can make a specific contribution, thanks to the concrete experience of its volunteers and also thanks to the development of its concept of the importance of the role of women in the poorest and most marginalized families; its experience and its project offer a useful basis for reflection. Even in a subaltern position, it is women who take responsibility for family problems. And often they play the role of mediators, agents of pacification in a context marked by disruptions and opposition.

AIC has adopted the following action guidelines: formation, communication, solidarity, self-achievement - all taken as the focus of its action with poor families:

To remain faithful to its mission, AIC feels the need to update constantly to find the best means for the promotion of the poor in a given period of time and culture. To achieve this goal, at its 1990 Assembly of Delegates in Assisi, Italy, AIC outlined its action guidelines as aiming to work together in favor of formation, communication, solidarity and self-achievement. These guidelines were defined, developed and consolidated at the Assembly of Delegates in Antigua, Guatemala, in 1994, taking into account the progress of the Association. Over the years, while remaining faithful to its fundamental choices, AIC's self-reflection has opened up new paths and new objectives have been adopted.

The former option, which consisted in being close to destitute families who are often marginalized and forced to experience dramatic social situations, has undergone a profound change; when it was realized that simple assistance was insufficient and resulted in new **dependencies**, it was understood that the destitute themselves must share in their own **promotion**.

This led AIC to a new understanding of the global importance of family in its role as the first cell of the human community and as the primordial elementary network of the social order. New and more profound motivations of a sociological order emerged. Prompted by these motivations, an idea was born; it was understood that it did not suffice to support the destitute, but that they must also be aware of the value and rights of the family. We must combat alongside them in order to defend them. During this campaign the AIC volunteers found precious allies in the women of these communities who, in general, proved to be fully aware of the familial and social dimension. Thus a new solidarity among women took shape, in a concrete way by means of the active participation in community initiatives supported, planned and executed, in common agreement, by the volunteers and the women of the local communities. In turn, some of these women became AIC volunteers, committed to the promotion of their community.

The idea of self-achievement of the poor, which became one of the primary objectives of AIC, was promoted within the Association due to an intuition of the Latin-American volunteers who were alarmed by the suffering of the marginalized communities where individuals are not respected in their dignity and their rights - above all, in the right to take their own decisions concerning their lives.

To combat this denial to the poor of the right to be agents of their own promotion, the Latin-American volunteers undertook a campaign of community animation, the object being to encourage the poor themselves to launch initiatives and to plan self-achievement projects. With more or less difficulty, this fundamental intuition spread throughout the world. Now, in every country, there are AIC volunteers committed to projects of this type.

In 1994, AIC undertook the defence of the human rights of the destitute:

Through the years, the idea of self-achievement has developed. It has led volunteers to research carefully the social value of the individual. Thus we understand that self-achievement cannot be carried out alone; it can only be realized in the family and social context. Research was also directed to the injustices suffered mainly by the destitute. Today, many of these people feel repressed, excluded from all participation and rejected by society. This marginalization is fundamentally unjust because it prevents the individual from exercising his or her fundamental rights. The United Nations "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" affirms this. According to Art. 7, every individual has the right to be protected from discriminations. Art. 22 affirms the right to have sufficient means for the free development of personality. Every individual has the right to participate in the public and cultural life of his community (Articles 22 and 27). Consequently, as stated by Monsieur Vincent, this battle against social exclusion is an act of justice before being a work of mercy.

The volunteers carefully studied their duties in the face of denied rights. At the 1994 Assembly of Delegates in Antigua, Guatemala, the delegations of AIC from around the world committed themselves to "political action": by denouncing injustices affecting the destitute, above all women, and by putting pressure on public structures so that the rights of the individual and the family in marginalized communities be recognized and defended. For this "political action", the AIC volunteers collaborate with other volunteer organizations, with the institutions and social movements most concerned with problems of justice, being fully aware of the fact that this effort cannot be carried out by them alone. A vast campaign of sensitizing public opinion is required. Society must be aware of the fact that poverty is not a fatality to which one should be resigned; lightening the burden only by palliative remedies is insufficient. Poverty must be felt as an injustice to be fought beginning with appropriate measures of prevention as well as actions which heighten cultural awareness. By "culture", we understand the whole complex of ideas, of knowledge and of history and traditions which make up current thinking.

The AIC volunteers, therefore, widened their enquiry to find, in the cultural baggage of their milieu, concepts which create so many situations of injustices and of lack of respect for the dignity of the marginalized. They discovered a vast range of mentalities. There exists an explicit contempt for the weak, who are seen as failures and incompetent, therefore unworthy of exercising their fundamental rights. There is a great variety of attitudes with different shades of meaning, but what these attitudes have in common is a total lack of confidence in the poor which leads to efforts to take over from the poor and to offer an assistance which is often humiliating. Obviously, these types of

mentality are serious obstacles to authentic self-achievement, based on respect and equal partnership.

Towards a culture of solidarity and self-achievement, of respect and peace:

Thanks to this reflection, AIC realizes that to defend human dignity and justice, it is necessary to get rid of such mentalities and to transform widespread and firmly rooted convictions. We should learn to have an impact on existing cultures, adding to them a new culture of peace, respect, solidarity and self-achievement; this can only be done through slow yet tenacious effort.

Only when this new culture becomes more widespread will the wish expressed in the first lines of the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" become a reality within the human community: "The recognition of the dignity inherent in all members of the human family and their equal and inalienable rights constitute the basis of liberty, justice and peace". This sentence is found in the Preamble to the Declaration.

AIC volunteers, members of a Catholic association, laying claim to the values of charity and Christian solidarity, cannot ignore the tremendous impetus which the message of the Gospel gives to this action. In fact, evangelization profoundly rooted in the culture of society is able to engender a conversion of mentalities.

The most recent texts from the Magisterium of the Church were of great help in this reflection. These texts bring to light the duty of Christians to evangelize individuals, communities and cultures. This new way to experience Christ's message and to announce it to the different communities is captured in the words of the Latin-American Bishops, "the Gospel, incarnate in their culture, manifests all its vitality so that one community may enter into dialogue with other communities for mutual enrichment" (Conclusions of the IVth General Conference of Latin-American Bishops in Santo Domingo; n. 299).

Importance of interaction with the Vincentian Family:

We have always followed this fundamental Christian and Church path by being united with the big Vincentian Family, especially with the Priests of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity, who have always set us an example and stimulated us in our work. Now, after the meeting of June, 3rd, 1995, we have initiated a more profound relationship and interaction which will enable us to transmit the fundamental project of Saint Vincent de Paul with fuller meaning and closeness to our roots. It was our Founder's desire that the Vincentian Family work in close collaboration.

THE PRESENCE AND PRESENT RELEVANCE OF THE SOCIETY OF ST VINCENT DE PAUL

Amin A. de Tarrazi

A Prophetic Intuition

"The question which divides the people of today is no longer one about political structures, but a social question. It is to find out which will win, the spirit of egoism or the spirit of sacrifice. Is society to be just a huge exploitation for the profit of the strongest, or a dedication of each person to the benefit of all, and especially to the protection of the weak? There are many people who have too much, and who want still more. There are very many more who do not have sufficient, who have nothing and who want to take if people won't give. A struggle is starting between these two types of people. This struggle threatens to be a terrible one. On one side is the power of gold, on the other the power of despair. We must jump in between these opposing armies, if not to prevent at least to soften the encounter. And the fact that we are young middle-class people makes it easier for us to fulfill the role of mediator, to which our title of Christian obliges us. That is why our Society of St Vincent de Paul is useful".

If you had not got to the end of that quotation you might well have wondered from which contemporary writer it came.

It comes, in fact, from the generous heart and intuitive intelligence of a young man named Frédéric Ozanam who already more than a century and a half ago, by 1836, had had this prophetic vision which permitted a foretaste of the great social struggles and, altering the planetary scale, the tensions between the third world and the industrial world.

From Dream to Reality

Anticipating that human relationships were running the risk of being more and more reduced to manifestations of force, he romantically dreamt "that all young people of generosity and spirit would unite in some charitable work...."

On 23 April 1833 this dream became reality at the first meeting of the "Conference of Charity," placed under the patronage of St Vincent de Paul. Six

students, including Ozanam who was just 20, gathered round Emmanuel Bailly, much older than themselves.

An On-going Expansion

Ozanam liked to recall the "humble origins" of the Society which, however, was to experience a lightning surge through France, Europe and the world.

In 1860 it already had 2,500 Conferences, with more than 50,000 members.

After a particularly difficult period during the Second Empire, when the Society was sometimes seen as an association outside the control of authority (in the circular letter of Duke Victor Fialin de Persigny, Interior Minister, to the French Prefects, 1861), its irresistible onward march resumed after the Franco-Prussian War.

That is how the number of groups had risen to 8,000 with 133,000 members by the start of the First World War.

In the centenary year, 1933, 12,000 conferences had more than 200,000 members, while by 1983, the 150th anniversary of the foundation, the number of Vincentians reached 750,000, with 38,500 conferences in 107 countries. In 1995 there are some 875,000 members spread among 46,600 teams in 130 countries on five continents.

Most of the groups are mixed, comprising men, women, boys and girls, and they work within the framework of city or country parishes, city districts, large groupings, schools or universities, professional or cultural associations.

A Universal Fraternity

But let us put aside history and statistics and look at the essentials, namely the spirit, aims and means.

The Society of St Vincent de Paul, one of the oldest charitable, social and humanitarian organizations, is seen today as a huge international movement of the apostolate of charity and social action. Thanks to the spiritual bonding and human formation of its members it wants to witness to the fraternal love of Christ among the poorest.

In collaboration with them and with others it tries to help them to overcome their various types of need. In all the countries of the world it appeals to men, women and young people, from every background and every level of society, who

want to live out their faith in the giving of themselves, radiating around them their hope and joy.

Right from the start the aim of universality was stated in Ozanam's enthusiastic hope: "I want to wrap up the whole world in a network of charity." In 1835 there were weeks of animated discussion, sometimes rather heated, ending with a decision on 17 February to divide up the founding Conference into different sections. With this decision the members of the fledgling Society showed that they wanted their movement to spread outside the borders of their parish, their city, their country, even their continent, in order to take root in all regions.

As happened with the Church itself, the richness of this dynamic association of fervent Christians had, in the future, to lie in its diversity. Its unity had to be forged in plurality and difference.

A Spiritual Search

If Frédéric Ozanam and his original companions were worried about human and social matters as they set up the Society of St Vincent de Paul, if their on-going care was to bring relief to the needs of their day, at the same time they felt the need and urgency of a solid spiritual formation as the only possible foundation for their vocation and mission.

The harmonious balance between prayer and activity which Vincent de Paul achieved struck them early on as the unchangeable element in Vincentian commitment. It draws its inspiration, strength and fidelity from a life of faith.

Some members of the Society, deepening their original spiritual initiative, go on further to the gift of themselves in the religious life, diaconate or priesthood.

Every year there are men, women and young people in the Society who make this more radical choice for the service of the Church.

A Commitment for Social Justice

In the middle of "The Great Century," whose splendour did not hide its harshness from either his eyes or his heart, Vincent de Paul stated: "There is no charity which is not alongside justice."

Thinking along the same lines Ozanam, who wished "charity to do what justice cannot do on its own," underlined the shortcomings of justice, the impersonal nature of which needs to be completed and humanised by sensitivity and kindness, something freely given: "Order in society is founded on two virtues, justice and charity. But justice already presupposes a lot of love, for one must love a person a lot if one is to respect his rights, which border one's own rights, and his freedom which limits one's own freedom! Justice, however, has limits; charity knows none."

It was this need which, in the 1930s, gave Emile Romanet, a member of a Conference in Grenoble, the revolutionary idea of family allowances. Following his Vincentian vocation, as defined above by Ozanam, he had understood that there was no charity worthy of the name that did not do something to bring about greater equity. The Council Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity reminded us of this when it said: "The needs of justice must first be met, so that what is due in justice may not be offered as a gift of charity" (chapter II N_ 8). The Society of St Vincent de Paul, therefore, with all its available human and material resources, and in close collaboration with public bodies and local groups, shares in the

common effort to remedy the causes of these social evils and to bring about development in the institutional structures.

A Personal Contact with the Suffering

But if a Vincentian thinks this struggle for justice is primary, he still won't find the fulfillment of his vocation unless he personally, directly and constantly serves the most deprived, following the example of Monsieur Vincent whom the members of the Conference chose as their patron saint. They try to "live, as he himself did, according to the divine example of Jesus Christ."

Sister Rosalie Rendu, a Daughter of Charity, understood the generous and burning zeal of Ozanam and his friends. She had already shown this by her effective and timely work among the poor in the Mouffetard area of Paris. Guided by her instinctive sensitivity she led them along the way of charity to the have-nots among whom they did their apprenticeship in real love of the poor.

Didn't Paul VI, who had been a member of the Society of St Vincent de Paul himself when he was a student, call Vincentians "the friends and servants of the poor"?

Varied Activity and Constant Adaptation

This is the framework within which all the operations of the Society of St Vincent de Paul are carried out for the benefit of those whom the world wounds, oppresses, isolates, rejects, marginalises:

- Help for children and young people.
- Education - Professional, technical and agricultural training - Educational grants.
- Initiatives to help the unemployed and their families.
- Job-finding and creating new jobs.
- Moral and practical support for the lonely, and for families with problems.
- Initiatives to help unmarried mothers and abandoned women.
- Help for senior citizens: home visits, home help, clubs, holiday centres, retirement homes.
- Health work: visiting the sick, the physically and mentally handicapped, the blind. Home care. Setting up hospitals, dispensaries, medical centres.

- Help for alcoholics, drug-addicts, the seriously ill.
- Prison visiting and after-care.
- Rehabilitating the marginalised.
- Help for seamen. Seamen's hostels.
- Help for itinerants - Halting sites.
- Help for immigrants: Welcome, orientation help, teaching literacy, in conformity with their identity, culture and traditions.
- Housing programmes and improvement of living conditions.
- Food.
- Development projects, especially in the areas of agriculture, stock-breeding and fishing.
- Animating more than 5,000 twinnings between teams in the developed and developing countries.
- Help for refugees and the stateless.
- Solidarity campaigns.
- Cultural animation - Libraries - Leisure activities - Sports - Holiday camps.
- Legal, administrative and social consultations.
- Catechesis - Liturgical animation - Marriage preparation.

The common denominator of all these initiatives, activities and undertakings is the desire to help the lost and the have-nots by listening, friendship, spiritual, moral and material support; to give them back their dignity, to ensure their personal development, to give them back hope and, if possible, the joy of life.

A Church Association with a Lay Character

This is one of the ways in which the Society of St Vincent de Paul is innovative. The innovative element, which was daring at the time of Ozanam and his friends, was to have insisted that the destiny of their dear Society, essentially

ecclesial and deeply attached to religious authority, should be in the hands of lay people who regarded themselves as totally mature and responsible.

One hundred and thirty years before the Second Vatican Council these young men had foreseen the importance, even the need, for a dynamic, imaginative lay apostolate in the midst of the "people of God."

The Society of St Vincent de Paul was officially recognised by Church authorities in Gregory XVI's briefs of 10 January and 12 August 1845, and has been confirmed by succeeding popes. It has always faithfully retained its lay status, the essential immutable element which characterises it.

At the Service of the Church and the City

Though born in the heart of the Church the Society of St Vincent de Paul is at the service of the city. Under the inspiration of the gospel message, attentive to the teaching of the magisterium, it operates in the midst of the human community and regards it as its duty to bring about "being better," over and above "being more."

Isn't faith without works dead? That, anyway, is what the Fathers of the Council appropriately remind us of in "Gaudium et Spes" ("The Church in the Modern World," N_ 43), when they urge "Christians as citizens of both cities to carry out their tasks in this world under the guidance of the gospel. They are far from the truth who, knowing that we have not here a lasting city but are heading towards the future one, neglect their human tasks, not realising that the faith itself, taking into account each one's vocation, makes this a more urgent duty. But they are equally in error who, on the other hand, think that they can devote themselves totally to the affairs of this world as if they had no connection with their religious life. They regard the latter as being confined to taking part in worship and obeying certain fixed moral obligations. This dichotomy between the faith which is professed by a large number and their daily behaviour is to be counted among the greatest errors of our day."

If the Church expects from us an authentic witness to faith and spirituality it also invites us to be totally present to this deeply-changing world which is suffering, struggling and looking for itself.

The vocation to the Society of St Vincent de Paul makes it a definite duty for each member to be involved in the human tapestry where the struggle for a better and more just world is being carried on.

Vincentians are aware of the various problems caused by the different forms of spiritual, moral, cultural, physical and material poverty, so their clear aim is to give back hope to those who have lost it, bringing to a questioning and searching humanity that "additional element of soul" which the great French philosopher Henri Bergson used to talk about.

Thanks to a flexible structure, reduced to essentials and which does not cost much, and above all made up of willing people, technical and material human means can be rapidly mobilised, set up and adapted to circumstances of time and place.

Also, the existence of indigenous teams in most countries of the world allows as rational, economic and disciplined action as possible, with regard to local conditions.

This organisation and these methods have proved their worth in the midst of the human dramas and natural disasters which afflict our world from time to time.

The Vincentian Vocation: an Attempt at Unity of Life

The Vincentian vocation, then, sees itself in this 20th century of science, technology and efficiency as a humble, yet authentic, witness to fraternal charity and social initiative.

It invites its members to service, to sharing and to the total giving of self: having, being, knowing, in order to better respond to the anguished appeal of so many today, sidelined by a progress which does not help the weakest.

It is a real social school, especially for the young, which by means of personal contact makes them aware of the poorest people and the biggest problems of our time. An act of one-to-one love does not in any way shut out reality but rather opens the heart and the mind to the world-wide dimension of suffering, to the demands of justice, and the rights of human dignity.

The Vincentian vocation is not an artificial veneer. When it is accepted in its totality it leads one to a fundamental unity of life, bringing thought, word and action into harmony. A harmony between faith and work in service of the neighbour is the ideal which the heirs of St Vincent de Paul and Frédéric Ozanam seek with patience, going beyond their weakness and insufficiency.

Looking to the future with determination, far from the glare of footlights and the artificialities of the media, they hold this thought of their founder deep in their own hearts:

"Charity must never look backwards, but always forwards. What it achieved in the past is small in quantity; present and future needs which it has to meet are infinite."

(Thomas Davitt CM, translator)

Marian Youth in 1995

*by Vincent GRODZISKI
Sr Antoinette-Marie HANCE
Members of the National Team of the Marian Youth*

Paris - May 1995

The international character of Marian Youth is extraordinarily rich in its cultural diversity, by its sharing in the new evangelisation and its involvement with and for the poor.

The Marian Youth of 1995, whatever their history are now moved by a double call:

- to bring back young people now far from the Church and especially those who are in difficult circumstances.
- to take Mary as a companion along the way to the Church and to life.

The Movement tries to give responsibility to the young people of today to organise themselves to bring to birth, where they are living, the New World, that civilization of Love in the gentle enthusiasm that is the way of the Virgin Mary.

The character of the Marian Youth throughout the world differs according to the different countries. It is known by various names: M.Y. (Marian Youth), M.V.Y. (Marian Vincentian Youth, Marian Vocational Youth), Association of the Children of Mary Immaculate, Association of the Children of Mary, V.M.Y.(Vincentian Marian Youth).

Setting

The movement is present on five continents. It is growing in some countries, in others it is shrinking. At the present moment the recorded numbers mount to about 200,000. The Movement brings together young people from five years of age and is open to university students and even adults in some countries. Most of the M.Y.'s are from a poor and simple background. The majority are girls (about 60%). They meet together regularly in little teams or groups in different places according to their set-up: parish-halls, institutions, base communities, schools, places where they live, chapels. Organisation is provided by responsible lay people, young and adults, seminarians, priests and sisters.

Structure

The presence of the Movement in the different countries seems linked, for the most part to the presence of the Congregation of the Mission and the Company of the Daughters

of Charity. At the same time it is noticed that other congregations, lay-people, priests in the parishes are drawn to the movement on account of its Marian spirituality, its closeness to the poor and the solid formation which it affords. The structure of the Movement differs a little from country to country. There is always a central office, a committee, a central organisation, or a national team. Its composition differs according to the place and to the make-up of the Movement. Thus some teams are composed entirely of Sisters, others of Sisters, Lay People and Priests.

Links With the Church

Local Level. The Movement is closely connected to the local churches. It is actively engaged in the parish pastoral activity and participates in catechism teaching, preparation of the liturgy, special drives, etc.

Relations with the clergy seem, in general, good even if some priests show resistance to the movement for various reasons. On the other hand, meeting with other organisations present on the ground gives an opportunity of working together. This collaboration demands that they look together at the situation before them so as to give answers that are new and adapted to the poor and to the Church of today. Take for example Brazil the Base Communities.

"... On the occasion of the Congress of 86, the challenge to join in the Base Communities grew and some M.Y. groups joined the Popular Movements. Sharing experiences and studies of "The New Way of Church" took place. These changes led the Movement to enter into a new stage of looking again at its life and asking: 'are we faithful to the Marian Vincentian spirit?' The studies of the beginnings, of the spirituality, of the history of the movement prepared the way for the new congress whose objective was the redefinition of the norms and the aims of the M.V.M.

The congress of 1989 was a new stage in the deepening of this searching for new answers to the call of the poor and the Church today which in turn brought a new approach and a new Marian vision ...

Important conclusions: It is essential to preserve the spirituality of the Movement: To Jesus by Mary. Living this spirituality in the option for the poor in the example of Mary and Saint Vincent. Being poor and/or making the option for Jesus Christ in the poor. The means of action used by each group can be different but the end must be the same.

Diocesan Level. The movement is also involved in different ways in pastoral activity on the diocesan level and takes part in such works as the synod, youth work, special drives, etc.

Official recognition of the Movement by some Episcopal Conferences indicates the interest that the bishops take in the aims of the Movement as a means of evangelisation of the youth of today.

National Level. In some countries the national leaders of different movements meet regularly with the Episcopal Delegate in charge of the Lay Apostolate to exchange their experiences, reflect on topics which currently challenge the christian faith and prepare seminars on a national level.

International Level. On account of its international character the Movement continues to be linked with the Pontifical Council of the Faith in Rome. It is invited to send delegates to international seminars like the World Day of Youth. In this context too, the national centres of the M.Y. received a questionnaire concerning their role in the New Evangelization.

Human and Christian Formation. In every country, the Movement has the privilege of taking part in human, Christian and apostolic formation.

Given the world in which they live today, new challenges must be taken up because the faith and the values of yesterday are being called into question; and no longer do the young have reference points. They are thrown off their balance on emotional, family, relational and religious levels. They have become prey to all sorts of pressures and ideas current in society; their social environment, political propaganda and numerous religious sects. That is why, a catechetical method, devised under different forms (team-work, week-ends, meetings, camps, retreats or person to person sharing allows the young people and their leaders to put in place the bases for a life that will be both human and christian. At the same time a formation in Marian devotion is given through the celebration of the Marian festivities on the occasion of the feasts of Mary. This leads to a deepening in doctrine, in pastoral practice and especially in the message of 1830. The novenas, the steps, the processions, the pilgrimages, the recitation of the rosary, and the distribution of the Medal of Mary Immaculate will all form part of this formation.

Along with this formation for all the members a continued and more intensive formation is provided for the leaders during sessions, congresses, seminars etc. (sacramental, biblical, liturgical, theological, ecclesiological, socio-political, study of Church documents...).

Apostolic Commitment. This initial and continued formation is steeped in the ethos of the movement, awareness of Marian spirituality and linked to the privileged witness of Saints Catherine, Vincent and Louise.

A theme for the year is chosen by many countries in terms of the Church and current topics. This allows the young people and the leaders to advance together and helps them to

make the link between life and faith. Formation and apostolic action go together for all the M.Y. of the world and more precisely: action for and with the poor. This M.Y. service progresses from commitment in their own lives to a regular commitment to action: visits to slums, to leprosaria, to the aged, to prisoners, to hospital patients, to poor families, to the blind, to the isolated, teaching people to read, helping children at school, work with children's groups, summer camps for the young, popular missions, etc. The Poor themselves form part of the team, active in their own surroundings and beyond them, one example among others, in India:

"... young boys and girls, members of the Association are illiterate. Working with our Parish Priest we tried to establish the Association in the villages (Bodopoda is surrounded by thick forests and high mountains without means of communication or other services for the villages in the district), and fourteen villages responded. The Association is taking deep roots. In spite of their illiteracy they hold monthly meetings, discuss given subjects and plan their activities. From time to time they receive the help of the catechists of their village who guide them and educate them in the different aspects of their life. Once every two months the sisters take part in these meetings. We notice to what a degree the Association brings them together in helping people who are in the greatest need. Sometimes they bring the sick to the dispensary carrying them on stretchers. They help the destitute giving them a little money for food and clothing. They contribute towards the needs of their village chapel, etc. It is interesting to see how, in their own poverty they collect money for their projects. They grasp at any opportunity to work in the fields and the money they earn is put into the common fund. In the same way they clear and cultivate the forest and all their pay is put into a common fund. These activities give them a sense of unity and from acting together in one project they develop christian values.

They gather at Bodopoda for seminars and celebrations and special activities on the occasion of the Feasts of Mary. They love to take part in them and they benefit greatly from them... We have been able to notice great changes in their lives as members of the Association devoted to Mary and to her Son in a special way.

"Love is resourceful, even to infinity" said Saint Vincent, indeed nothing stops the M.Y. An example is the Foreign Mission of the J.M.V. of Spain."

The Movement looking for other activities has thrown itself into the Foreign Missions (Missions Ad Gentes) since 85. Thus it has had eight years missionary experience in the Honduras, seven in San Domingo, one in Mexico and one in the Argentine. During the time of the mission, two months of July and August they worked in the town parishes, in the suburbs and the villages, always in very poor areas with the Vincentian Fathers and the Daughters of Charity. The clear object was to bring the message of Jesus Christ to the poor in the joy and the manner of young people. It was their aim to share their ideas and apostolic experiences with young people of their own age and to work with them in the areas of evangelization... The work of human and social development went together in

this... They worked on a literacy programme, a health programme to teach hygiene and childcare. They taught mothers some simple ideas for feeding underprivileged children. They built small timber houses for families living in the slums. Through their efforts were born small Christian communities and groups of young M. V. Y.'s who carry on the work they have begun....

In the spirit of the Magnificat

It seems clear that in every country the apostolic involvement of the M.Y. lives out the same spirit of the Magnificat. The Movement recognises in Mary "*who lives among the poor and the lowly of the Lord*", a woman full of energy, acquainted with poverty and suffering, flight and exile. They try to say that God is on their side and that he looks upon them with a preferential love. They stand up courageously to have their dignity and their rights respected. They proclaim their faith in a God that is a lowly servant and who is not afraid to take the last place to raise up those who count for nothing. Like Mary in the Magnificat, the M.Y.'s learn the path of wonderment, action and conversion.

In Conclusion

With Mary the Marian Youth share in building up a world for everyone, where no person will be put aside. Their first care is for those who are in a difficult situation so that they become active participants with others in society and the Church. An example from France will illustrate this:

"I am a widow. I have six children. The youngest will soon be three. My husband decided to leave one morning. He was unemployed. He just couldn't take any more. Before his death it was already difficult but now it's worse. We can't pay the rent any longer...

At the time of his death, my husband who was a believer, but not me, I said; 'to God with him'. I thought that if there was a God in heaven he would not have done that to us! The Good God; I don't believe in it. In my life I have got more blows than hugs from a father and a mother who drank. I never had enough to eat as a child.

Don't speak to me of your Good God. He is responsible for my kids in the M. Y. There is no question of them going with you".

One evening, I was at the end of my tether. Disgusted, I found my kids praying in their room before Our Lady. I stayed there without moving, listening to them, without their seeing me. That changed me. They were saying to Mary: "Daddy is with you. He helped everyone. He couldn't say no to a neighbour looking for anything. Tell him that we want to stay with the M. Y. He wanted us to go but Mum wants us to stop. In our heart we promised to be M. Y.'s but we can't. We want to keep our promise. Let him settle with you so that Mum says yes!"

Well, believe me, I was just stuck to the ground; I don't know what praying is but there I was, stunned, in front of my kids, listening to their words.

The following day, pretending I had seen nothing, I said to my children: 'I have been thinking. I'm going to phone to say you can keep going to the M. Y.' Well, they hugged me and went off into their room. I found them in front of the little statue of Our Lady, saying: 'Tell Daddy, its great. We can keep on going'. That's all I heard at the time. Now I don't know where I am with God. I don't know how to pray. I don't know if he exists, but anyway his mother had done a good day's work. I believe in her alright...

There's one thing that has made me sit up: I saw myself from the outside. Asking myself to write this story for the M. Y. I said to myself: 'everything that happens is important. Even after emptying all your bag you don't find that it is bad. You're not put down'. Someone, my kids' leader has just said to you: 'That's just terrific! It must be made known!' Well believe me, its the first time somebody told me I did something good.

Now I think: 'There must be a good God in the heart of those who know how to listen without judging poor people and who loves them so much that he doesn't turn on them for what they say when they are fed up to the teeth with life. We the little ones, people with no standing rely on the eyes of people capable of making our kids like other kids, making them also able to keep a promise.'

If that is what the M. Y. are, I say keep on, and then I am going to ask you to speak for us. Tell everyone that we, poor people, uneducated people, we, that poverty cuts off from others, that poverty crushes, don't ask to be seen like those who have everything, but we need to find love and we need to be thought of too. Poor people have riches in their heart even if they have nothing else.

Now, I say to my kids: 'you should bring others, at school and everywhere. That will help other young people to come out of themselves and not despair.' Anyway, I say it everywhere.

(Denis O'Donovan C.M., Translator)

FROM DEVOTION TO EVANGELIZATION

by Jesús Rodríguez Rico, C.M.

National Director of the Association of the Miraculous Medal in Spain

The Miraculous Medal Association has been marked principally by a pious and devotional attitude toward the Mother of God and, frequently, reduced to this area without much ecclesiastical or even social projection.

The month of May and the Triduums and novenas which precede the liturgical feast of the 27th of November are strong moments of prayer in relation to the Miraculous Medal. In many of the more than 400 current centers in all of Spain, the Eucharist is celebrated the 27th of each month for the deceased members and for the families who receive the Home Visit of the Virgin of the Miraculous Medal in their homes.

After Vatican Council II and the Apostolic Exhortation "Marialis Cultis" there has been a shift in the direction of our Association. We could not continue doing what we always did. Actually, John Paul II calls us to a new Evangelization at the dawn of the third millennium.

In Spain the bishops have a great concern for the Evangelization of diverse sectors such as the intellectuals, the workers, the youth and persons who have strayed from the life of the Church and live an ever growing agnosticism with terrible personal and social consequences. In order to respond to these calls, what we did first was to organize the catechetics of adults in our Association's centers. In this manner we offer Christian formation in a systematic way for those who have no other method of cultivating their baptismal faith

Currently there exist more than 200 groups of adult catechism even though not all the centers have decided to implement the program. There is a lack of catechists with experience and preparation.

In order to have a more wide range effect, a priest or Daughter of Charity explains to the persons who will direct the adults in their faith formation. The catechists exercise their ministry in private homes, not in churches, in order to reach those who would not approach a church.

The Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, *Robert Maloney*, in his message directed to the participants of the *Marian Congress* in *El Escorial*, commemorating *the One Hundredth Anniversary of the liturgical feast of the Miraculous Medal*, invited us to make each center of the Association a place of prayer, formation in the faith and charity toward the needy.(1)

The starting point for creating these groups of believers was to unite the Marian trend of the Little Company with the Vincentian charism of evangelizing the poor. We tried to prepare the believers so that they might give reason for hope, in these moments when the sects cause havoc among the simple and humble, the poor and less cultured. Now we are promoting the life of prayer in the centers. For this we depend on the spiritual experience of the Daughters of Charity and the courses on prayer which are offered in different cities in the nation.

Our hope is that the lay person recuperate the meaning of prayer as a means of increasing and strengthening one's faith in the midst of daily activities. These Christian formation groups meet once a month; various groups meet every two weeks. They pray with the Psalms, meditate some bible passage, share their prayer with simplicity, listen to the explanation that the catechist offers them and actively participate in the dialogue, finishing with a prayer of petition in litany form or a hymn.

The goal of these groups, which meet around the statue of the Virgin Mary of the Miraculous Medal, is a catechumenate of adults. Nonetheless we should proceed at their pace, conscious of their age, culture and possibilities. All catechism ends with a commitment.

587 members of the Miraculous Medal Association from all of Spain participated in the Congress in El Escorial. The conclusions mark the patterns of joint conduct and promotion of people; trying to unite prayer and action: devotion and commitment of life for the poor and humble of our society, piety and the use of the goods of the Miraculous Medal Association on behalf of the less fortunate; of those for whom we wish to be a voice and of those whom we wish to defend before the situation of injustice caused by a divided and selfish society.

HOME VISIT OF THE VIRGIN

This practice began in Barcelona some 80 years ago. Our Confreres observed that every month an urn or shrine box with a statue of the Holy Family would be passed from home to home if the family so asked. They thought about substituting the statue of Mary of the Miraculous Medal for that of the Holy Family.

In groups of approximately 30 families, the statue of the Virgin Mary passes from house to house a certain day each month. Each group has someone responsible to coordinate the presence of the statue in each home on the corresponding day of the month. This same individual repairs any damage, receives the offerings and hands them over to the treasurer of the Association. This person serves as a link between the Center and the families who receive the Virgin.

This devotional practice aids the sanctification of the family. It attempts to bring the religious symbol into the home so that children from their earliest years might see it. This practice encourages all to pray to the Mother, an occasion to remember the religious aspect, the remembrance of their baptismal faith and the world beyond, in the midst of difficulties or life's duties.

It is the day to honor Mary and, through her, to honor her Son, the Lord. For this reason we insist on reception of the sacraments on this day. Often we observe that the shrine box of the home visit of the Virgin of the Miraculous Medal is the only religious sign in many homes and the humble bond that unites these families with the ecclesiastical community.

In 1916 *Father Hilario Orzanco*, the great *apostle of the Virgin of the Miraculous Medal*, began to *extend this practice through all of Spain*. The Missionaries would encourage the devotion as a means of perseverance in the fruits of the Mission.(2) The Daughters of Charity would promote the visits where they held State benefices and many other houses located in towns and cities through all of Spain.

Since 1916 the Association of the Miraculous Medal is intimately united to the home visit of the Virgin and has become an established practice through all the nation. Later the Vincentian Fathers and Daughters of Charity took the practice to the nations of Latin America and observed the great value for convocation which it had among the simple, the humble, the poor and those who had strayed from the Church.

The offerings received in the collection box connected to the shrine box are channeled by the central committee of each local center toward the celebrations, the apostolate, charity toward the needy (3), formation of the members (4), contribution towards the five campaigns organized by the Church: *Mission Sunday, Catholic Charities Fight Against Hunger, Day of the Diocesan Church, Day of the Seminary*. We also contribute toward our Missions "Ad Gentes" and with the Volunteers of Charity (5).

It is not the intention to accumulate offerings but rather to use them as the needs arise, so that at year's end there is a small amount remaining. In this way it is not necessary to deposit it in banks or credit associations. Bank accounts can have grave risks with the Public Treasury, especially if someone, using our fiscal identification code under the guardianship of an Association of the Catholic Church, commits fiscal fraud or money laundering. This would involve us in a serious problem and stain the good name of the Association, the Little Company and the Church, a scandal which the media could divulge, calling attention to our good faith and our ignorance of the fraudulent use of our fiscal identification code. For this reason no notary powers are given to open bank accounts, only to persons strictly necessary according to the judicial and commercial laws of each nation.

The Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, *Richard McCullen*, gave me authorization to dispose of the funds of the Miraculous Medal Association in Spain (6). Later he also did so on behalf of another confrere (7) in order to have things well ordered, in case of accident or sudden death. In this way we would not lose the money should the person die who has the first signature on the bank account.

PRESENCE IN THE PARISHES AND IN THE DIOCESAN PASTORAL WORK

Since the Association of the Miraculous Medal is a Public Association in the Church (8), it could not remain enclosed in itself. If it acts in the name of the Church (9) and receives from the hierarchy the duty to be present in the world and sanctify the temporal order (10), it should be in communion with the local Church and its pastors where it exists (11). Currently it is canonically established in 62 of the 67 existing dioceses in Spain, including the Military Ordinariate.

We begin by offering the associates to the pastors as catechists, animators of devotional practice and promoters of charitable and social pastoral work, participating in Catholic Charities on the parish level and in visits to the sick. In 1992 we developed *the first pastoral plan* of our Miraculous Medal Association for the *years 1993-1994*. We focused on rediscovering and living baptismal faith and service in thanksgiving toward the poor. This pastoral plan should be adapted to the pastoral lines of each diocese and to the parochial projects where we are integrated and where we want to serve the Church with our own charism

The reception of the pastors was encouraging. They perceived that we desired only to involve ourselves in the general pastoral attention of the local Church and serve its faithful without expecting anything in return. The pastors also discovered that in our Association one could find people for the prophetic ministry (catechetics, above all with adults and estranged Catholics), liturgical ministry (animators of the Eucharistic liturgy) and ministry of deacons (visits to the sick and help to the needy). Since the offerings of the Miraculous Medal Association serve the good of the same parish or town where it is established, there was little resistance from the pastors although, unfortunately, we experience some still.

Some months ago we elaborated *the second Pastoral Plan* of the Association for the *years 1995 and 1996*. Together with the last plan, it supposes a step ahead in the commitment toward the promotion of people, help toward the needy and solidarity in the struggle against injustice. It is nothing more than a systematic exposition of the conclusions of our Marian Congress en El Escorial in 1994.

The 15th of August 1994, *100th Anniversary Commemoration of the Liturgical Feast of the Miraculous Medal*, we organized a *pilgrimage* of the associates to Lourdes and Paris, to the Chapel of the Apparitions of the Virgin Mary to Saint Catherine Labouré in 1830. *It was an historic day in which more than 700 pilgrims participated*. We were received and greeted by the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and by the Mother General of the Daughters of Charity, who celebrated her feast day that day.

JURIDICAL ASPECTS

Although it might seem strange, the base that ought to assure the future of an Association of faithful is not only the charism which drives it. An Association also needs a juridical support in order that the Diocesan Bishop approve it, so that it might function adequately and that it might continue.

The charism of the Miraculous Medal Association is to honor Mary, the Mother of the Lord, in the mystery of her Immaculate Conception (12). This will be the soul and life which vitalizes its members. The juridical structure will help to perpetuate the charism, to make it concrete in diverse occasions and circumstances of the Christian life of the associates. The juridical structure will also help to adapt the Association to new times.

The one who creates the Miraculous Medal Association is the *Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission in its nature as an Association of Apostolic Privilege* (13), that is, entrusted by the Pope to the Superior General of a Religious Order or Congregation. Nonetheless there were times in which, by disposition of the General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission, the Superior General delegated this faculty to the Visitors for their respective Provincial canons and to the local superior for his house. The Visitor could sub-delegate to a Missionary for his Province (14).

Currently, in order to obtain greater working flexibility, Father Richard McCullen, C.M., as Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, gave me a written power in order to create Centers and sign patents of creation of the Miraculous Medal Association in all Spanish territory (15).

Nonetheless the written authorization of the Diocesan Bishop is necessary in order to proceed to erect canonically a new center of the Association (16). Invoking paragraph 2 of Canon 312, some bishops said that it was sufficient to have a house of the Congregation of the Mission or of the Daughters of Charity in one's dioceses in order that the Association begin to exist as an appropriate work of these congregations. In this respect I want to recall the pontifical mandate, "Dialectus Filius" of Saint Pius X directed to Father Antoine Fiat, C.M. and his successors in the Generalate of the Company in which he makes a recommendation to him personally, not to the whole Congregation of the Mission (17). In summary we can say that this commission makes the Association a field of work for the Missionaries and, confided to the Superior General of the Mission, we ought to give it a Vincentian color. What can be said about erecting it in parishes staffed by secular priests or in churches served by religious? Written authorization of the diocesan bishop is necessary (18)).

It is important to keep the authenticated or legalized photocopies which have been presented before a civil or ecclesiastical Notary in the archives of the Provincial and General Curia. This includes both the decree by which the Diocesan Bishop authorizes the creation of the Miraculous Medal Association in his diocese as well as the various decrees of establishment signed by the same prelate, relative to each one of the existing centers in his diocese.

By juridical analogy one proceeds to the canonical establishment of the Association on the part of the Episcopal Conference. It is the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission who establishes the Association, but this requires the consent of the Episcopal Conference of a particular nation. In Spain they required me to present the approbation on the part of twelve bishops in order to proceed to give us the decree by which the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission is authorized to establish the Miraculous Medal Association within the national territory (19).

With these approbations in the ecclesiastical circuit we now have juridical canonical person of the Association (20). Also it is convenient to make two photocopies of these decrees once they have been authenticated or legalized before a civil or ecclesiastical Notary in order to keep them in the archives of the General and Provincial Curiae.

It is convenient to obtain juridical civil person. In order to do this one inscribes the Association in the Register of Religious Associations of the Ministry of Justice, if it so exists in the State legislation, or in the Register of Civil Associations of the Interior Ministry or Governor's office (21). With civil juridical person the Association is subject to rights and duties before the State. Therefore it can acquire, possess, administer and dispose of goods.

Perhaps most importantly is that with this civil juridical step we have the basis to seek from the public Treasury a Fiscal Identification Code. We can also enter the social security system of the nation as a small business so that our employees might obtain social coverage: sanitary assistance, pharmaceutical assistance, sick pay, accident coverage and retirement benefits when necessary (22).

I REPEAT ONCE AGAIN: of all the documents it is prudent to have 2 authenticated or legalized photocopies which have been presented before a civil or ecclesiastical Notary for the archives of the Provincial and General Curiae. History is made with written documents.

It should be well understood that for all these procedures some statutes are necessary, both in the ecclesiastical as well as the civil sphere (23)

We wrote some which Father McCullen approved on January 31, 1986. These were the beginning of some opportune steps. In this year, 1995, we plan to write some new statutes, revise the Association's bulletin and prepare catechism of adults in a systematic manner.

(John Carney, translator)

(1) Rome, April 7, 1994

(2) XXVI General Assembly C.M. 1902, Decree 553. Secundum Supplementum, Page 3.

XXIX General Assembly C.M. 1931, Decree 630. Cuartum Supplementum, Page 4.

(3) Canons 1254 paragraph 2 and 114 paragraph 2.

(4) Canon 329.

(5) Canon 328.

(6) Rome, March 15, 1986.

(7) Rome, October 29, 1988.

(8) Canon 301 paragraph 3.

(9) Canon 313.

(10) Canon 298 paragraph 1.

(11) Canon 311.

- (12) Acta Apostolicae Sedis. Tome I, number 17, pages 669-671 art. 1 Rescripto Dilectus Filius.
- (13) Canon 312, paragraph 1, number 3.
- (14) Decree 38 of the XXXII General Assembly, C.M., 1955. Nova Series Post Approbatas Constituciones; page 10.
- (15) Rome, March 15, 1986.
- (16) Canon 312, paragraph 2.
- (17) Acta Apostolicae Sedis. Tome I, number 17, pages 669-671, dispositive part after article 7.
- (18) Canon 312 paragraph 2.
- (19) Decree of Establishment of the Superior General of the C.M., signed in Rome on December 19, 1986. The decree of the Spanish Episcopal Conference was signed in Madrid on February 23, 1987.
- (20) Canon 114 paragraph 1 and 313.
- (21) Our Association obtained it May 8, 1987.
- (22) Canon 1286 paragraph 1.
- (23) Canon 304.

FREDERICK OZANAM.

CONTINUITY AND RENEWAL OF THE VINCENTIAN SPIRIT.

by Jaime Corera, C.M.

Parallel lives.

In spite of the space of two centuries between them, there are, in the biographies of Vincent de Paul and Frederick Ozanam, some interesting similarities, which, perhaps, suggested the title of this essay. Although born far from the city of Paris (Ozanam in Italy), they both spent the greater part of their lives as inhabitants of that city; both were students and graduates of its University of the Sorbonne. However, on this superficial level, the differences between them are more remarkable than the similarities, especially as regards their origin as well as their profession. Ozanam was a middle class citizen; by profession an intellectual, a writer and a professor, while Vincent was of a poor country farming background.

So the difference of social background could well have been a cause, or at least an occasion, of a further parting of the ways which would have made impossible any parallelism between their lives. For while the desire of overcoming the poverty of his origin was on the point of leading Vincent astray into the fruitless paths of ambition, until he was about thirty six years of age, Ozanam was "*thanking God for having been born in a situation between scarcity and abundance.... God knows what dangers the luxury of a wealthy condition would have had for me.*" (Letters, I, 239).

In their lives there are similarities which are much less superficial and more meaningful than those already mentioned. The dedication of their lives to the salvation of the poor, originated in both as a solution to a crisis of faith. The fact that Vincent suffered a crisis after he had reached the age of thirty scarcely matters, while Ozanam had solved his crisis before he had reached the age of twenty. In both cases the result was the same.

There is also a very curious coincidence, although at first sight anecdotal, which resulted in the lives of both men in being an event of decisive consequences. The young agnostic, Jean Broet, effected without being aware of it, a strict parallel in the life of Ozanam, with the so called "*heretic of Marchais*" in the life of Saint Vincent. These two men confronted each of them with the same objection: "*how can the Catholic Church be the true Church of Jesus Christ when it is forgetful of the poor?*" It is true that Ozanam was confronted with this

objection before he ever thought of working for the poor, while Vincent de Paul heard it when he had already spent three years of dedication to the country missions.

However, all the important biographies of Saint Vincent rightly stress the importance of the event for the future planning of his life and work. Abelly, who first brings the event to our notice, devotes four pages in detail to it. (I.I, c. 13, pp. 54-57).

The dedication of his missionaries "to the instruction and sanctification of the poor" transformed them into "*witnesses to the fact that the Holy Spirit is guiding the Church.*" (o.c., p. 57). For both Vincent and Ozanam, active charity to the poor will be from that moment, as well as being the guiding principle of their lives, the greatest proof of the veracity of their faith and the veracity of the Church.

Continuity

From its very foundation, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul recognises the Saint as its Patron, and it is inscribed in a formula of dedication to the poor which draws from and is inspired by the work and spirit of Saint Vincent de Paul. By the same token it does not surprise us that Ozanam and his first companions went to learn a Vincentian spirit and the methods of work for the poor from an outstanding daughter of Saint Vincent named Rosalie Rendu, nor the fact that they found in the Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission, ideas, which at times, they copied almost literally into their own regulations, to inspire them with a simple, humble and charitable style in their activity among the poor.

But in the thought and writings of Ozanam one notices a still more profound continuity; namely a continuity which reaches to the very roots of what we qualify as a "*Vincentian spirit.*" Various modern theories of that spirit have succeeded in pointing out accurately the central and radical place which the Will of God occupies for Saint Vincent as a base and root of his very soul. Abelly himself saw this very clearly: "*The conformity of his will with the Will of God was the general virtue of this holy man, a virtue which poured out its influence over all his other virtues*" (I.3, c. 5); including, of course, over his characteristic "*virtue*" of love for the poor. The "*spirituality*" of Frederick Ozanam had no other foundation

"Up to now I have asked God for light to know His Will. At present... it only remains that He give me the courage to carry it out" (Letters, I 425).

This "*virtue*" or basic attitude must be linked, as for Vincent, with a profound humility:

"Is it possible that there is a vine stock in the vineyard of the Lord that He has not surrounded with great care?... But I, a wicked plant, have not blossomed under the divine breath..., I have not known how to love, I have not known how to work..., I feel that I have piled over my head the responsibility for the graces to which I pay no attention each day" (o.c., I 172).

These words of Ozanam remind us of the pathetic outbursts of Saint Vincent about his own unworthiness, his *"I am worse than the demon,"* his *"I am the worst of all men."* These expressions are so disturbing to the average reader today, without doubt, because he/she does not feel as humble as either of these two men.

Both *"virtues"* are also joined to a boundless confidence in Divine Providence, so remarkable in Saint Vincent. At an early age, Ozanam writes:

"I think that I can affirm that there is a Providence and that this Providence, from the beginning of time, could never abandon its rational creatures to a wicked spirit of evil and error" (o.c., I 34).

Only on the basis of such confidence in Providence could the spirit and the hope of improving the temporal and spiritual condition of the poor be maintained, in the face of the apparent disasters of history.

But the real continuity of spirit between Vincent de Paul and Frederick Ozanam is fully found in that which defines, from a theological point of view, the very essence of the Vincentian *"spirituality,"* namely the identification of Christ with the poor (*"You did it unto Me"*). Here is an important text of Ozanam which reminds us forcefully of that other text of Saint Vincent: *"turn the other side of the medal and you will see, in the light of faith, that the poor represent for us, the Son of God."*

"We see the poor see the poor with the eyes of flesh; there they are and we can place our fingers in the wounds; the marks of the crown of thorns are visible on their foreheads....

You are the sacred image of the God we do not see; and as we cannot love Him in any other way, let us love Him in your persons.... You are our masters, and we will be your servants" (ibid., p 243).

The last sentence appears to be not only inspired by, but literally copied from another well known characteristic statement of Saint Vincent.

Renewal

A careful reading of the documents of the Mission during the 19th and 20th centuries (General Assemblies, circulars of Superiors' General..., constitutions of 1954) leave the painful impression on the reader of the fact that the Congregation founded by Saint Vincent was trying to maintain fidelity to the spirit of the Founder on the basis of a literal repetition of his words. And that in times of

profound social changes of which, of course, everyone was aware because they were so obvious (revolutions, industrialisation, democratisation...). Besides, these changes were seen by intelligent persons, such as Fr. Etienne, as an excellent historic opportunity for reconstructing, and renewing, what Fr. Etienne called the "*building*" of the Congregation:

"In this situation, is there not a completely new basis on which the Congregation can be designed and its building reconstructed in conditions favourable to freedom of movement and to the development of its activity?" (Recueil... t. III, p.399)

There was the great opportunity, clearly perceived and expressed. In order to take advantage of it, he believed that the key could be found, as we have said, in the literal fidelity to the words of Saint Vincent:

"The nature of the Congregation cannot be subjected to the changes and alternatives which institutions formed by the hand of man suffer..., one ought not to introduce the smallest change in our rules and Constitutions, for they can be observed with the same fruit and fidelity at the present time as in past ages." (Circular and Assembly of 1849, *ibid.*, p. 135).

But, as often happens, the proposed literal repetition was not as literal as was claimed. The two hundred years between the one who says something and the one who claims to repeat it literally have not passed in a vacuum. Referring to numbers 15 & 16 of chapter VIII of the Common Rules (number which, with good sense, advise the missionary not to spend time or energy on the vagaries of the politics of the time), Father Etienne writes:

"By our vocation we ought to keep entirely remote from the movements of politics, from all changes which take place in the social order" (13th of August 1874; *ibid.*, p.112).

Although the first part of the above quotation would appear, at first glance to coincide literally with the idea of Saint Vincent, the second part (from all changes which take place in the social order), apart from being impossible for any individual and still less for any institution, to follow out in practice, would not have occurred to Saint Vincent, nor even thought of by him. Only many years later, at least one hundred, was it possible for anyone to conceive and express the idea of social change.

Frederick Ozanam was a man who was extremely sensitive to social change. Not only was he sensitive to change, but also to the idea that social change for the Christian means a revision of his ways of understanding the faith, so that facing social change, he can also follow the ancient faith by acting as a leaven in the new society:

"The question which agitates us today is not a question of persons nor a question of political forms, but a social question; it is the violent collision of riches with poverty.... ..our duty as Christians, is to place ourselves between these irreconcilable enemies and to strive to bring about an equality, as far as possible, among these persons, and that charity may bring about that which justice alone would not be capable of doing." (Letters, t. I, p.239).

While he was 17 years of age and very much in line with his middle class family education, he showed himself still as a genuine "legitimist" (*"I have seen a poster with the announcement that Charles X ought not to be king, or to reign over us. Since when is the person of the king not inviolable and sacred? I will always be a faithful subject of King Charles X"* - *ibid.*, p.27). The years and without doubt also the faith taught him a lot. At the age of 25 he writes:

"Every government appears to me respectable in so far as it represents the principle of divine authority. But I think that along with the power, it must maintain the principle of liberty; I think that one must advise or warn against a power which exploits the power in place of sacrificing itself" (*ibid.*, p. 143).

Immediately after the Revolution, at the age of 35, (1848)

"We have accepted the republic, not as an evil of the times that we have to resign ourselves to, but as progress which we must defend." (*"Lo que somos"*, en *L'Ere Nouvelle*, n., 16, I, 1st of May 1848).

In contrast, let us see what Father Etienne wrote, only a few months later:

"The cause of all revolutions, which overturn thrones and destroy empires, is found in those words of Scripture which are placed on the tongues of the wicked: 'I will not serve, nor will I submit.' The foundation on which the social order rests is the respect for authority" (*Recueil*, t. III, p.141, Circular of 1849).

It is scarcely possible to find a sharper contrast of opinions about the same historical phenomenon. Both opinions proceed from men inspired by Saint Vincent. Both wish to express attitudes inspired by Christian faith. But the attitude of Etienne, unlike that of Ozanam, although based on Biblical reasons, poorly conceals the reality of a nostalgia for the old regime at a time when it was already dead and buried.

But these nostalgias for the past can only lead to a rejection of the present and an escape into "Winter quarters." This was a posture which a good part of the Church and a good part of the Congregation of the Mission adopted for about one hundred years. This was inspired in large measure by the one who is rightly considered as the re-founder of the Congregation, Father Etienne.

The leaven does not become effective while it is carefully stored in the larder. What happened in the Church before the brutal event of the universal

proletarianisation of the masses of European citizens? The attitude of isolation and of taking refuge within herself, faced with the problems created by the new industrial-capitalist society produced, as Pope Pius X came to realise at the turn of the century, the loss to the Church of the working class.

This would not have happened if attention had been paid to what Ozanam was writing with clear foresight in 1848:

"These masses (of people) so tenderly loved by the Church, because they represent the poverty (poor) which God loves, and the work which God blesses..., let us help them not only with alms which demeans them, but also by our efforts to set up institutions or conditions, which, by making them independent, improve their lot. Let us make way for the barbarians!" (Correspondence, 10th February 1848).

That last phrase caused, as it could not do otherwise, a great scandal among middle-class conservative Catholics (what would Fr. Etienne have thought of it?) a scandal which would not be safely sweetened by the explanations which Ozanam believed he was obliged to give

- to a friend:

"In saying: let us make way for the barbarians, I am seeking that, instead of mollifying the consciences of the egoistic middle class, we devote ourselves to the people. It is among the (poor) people that I am able to see the remains of faith (remember St. Vincent saying: 'among the poor, one finds the true religion, the living faith...') and of morality for saving a society which the upper classes have already lost" (22nd February 1848).

- to his brother, a priest:

"Instead of seeking an alliance with a defeated middle-class, let us seek our support among the working-class poor, who are the real allies of the Church. Poor like them, deprived like them, blessed with all the blessings of the Saviour" (23rd May 1848).

He could not be more explicit, but he was not heeded (certainly not by the Congregation of the Mission) until the "official" Church took heed in the Encyclical "Rerum Novarum" by Pope Leo XII, almost half a century later. But the "official" Church itself did not completely accept his words till almost a century later with the Second Vatican Council and its preferential option for the poor.

Conclusion

To be able to consider oneself as legitimately Vincentian in fact (and not merely because one belongs to one of the institutions founded by St. Vincent) one must base one's life even today, on the "traditional" virtues lived by St. Vincent and proposed to his followers; fulfilling the Will of God, trust in Providence, simplicity, humility..., a genuine option (not only preferential, but exclusive) for the poor. Without the equipment of these and other virtues it is not possible to live, especially today, in its fullness, the Christian life invented by St. Vincent de Paul (in reality inspired by the Holy Spirit) in the XVIIth century.

But placing continuity in the same spirit on a supposed literal fidelity would result in closing one's eyes to the obvious fact that the later society is not now the society of XVIIth century in which St. Vincent lived. True continuity in the same spirit has to adopt for itself new forms of working for the poor in order to try to respond adequately to the new social situation. Put in a nutshell, the Christian faith and the Vincentian spirit today cannot be blind to the necessary social and political dimensions; dimensions which have now been treated in "Gaudium et Spes" document of Vatican II and elsewhere.. They are being treated with great clarity in the thought of present day theologians. The present day Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission treat of them with sobriety, but with sufficiency (2; 11; 12; 14; 18; 85; 88; Statutes 1; 2; 3; 7; 8; 9; 11; 40).

There had been a certain slowness in the explicit recognition of all those new phenomena in society and in the faith on the part of the Church and on the part of the Congregation of the Mission. Better late than never! But the Vincentian tradition had no reason to wait to these times, and to that (Vatican II) Council in order to try to reformulate its own charismatic vision for post-feudal ages. In fact, Frederick Ozanam, a devoted Vincentian, had already re-formulated it with courage and foresight.

Séamus O'Neill, Translator

A FURTHER LOOK AT "GENTLENESS"

Gentleness, or *douceur*, is the third of the five characteristic virtues of the Congregation of the Mission.¹ It is also one of the virtues stressed most by St. Vincent in his conferences to the Daughters of Charity. "For what is charity," he tells them, "but love and *douceur*."²

St. Vincent uses the French word almost 400 times in his letters and conferences, with various shades of meaning. In the Latin text of the Common Rules, to express the same concept, he uses the word *mansuetudo*.³

It is very difficult to translate *douceur* into English. The literal translation would, of course, be *sweetness*. But, in contemporary English, that rarely fits.⁴ Today sweetness has cloudy connotations in English, especially in describing persons. While it can still be used appropriately in just the right circumstances, its usage becomes more and more limited. Sometimes it has overtones of effeminacy. One might not hesitate to say, in Italian, that a man's character is *dolcissimo*, but one would be slow to say, in English, that he is "very sweet."

"Meekness" too, while usually used to translate *mansuetudo*, does not sufficiently convey the rich overtones of St. Vincent's use of *douceur*. Somehow it often carries with it the connotation of timidity or lack of strength. The latest English translations of the Rules, as well as of the letters, for the most part choose "gentleness," which, it seems to me, is considerably better, because it allows for stronger overtones.

The problem, however, lies not just with the translation of *douceur* as "sweetness" or "meekness." In fact, it is the thesis of this article that *douceur*, as used in the Rules, letters, and conferences of St. Vincent, has a wide range of meanings. As a result, the word that one uses to translate it (for the sake of consistency and readability in this article, I choose "gentleness") must be

¹I call this article a *further* look at "gentleness," since I have already treated this subject, in an earlier essay. Cf. R. Maloney, "Five Characteristic Virtues: Yesterday and Today" in *The Way of Vincent de Paul* (New York: New City Press, 1992) 37-69.

²SV IX, 267.

³CR II, 14.

⁴Actually, however, *sweetness* has a rather noble history in the English language. Shakespeare does not hesitate to use it as a tender accolade: "Goodnight, sweet prince" (*Hamlet*, Act V, Scene 2, line 373). We also find the word generously sprinkled through classical Christian prayers: "O clement, o loving, o sweet Virgin Mary." It is common in hymns: "Sweet Little Jesus Lord," "Goodnight, Sweet Jesus." Popular songs loved the word: "Ain't She Sweet," "Sweet Georgia Brown." Its usage continues, and is accepted, even to the present day in some common phrases: "sweet sixteen," "my sweetheart." My brother-in-law, in fact, still calls my sister "Sweetie"!

supplemented by a variety of other words and phrases. I offer the following exploration of the various meanings of *douceur* as a help to those who want to "put on" this virtue, which St. Vincent regarded as so important.

I. DOUCEUR AS UNDERSTOOD BY ST. VINCENT

1. *It is a missionary virtue.*

It is a mistake to think that, for St. Vincent, the five characteristic virtues were merely a matter of personal Christian asceticism or of individual perfection. He chooses them as characteristic of *missionaries*. This is evident, in regard to *mansuetudo*, when St. Vincent introduces it in the Common Rules. There⁵ he states that the missionary, by exercising this virtue, will reconcile the hearts of men and women, so that they are converted to the Lord. Since the reconciliation of those involved in quarrels was precisely one of the goals that St. Vincent proposed for the mission,⁶ he wanted the reconciler to be able to remain cool when he mediated disputes that were hot! He states, moreover, that missionaries, beyond all other priests, are to be filled with gentleness since their vocation calls them to serve the most miserable and abandoned in society.

There are many instances where St. Vincent describes *douceur* as a missionary virtue. He tells François Du Coudray⁷ that recently he had been involved in the conversion of three people, but he avows that this was possible only through *douceur*, humility, and patience. He assures another priest of the Mission⁸ that, while giving missions, one can win over the poor only by *douceur* and personal goodness. He states that this is, in fact, the reason why he has firmly resolved to recommend the practice of this virtue to the Company. When speaking to Philippe Le Vacher about work among the captives and slaves in Algiers,⁹ he encourages him to attract them by gentle (*douces*) means. He expresses his fear that the evil which the slaves are already suffering in their captive state, joined with the rigor that Le Vacher would like to exercise, might lead them to despair.

⁵CR II, 6.

⁶CR XI, 8.

⁷SV I, 66.

⁸SV IV, 52.

⁹SV IV, 120.

In 1852 Etienne Blatiron, the superior in Genoa, asked St. Vincent several times to send Monsieur Ennery to give a mission in Corsica. St. Vincent refused,¹⁰ stating that Ennery is not gentle enough for that region, "where the people are uncouth and used to being rough." He emphasizes the missionary value of gentleness: "They must be won over by *douceur* and cordiality, for evils are cured by the contrary."

St. Vincent likewise tells the Daughters of Charity that nothing conquers the hearts of those who are angry or bitter more than *douceur*.¹¹

Finally, in the principal conference that he gave on gentleness, on March 28, 1659, St. Vincent states emphatically that it is the virtue of "a true missionary."¹² In another conference given five months later on the five characteristic virtues, he underlines how essential gentleness is in dealing with poor, often ignorant, country people.¹³

2. *It enables the missionary to control anger and to channel it properly.*

This is the principal theme of the conference that St. Vincent gave on March 28, 1659.¹⁴ Here he states that gentleness involves various steps. The first step has two stages. In the first stage a person represses the spontaneous movement that he feels toward anger, trying to remain calm and reasonable. This is difficult, St. Vincent tells his listeners, but it is possible, since, while the movements of nature precede those of grace, grace can conquer them. The second stage consists in directing one's anger appropriately. It may at times be important to correct, to chastise, to reprove, just as Jesus did with his disciples. In such instances the missionary should act not because he has been overcome by anger, but because he has become its master.

St. Vincent states that the gentle are constant and firm. They are able to think straight. On the contrary those who allow themselves to be carried away by

¹⁰SV IV, 449.

¹¹SV IX, 261.

¹²SV XII, 189.

¹³SV XII, 305.

¹⁴SV XII, 182ff.

anger and passion are ordinarily inconstant.¹⁵ In addition, he states: "I think that the ability to discern things is granted only to those who have *douceur*."¹⁶

3. *It is linked with respect for the human person.*

St. Vincent often links gentleness and respect.¹⁷ He tells the Daughters of Charity that there is no such thing as charity without gentleness and respect for the other.¹⁸ He urges Robert de Sergis to treat the domestic help gently, cordially, and with profound respect.¹⁹

In a conference to the Daughters of Charity, given on August 19, 1646, on "The Practice of Mutual Respect and of *Douceur*," St. Vincent encourages them to give themselves to God by respecting one another. He notes that this will not be easy, and for that reason asks them to join with him in a prayer²⁰:

O my God, I desire from the bottom of my heart to be gentle and respectful toward my sisters in order to please you, and once more I give myself entirely to you to strive to acquire these virtues in a manner quite different from the way I have acted up until now. But, as I am weak and can do nothing that I have resolved to do without your special assistance, I beseech you, O God, by your beloved Son Jesus, who is love and gentleness itself, to grant me those virtues, together with the grace of never doing anything contrary to them.

4. *Gentleness should be accompanied by firmness, especially in superiors.*

St. Vincent touches on this theme frequently in his letters to Louise de Marillac and to various superiors. He often tells Louise to honor Our Lord in his gentleness and firmness. In a letter written to her on November 1, 1637, he says: "If the gentleness of your spirit needs a dash of vinegar, borrow a little

¹⁵SV XI, 65.

¹⁶SV XII, 190.

¹⁷Cf. SV I, 88; VII, 590-91; VIII, 227; IX, 260ff.

¹⁸SV IX, 260.

¹⁹SV I, 354.

²⁰SV IX, 269.

from Our Lord's spirit. O Mademoiselle, how well he knew how to find a bittersweet remark when it was needed!"²¹ In putting Monsieur Portail in charge of a mission team, in 1632, he encouraged him to honor *la douceur et l'exactitude* of Our Lord.²² In writing to the superior at Nancy, François Dufestel, Vincent tells him to be firm and uncompromising in regard to the end, but gentle and humble in regard to the means.²³ He gives the same advice almost verbatim in a letter written four days later to Jean Guérin²⁴ and repeats it in another letter to Guérin four months later.²⁵ He returns to the same theme in writing to Etienne Blatiron, the superior at Genoa, on September 9, 1650,²⁶ as well as to Louis Dupont, superior at Tréguier, on February 16, 1656.²⁷

Using a classical axiom in a letter to Denis Laudin, on August 7, 1658, he encourages him to imitate the spirit of Our Lord who is equally *suave et ferme*.²⁸

St. Vincent summed all of this up quite carefully in his advice to a seminary director²⁹:

We must be firm but not rough in our guidance and avoid an insipid kind of gentleness (une douceur fade), which is ineffective. We will learn from Our Lord how our gentleness should always be accompanied by humility and grace so as to attract hearts to Him and not cause anyone to turn away from Him.

Joseph Leonard, in a translation made a number of years ago, rendered this text as follows: "Namby-pamby mildness, that is useless, should be avoided"!³⁰

²¹SV I, 393.

²²SV I, 176.

²³SV II, 298.

²⁴SV II, 300.

²⁵SV II, 355.

²⁶SV IV, 75.

²⁷SV V, 552.

²⁸SV VII, 226.

²⁹SV IV, 597.

³⁰Joseph Leonard, *St. Vincent and Mental Prayer* (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1925) 177.

5. *Gentleness also means affability, cordiality, warmth, approachability.*

This is the way St. Vincent often describes *douceur* in speaking about relationships with the poor and relationships within the Community.

Cordiality is one of the key words that he uses to describe good relationships.³¹ He places it among the means for persevering in one's vocation,³² stating that a missionary will persevere if he lives in deep charity and cordiality with his brothers.

He links cordiality with affability, saying that it is particularly necessary in working with poor country people.³³ He states that affability is the soul of good conversation and renders it not only useful but also agreeable. In his principal conference on gentleness, he says that the second step in being *douce* (after controlling one's anger and channeling it properly) is affability and cordiality.³⁴

St. Vincent is convinced that warmth and approachability are especially necessary in those who hold important positions in the Church:

*You can see by experience that an amiable way wins hearts and attracts them; on the other hand, it has been noted in regard to persons of rank who hold office that, when they are too serious and cold, everyone fears and shuns them. Since we must work with poor country people, candidates for orders, people on retreat, and all sorts of others, it will not be possible for us to produce fruit, if we are like parched land that bears only thistles.*³⁵

6. *Gentleness involves joyfulness and peacefulness.*

³¹SV I, 112; IV, 51, 113, 341, 449; VI, 29; IX, 261.

³²SV XI, 109.

³³SV XI, 68.

³⁴SV XII, 189.

³⁵SV XII, 189.

St. Vincent tells the Daughters of Charity that when someone has joy in her heart she cannot hide it. People will see it on her face. They will be grateful to God for having met her.³⁶

Here, the key French word in St. Vincent's writings is *gai*.³⁷ Since St. Louise was a rather serious type, St. Vincent often urged her to be *gaie*. As she sets out on a journey in 1631, he encourages her: "Honor the tranquility of His soul and that of His Holy Mother and be very *gaie* on your trip, since you have good reason to be so in the work in which Our Lord is employing you."³⁸ On another occasion, as she was about to travel with the more ebullient Madame Goussault, he writes: "Please be very cheerful with her, even though you should have to lessen a bit that somewhat serious disposition which nature has bestowed on you and which grace is tempering by the mercy of God."³⁹ He often recommends that she seek the peace of mind and heart that characterized the Blessed Mother and Our Lord.⁴⁰

During the annual retreat of 1632 he exhorted the missionaries to have great respect for one another during the time of recreation and also to be *gai*. He advises a superior to conform his conduct to that of Our Lord, who was always completely humble, completely gentle, completely attentive, and accommodating, with humor, of the infirmities of others.⁴¹

He constantly counsels the Daughters of Charity to be joyous, smiling in their service of the poor. He once told St. Louise⁴²: "The kingdom of God is peace in the Holy Spirit. He will reign in you, if your heart is at peace. So, be at peace, Mademoiselle, and you will honor in a sovereign way the God of peace and love."

7. *Gentleness involves forbearance and forgiveness.*

Support (forbearance) is the key French word here.

³⁶SV X, 487.

³⁷As all English-speaking readers recognize, *gay*, in their own language, has undergone a remarkable transformation in recent decades, so that today it very often means *homosexual*.

³⁸SV I, 102.

³⁹SV I, 502.

⁴⁰SV I, 111, 114, 571.

⁴¹SV IV, 581.

⁴²SV I, 114.

He encourages Etienne Blatiron to treat a troublesome confrere with gentleness and forbearance (*support*), since this is in conformity with the spirit of Our Lord.⁴³ He tells Bernard Codoing to show two confreres, with whom he was having difficulty, the gentleness and forbearance recommended by Our Lord.⁴⁴ He repeats the same advice to Marc Coglée, superior in Sedan,⁴⁵ to Louis Dupont, superior at Tréguier,⁴⁶ as well as to Pierre Cabel⁴⁷ and Firmin Get.⁴⁸

In the conference on "The Five Characteristic Virtues of the Company," given on August 22, 1659, he states that gentleness and forbearance are necessary both in community life and in the service of the neighbor.⁴⁹ It entails enduring offenses with forgiveness and courage. In fact, we should treat gently even those who do injury to us. He encourages the missionaries:

*Gentleness not only makes us excuse the affronts and injustices we receive, but even inclines us to treat with gentleness those from whom we receive them, by means of kind words, and should they go so far as to abuse us and even strike us in the face, it makes us endure all for God. Such are the effects produced by this virtue. Yes, a servant of God who truly possesses it, when violent hands are laid upon him, offers to the divine goodness this rough treatment and remains in peace.*⁵⁰

8. *Gentleness goes hand in hand with humility.*

St. Vincent returns to this theme again and again. The Spirit of Our Lord, he tells Robert de Sergis,⁵¹ is one of gentleness and humility. In the Common

⁴³SV III, 383.

⁴⁴SV III, 469.

⁴⁵SV IV, 51.

⁴⁶SV V, 605.

⁴⁷SV VII, 201.

⁴⁸SV VII, 594.

⁴⁹SV XII, 306.

⁵⁰SV XII, 192.

⁵¹SV I, 536; cf. I, 528.

Rule he cites the text from Matthew's gospel, "Learn from me that I am gentle and humble of heart"(11:29b).⁵²

In writing to Monsieur Portail about how to respond to one of the other original members of the Company, François Du Coudray, he encourages him to treat him always with gentleness and humility.⁵³ He assures Sr. Françoise Ménage, in a letter written on February 12, 1659, that she will become truly happy if she practices humility, gentleness, and charity toward the poor and toward her sisters.⁵⁴

The Rule of the Daughters of Charity⁵⁵ also links the two virtues, calling the members of the Company to honor Our Lord particularly in his poverty, his humility, his gentleness, his simplicity, and his sobriety. In fact, for St. Vincent gentleness and humility are so intertwined that, like prudence and simplicity, they are "twin sisters."⁵⁶

9. *Gentleness involves compassion for others.*

St. Vincent states that the missionary must be filled with compassion,⁵⁷ particularly since he is called to serve the most miserable, the most abandoned, and those overwhelmed by spiritual and physical ills. He consistently links compassion with *douceur*.

In the 12th rule for the Daughters of Charity he states: "Their principal concern shall be to serve the sick poor, treating them with compassion, gentleness, cordiality, respect, and devotion."⁵⁸ He tells the Daughters that their holiness consists in observing their rules well and in the right spirit by serving the poor with love, gentleness, and compassion.⁵⁹

⁵²CR II, 6.

⁵³SV III, 7.

⁵⁴SV VII, 455.

⁵⁵SV XIII, 555.

⁵⁶SV XII, 184.

⁵⁷SV XI, 77.

⁵⁸SV X, 331.

⁵⁹SV X, 353.

During the conference given on July 24, 1660, "On the Virtues of Louise de Marillac," it was precisely this mixture of *douceur* and compassion that one of the sisters noted in Louise.⁶⁰

II. ST. VINCENT'S PRACTICE OF DOUCEUR

In addition to looking at theory, it is always helpful to examine *praxis*. This is especially important in regard to St. Vincent since, as I pointed out in an earlier article on the vows,⁶¹ he shows a remarkable flexibility in applying principles to concrete situations. Moreover, St. Vincent's *praxis* provided a context within which the members of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity interpreted what he said. When he spoke or wrote about *douceur*, his audience depended not only on his words as an instrument of interpretation, but also on his life.

1. *His own self-understanding.*

St. Vincent himself witnesses that when he was young he was strong-willed and easily moved to anger. He also had a tendency to be moody for long, dark periods which, he attests, caused Madame de Gondi some pain at times. But, recognizing these traits within himself, "I turned to God and begged him incessantly to change my dry, contentious manner and to give me a warm, *doux* spirit, and by the grace of Our Lord, and with the little bit of attention that I gave to holding back the movements of nature, I have somewhat changed my dark moods."⁶²

St. Vincent speaks with considerable modesty here. Abelly, his first biographer, attests that Vincent had an enormous admiration for Francis de Sales, whom he considered the gentlest person he had ever known. He adds that St. Vincent profited so well from the example of the Bishop of Geneva that he acquired a remarkable *douceur* and affability and had a wonderful way of speaking and relating with all different kinds of persons.⁶³

In fact, he learned the lesson of *douceur* so well that he was often compared with St. Francis de Sales in that regard. Collet observes that his

⁶⁰SV X, 727.

⁶¹R. Maloney, "The Four Vincentian Vows: Yesterday and Today," *Vincentiana* 3 (Roma: Curia Generalitia, 1990) 230-370.

⁶²Abelly, Book III, chapter 12, 177-78.

⁶³Abelly, Book III, chapter 12, 180.

gentleness and affability became proverbial and that people said the same things about him that he himself said about Francis.⁶⁴

2. *His respect for persons and his support of those who were difficult.*

The recently published notes of Br. Louis Robineau, which Abelly used in preparing his biography of St. Vincent, give many examples of the enormous respect that St. Vincent showed toward persons of various conditions in life, from the most powerful to the weakest in society.⁶⁵ Robineau notes especially the gentleness with which he admonished others and the profound respect with which he treated the poor. He recounts many stories too about St. Vincent's *support*.⁶⁶ He comments that Vincent had a remarkable ability to endure difficult situations: the calumnies of others, the trials that he endured as a member of the Council of Conscience, the gossip suggesting that he had witnessed a secret marriage between Anne of Austria and Mazarin,⁶⁷ the troubles that several confreres created for him, and his own infirmities.

3. *His warmth and compassion.*

His own letters give vivid witness to his warmth and compassion. He writes to St. Louise de Marillac "que j'ai peine de votre peine!"⁶⁸ He often writes with great compassion to confreres and Daughters on the occasion of the deaths of family members or members of the community.⁶⁹ Just after the death of Monsieur Portail and immediately before that of Louise de Marillac, he writes to Mathurine Guérin⁷⁰:

Certainly it is the great secret of the spiritual life to abandon to him all whom we love, while abandoning ourselves to whatever he wishes, with perfect confidence that everything will go better in that way. It is for that reason that it is said that everything works for the good of those who serve God. Let us serve him, therefore, my Sister, but let us serve him according to his

⁶⁴Pierre Collet, *La Vie de St. Vincent de Paul* (Nancy: A. Leseure, 1748) Tome I, book 2, 99.

⁶⁵André Dodin, *Monsieur Vincent, raconté par son secrétaire* (Paris: O.E.I.L., 1991) 53-56.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 143-45.

⁶⁷For a discussion of this question cf. Dodin, *Op. Cit.*, 173.

⁶⁸SV I, 142.

⁶⁹SV VI, 444; VIII, 55, 256.

⁷⁰SV VIII, 256.

pleasure, allowing him to do as he wishes. He will take the role of father and mother for us. He will be your consolation and your strength and finally the reward of your love.

In a moment of tension between himself and François Du Coudray, he writes to the latter: "I cannot, no, I cannot express to you, my dear little Father, my sorrow at grieving you. I implore you to believe that, were it not for the importance of the matter, I would prefer a thousand times to bear the pain of this myself rather than upset you by it."⁷¹ When Guillaume Delville and his family found themselves in difficulty in 1646, St. Vincent wrote: "I cannot express to you the sorrow my heart felt at this and how I would like to have suffered in your place, myself alone, what you and your family have endured. Monsieur Codoing, the bearer of this letter, will be able to testify to you how deeply this has touched me. I am sending him mainly to assure you that your troubles are my troubles."⁷²

4. *His labors for peace.*

To all this must be added something that is quite striking in St. Vincent's practice: peace-making. It appears on two levels particularly.

1) He encouraged the members of the Congregation of the Mission to work at healing broken relationships. One of the goals of "the mission" was reconciliation.⁷³ Missionaries were to attempt to settle quarrels and disputes during missions. In fact, they frequently report to St. Vincent about their success in doing so.

2) He himself worked actively to bring an end to war. He was deeply concerned over the ravages of war and the grief that it brought to his countrymen, particularly the poor. On two occasions he intervened personally in an attempt to bring peace to his land.

At some time between 1639 and 1642, during the wars in Lorraine, he went to Cardinal Richelieu, knelt before him, described the horrors of war, and

⁷¹SV III, 74.

⁷²SV II, 619.

⁷³CR XI, 8.

pleaded for peace: "Let us have peace. Have pity on us. Give France peace." Richelieu refused, responding that peace did not depend on him alone.⁷⁴

Collet relates an even more striking episode, which he takes from an account written by Brother Ducournau.⁷⁵ In 1649, during the civil war, St. Vincent left Paris quietly, crossed battle lines and forded a flooded river (at almost 70 years of age) to see the queen and to beg her to dismiss Mazarin, whom he regarded as responsible for the war. He also spoke directly to Mazarin himself. But again his pleas went unheeded.

III. SOME HORIZON SHIFTS THAT HAVE TAKEN PLACE BETWEEN THE 17TH AND THE 20TH CENTURIES

Horizon shifts significantly influence our outlook on things. The view of Rome from the pinnacle of St. Peter's Dome is quite different from the view from the surrounding Alban hills. From both places one can pick out the Tiber, many of the same buildings, the parks, and various other sites, but from each perspective they appear quite different. They may seem smaller or larger, depending on the distance. They may seem darker or lighter, depending on the time of day or the season. From St. Peter's, parts of some buildings may be seen that are not visible from the Alban hills, since one is looking at them from different directions.

All of this is evident from a "physical" perspective. One might also say, from a "theological" perspective, that the Church surely appears quite different when perceived from my office in Rome than when seen from a *comunidad de base* in Latin America! One's horizon, whatever it is, always influences one's view, bringing varied insights and different nuances.

A number of horizon shifts have taken place since the 17th century that affect the way one might view *douceur*. Let me try to describe several of these briefly.

1. Contemporary psychology has examined anger very carefully, pointing out the dangers of repressing it.

⁷⁴Cf. P. Coste. *The Life and Labours of St. Vincent de Paul*, translated by Joseph Leonard (London, 1935) II, 369-370. Cf. also, Abelly, I, XXXV, 169.

⁷⁵P. Collet. *La Vie de St. Vincent de Paul* (Nancy, 1748) I, 468. Cf. SV III, 402. Cf. also, Coste, II, 447.

More than a century ago Charles Darwin in his classic study, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, systematically examined anger responses in the human person as compared with those in animals; he saw anger within the context of the approach-avoidance pattern that characterizes all human affectivity. In 1890 William James noted that all emotional responses have physiological aspects, heightening the person's energy in view of a further response. Since that time research into the emotions has developed considerably.⁷⁶

Today we recognize that stored-up anger often results in considerable psycho-somatic damage and frequently shows itself in unexpected explosions that hurt others. Contemporary literature examines and suggests healthy ways of dealing with anger and directing it creatively.

In recent years, scientific studies have found popular expression in numerous spiritual reading books dealing with the healthy expression of the emotions as part of human growth.⁷⁷ Superiors, and those responsible for formation programs, have become quite aware that there are many "angry people" in communities (as in other callings), with potentially explosive results. Through the discussion of the emotions, and particularly anger, during the time of formation, many communities try to deal with these problems ahead of time, in order to avoid catastrophic events later.

Studies also show that emotions, and even basic facial expressions, elicit similar affective responses from others. Happy expressions elicit happy responses; sad expressions, sad responses.⁷⁸ Reading these studies, one spontaneously recalls St. Vincent's exhortations to the Daughters of Charity to be joyful and smiling in their service.

2. In modern times there has been a very significant revival of pacifism.

In this regard, Gandhi has had an enormous influence, with his peaceful revolution in India. Likewise, Martin Luther King, in the United States, obtained very significant advances in civil rights by non-violent resistance.

⁷⁶Robert Plutchik, *Emotion: A Psychoevolutionary Synthesis* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980) 128-151.

⁷⁷Fran Ferder, "Never Let the Sun Set on Your Anger: Anger and Its Expressions" in *Words Made Flesh: Scripture, Psychology, and Human Communication* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 1986) 67-84.

⁷⁸G. Simon Harak, *Virtuous Passions* (New York: Paulist, 1993) 18. This author notes (p. 25) that we begin to "pick up" emotions from people about a tenth of a second after coming into contact with them.

James Douglass' book, *The Non-Violent Cross*,⁷⁹ which gained immense popularity, capsulized the biblical and philosophical roots of pacifist movements.

In the Catholic tradition, *Gaudium et Spes*⁸⁰ took a carefully nuanced, yet positive position in regard to pacifism: "In the same spirit we cannot but express our admiration for all who forgo the use of violence to vindicate their rights and resort to those other means of defense which are available to weaker parties, provided it can be done without harm to the rights and duties of others and of the community." At the same time Paul VI made stirring appeals for world peace, crying out on October 4, 1965, at the United Nations headquarters in New York: "No more war, war never again!"⁸¹ In his book, *Faith and Violence*, Thomas Merton offered a clear presentation of the theory and practice of Christian peace-making.⁸² In 1983 the bishops of the United States, in a carefully prepared document, made a very significant contribution to the theory and the practice of working toward the creation of peace.⁸³

3. In recent times there has been increased consciousness of the need for peace-making not only on an individual level, but also on a structural level. Here too, Paul VI made an eloquent appeal: "If you want peace, work for justice."⁸⁴ John Paul II adds: "Development is the new name for peace."⁸⁵

The groundwork for this emphasis on the need for structural change is already evident in *Pacem in Terris*⁸⁶ and in *Gaudium et Spes*.⁸⁷ Paul VI takes the theme up eloquently in *Populorum Progressio*,⁸⁸ and in an address to the members of Cor Unum, given on January 13, 1972, calls Christians to commit themselves to enter into "the very heart of social and political action and thus

⁷⁹Douglass, James W., *The Non-Violent Cross* (New York: Macmillan, 1968).

⁸⁰*Gaudium et Spes*, 78.

⁸¹*Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 57 (1965) 881.

⁸²Merton, Thomas, *Faith and Violence* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968).

⁸³"The Challenge of Peace," *Origins* 13 (no. 1; May 19, 1983) 1-32.

⁸⁴*Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 57 (1965) 896.

⁸⁵*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 10; cf. *Populorum Progressio*, 77.

⁸⁶*Pacem in Terris*, 89, 91.

⁸⁷*Gaudium et Spes*, 85.

⁸⁸*Populorum Progressio*, 78.

get at the roots of evil and change hearts, as well as the structures of modern society."⁸⁹

Today we are conscious that sin deeply affects social structures. It becomes embodied in unjust laws, power-based economic relationships, inequitable treaties, artificial boundaries, oppressive governments, and numerous other subtle structural obstacles to harmonious societal relationships. It is only when such structural obstacles are analyzed, understood, and removed that society can establish abiding, peaceful relationships.

Today there is also a heightened sense of the global community and the calamitous implications of the arms build-up. The sale of arms remains one of the major factors in the world economy. Local conflicts (in Algeria, Chechnya, ex-Yugoslavia, and in numerous other places) make the international scene at times quite volatile, with the ever-present danger that these conflicts will escalate into an "all-out war." With the widespread diffusion of arms and the frequency of their use, young people often attest to uncertainty about their future because of the possibility of nuclear annihilation.

Meanwhile, papal documents have consistently condemned the arms race.⁹⁰ At the same time, the United States Bishops' Peace Pastoral set off a broad series of discussions on the question of war, peace, and arms among episcopal conferences throughout the world.

IV. DOUCEUR TODAY

St. Vincent's teaching about this third "smooth stone,"⁹¹ as he liked to put it, is quite translatable into modern usage. His conference of March 28, 1659, as well as several of his letters to Louise de Marillac, contain a practical wisdom that is very relevant today. While one could say much about this virtue, I will focus here only on four points.

1. Gentleness entails the ability to handle anger positively.

Anger is natural. It is energy that spontaneously arises within us when we perceive something as evil. It helps us to deal with evil. It prepares us to

⁸⁹*Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 64 (1972) 189.

⁹⁰Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 81.

⁹¹CR II, 6.

"fight," as Darwin might put it. But, like all spontaneous emotions, it can be used well or badly. Concretely, all sorts of people have trouble handling it well. As mentioned above, there are many "angry people" in the world.

Uncontrolled anger, in its most violent forms, erupts into war, assault, rape, murder, and the many crimes that make headlines in daily newspapers. In its less violent forms, unregulated rage shows itself in outbursts of temper, angry diatribes, refusal to talk to others, throwing things, slamming doors, pouting, holding grudges, attempts at "getting even."

As St. Vincent pointed out, handling anger well often involves expressing it appropriately. He himself was outraged at the plight of the sick and the hungry, so he established the Confraternities of Charity, the Congregation of the Mission, and the Daughters of Charity. Anger enabled him to react with vigor and creativity when confronted with the needs of the poor in his day. He also expressed anger directly when he perceived evil within his communities, but he learned to combine his anger with gentleness. He knew how to mix the bitter and the sweet, as he told Louise de Marillac.⁹² He sought to imitate Jesus who was equally "gentle and firm."⁹³

Venting a roused spirit appropriately can be very healthy. It can ease hidden tensions and work toward the resolution of conflict. It can be an appropriate instrument in correction. But if anger is handled badly, it can be terribly destructive. Unleashed, it can result in violence and injustice. Repressed, it can fester into resentment, sarcasm, cynicism, bitterness, depression.

The challenge is to learn the ways of appropriately controlling, moderating (even suppressing anger for a period of time), sublimating, and expressing anger. St. Vincent often appeals to the example of Jesus who knew how to moderate, and yet express, his frustration in regard to the apostles, and who could be very direct in expressing his anger in regard to the pharisees, who were laying unjust burdens upon others.

2. *Gentleness entails approachability, affability, warmth.*

These are especially important qualities in ministers. In this regard, St. Vincent encourages us to be confident that we can really change, citing his

⁹²SV I, 292-94.

⁹³SV VII, 226.

own personal experience. While he was of choleric temperament and, in his younger days, rather moody for long dark periods, he changed so much in the course of his life that all those who knew him later said that he was one of the most approachable men they had ever met.⁹⁴

He told the community that people are won over much more by gentleness than by argument. This advice is especially relevant when we offer the gift of correction,⁹⁵ whether the correction is done by peers or by superiors. Those corrected are much more able to hear words spoken gently than words of stinging accusation.

Moreover, gentleness and warmth in the giver draw out the same gifts in the receiver. Those who find the minister warm and loving will begin to respond in the same way. This is surely why St. Vincent so emphasized *douceur* as a "missionary" virtue.

3. *Gentleness involves the ability to endure offenses with forgiveness and courage.*

St. Vincent based his teaching in this regard on respect for the human person. Even those who commit injustice, he told the double family, deserve respect as persons. The writings of John Paul II reiterate this theme in our day --- the call to have profound reverence for each individual.

Naturally, having respect for the person of the offenders does not prohibit us from channeling our anger with courage against the evils they are committing. But it does prohibit us from practicing injustice in the name of justice. St. Vincent recognized clearly (and he reminded Philip LeVacher about St. Augustine's teaching in this regard⁹⁶) that there are some evils that must be tolerated, since there is no practical possibility of correcting them. The wise person learns to live with them, and the gentle person treats with respect those whose lives are so entwined with evil that it cannot be rooted out.

There is a delicate balance in this regard. At times one must suffer with courage. There are evils that cannot be avoided and that must be endured. But on the other hand, one must avoid a false gentility, as Adrian Van Kaam once

⁹⁴Cf. Abelly, III, 177-78.

⁹⁵Cf. Mt 18:15-18.

⁹⁶SV IV, 121.

put it⁹⁷ (or, to use Joseph Leonard's translation of St. Vincent's phrase, "namby-pamby mildness"!). At times one must cry out against injustice and channel all one's energies into overcoming it. It takes great prudence to know the difference between these cases.

At this time of rapid change in the history of the Church, the combination of gentleness and firmness is especially necessary. This is particularly so in making decisions. As communities assess their apostolates with a view toward the future, they must have the courage to choose and act. At the same time, they must show gentleness toward those who have great difficulty adapting. Likewise, individuals must have courage in setting growth-goals, but they must be gentle with themselves by recognizing that personal change does not occur overnight, but only gradually.

Ministers too must know that no matter how well they do their jobs, they will have to endure, with both courage and gentleness, their own limitations and the conflicting expectations of others. Religious superiors will experience that some in their communities see all things in black and white, while others love only what is grey. Some will use the past as their dominant norm for decision-making, while others will look only to an uncharted future. Superiors will never fully satisfy all these different personalities. They must make decisions with courage and treat with gentleness those who disagree. They must combine in their lives two New Testament sayings: "With the strength that comes from God, bear your share of the hardships the gospel entails,"⁹⁸ and "Learn of me that I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls."⁹⁹

4. *Gentleness involves action on behalf of justice and peace-making.*

Today especially, witness to Jesus' gentleness and his proclamation of a kingdom of peace play a very prominent part in the Church's preaching of the good news. This is intimately linked with the promotion of justice and peace and education toward both. *Centesimus Annus*¹⁰⁰ speaks eloquently on the theme: "I myself, on the occasion of the recent tragic war in the Persian Gulf, repeated the cry: -`Never again war!' No, never again war, which destroys the lives of innocent people, teaches how to kill, throws into upheaval even the

⁹⁷Van Kaam, Adrian L., *Spirituality and the Gentle Life* (Denville, New Jersey: Dimension Books, 1974).

⁹⁸2 Tim 1:8.

⁹⁹Mt 11:29.

¹⁰⁰*Centesimus Annus*, 52; cf. also, 14, 54.

lives of those who do the killing and leaves behind a trail of resentment and hatred, thus making it all the more difficult to find a just solution of the very problems which provoked the war. ...For this reason, another name for peace is *development*. Just as there is a collective responsibility for avoiding war, so too there is a collective responsibility for promoting development."

Aquinas reminds us that the passion most immediately associated with justice is anger.¹⁰¹ Anger recoils in the face of injustice in order to spring back and wipe it out. It moves us to lunge toward justice, to hunger and thirst for it. Anger springs from love and respect for the human person, whose rights we perceive as being violated. It strains to right wrong, to reestablish an order in which persons can grow and flourish. It will always be aroused, therefore, when we perceive that unjust structures are depriving the poor of the political, social, economic, or personal freedom that their human dignity demands.

Gentleness finds the ways of expressing anger in "action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world."¹⁰² For those involved in ministry, education for justice and peace will be among the primary means.¹⁰³

Reconciliation too will be one of the basic goals of ministry. I am reminded of the role that the Community of Sant'Egidio played in mediating the peace in Mozambique. After 15 years of civil war, "human wisdom" would surely have doubted the ability of a "powerless" Italian Community to accomplish what other much more "powerful" agencies had failed to do. Yet the negotiations were successfully completed in 1992 and peace continues to reign in that country. Could not other groups have similar courage in offering their services as ministers of reconciliation?

Conversation and dialogue will, in the lives of the gentle, be the primary means for settling conflicts, accompanied by suffering love. These are the tools that Jesus himself used; he himself is "our peace, and breaks down the wall of separation."¹⁰⁴ If the community of his disciples has a genuine passion

¹⁰¹Cf. *Summa Theologica I-II*. 46.2, 4, 6.

¹⁰²Synod of Bishops, 1971, *Justice in the World*, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 63 (1971) 924.

¹⁰³Cf. John Paul II, "Women: Teachers of Peace," *Origins* 24 (# 28; December 22, 1994) 465-69; Jorge Mejia, "Dimensions of the Bishop's Essential Ministry of Peace," *Origins* 24 (# 39; March 16, 1995) 641-648; Dolores Leckey, "Peacemaking and Creativity: Three Dynamics," *Origins* 24 (# 45; April 27, 1995) 777-780. Leckey focuses on three dynamics that make for peace: listening, beauty, and laughter.

¹⁰⁴Eph 2:14.

for dialogue, justice, and peace, then it is a clear sign that the Kingdom of God is at hand.

"Passionate" gentleness¹⁰⁵ knows how to direct anger to root out injustice, to channel it so that "justice rolls like a river."¹⁰⁶ W. E. B. DuBois sums up this gentle passion in a lovely prayer:

Give us grace, O God, to dare to do the deed which we well know cries to be done. Let us not hesitate because of ease, or the words of men's mouths, or our own lives. Mighty causes are calling us -- the freeing of women, the training of children, the putting down of hate and murder and poverty -- all these and more. But they call with voices that mean work and sacrifice and death. Mercifully, grant us, O God, the spirit of Esther, that we say: I will go unto the King and if I perish, I perish. Amen.

¹⁰⁵Cf. Walter Burghardt, "A Faith That Does Justice," Warren Series Lectures, in *Catholic Studies* (# 18; November 17, 1991) 9.

¹⁰⁶Am 5:24.

Parish with a Powerful Missionary Vitality, with Parish Evangelization Cells.

*Emeric Amyot d'Inville CM
Secretary General*

Eight years ago in the basilica of Sant'Eustorgio in Milan the total number of people attending Sunday masses was about four to six hundred. That is the same as saying that the huge prestigious building was almost empty. Nowadays there are about 2,000, a large number of whom used to have no connection with the Church and whose lives were almost untouched by the faith, as is often the case in large western cities. What is going on in this parish? Why have so many people come to it? What is the secret of this evangelization which has had such good results?

These are questions which I myself was asking when, in August 1994, I heard the parish priest of Sant'Eustorgio, Fr P G Perigni, together with some laypeople of his parish, tell us about their experience during a retreat for priests which I was making. Recognising a new way that worked, I wanted to know more about it, so I signed on for the *European Seminar on the System of Parish Evangelization Cells*, which the parish has been running for several years to share its secrets and help those who wish to begin the experiment. There were about 270 people, about half of them priests, the other half laymen, and one bishop, not to mention the auxiliary bishop of Milan standing in for Cardinal Martini who was absent in Rome and who left a message of welcome for us.

The secret is simple: It is evangelization by laypeople in their life situation. It is that evangelization should be an effective priority in a parish, and that this can, and should, be carried out by laypeople in their life situation under the guidance of their parish priest. This is simply taking seriously what our Lord commanded: *Evangelize, and make disciples*. It is realising that this command is not directed just at priests and members of religious communities, but at all the baptised who have a vocation to evangelization and who can be Christ's instruments in the places where they are. This missionary initiative is based on the *Parish Evangelization Cells*.

Behind this initiative there is also the conviction that if a Christian, that if a parish, does not evangelize, they die. To illustrate this Fr P G used the two Palestinian seas, the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. The same River Jordan empties into both. The first produces abundant life and lots of fish, because the Jordan both flows into and out of it. The other produces nothing but death because the Jordan flows into it, but not out of it. A Christian

who wishes simply to take from the Church without contributing anything, is doomed to vegetate and die.

Some history

The experience of Sant'Eustorgio's parish goes back to June 1986 when Fr P G read an article describing what was going on in St Boniface's parish in Pembroke, Florida. He spoke to his bishop, Cardinal Martini, and with his approval crossed the Atlantic to go and see for himself on the spot. The reality was even better than what he had read. The missionary thrust, based on the *Parish Evangelization Cells*, is powerful, and life is throbbing everywhere. He was conquered. He wanted to achieve the same in his own sleepy parish.

In February 1987 he shared this experience with the Pastoral Council in his parish, with the Vicar General present. It was decided to start in a small way, with prayer: one hour of eucharistic adoration each day, in the parish chapel. Perpetual adoration sprung from this, which is the source and foundation of the whole missionary effort in St Boniface's, and later on in Sant'Eustorgio's.

In the same month of February 1987 Cardinal Martini sent three parishioners and a priest to St Boniface's to take part in a congress which it organises every year on the Evangelization Cells. They came back full of enthusiasm and a desire to search for the Lord not alone for themselves but above all in order to be able to give him to others. They understood that a living and evangelizing parish could exist.

As for Fr P G, he understood that it was necessary to transform the mentality and the style of evangelization in the parish. For this he organised a series of weekly meetings to study the encyclical *Evangelii nuntiandi* of Paul VI, which were very successful. Then, in April, he ran a training course for six weeks for future leaders of the Cells, in which forty-two people participated. From this emerged four formation, or provisional, Cells, which met over a period of six months, in order to prepare themselves to be Cell leaders. The whole parish was kept informed all the time about what was going on, and anyone could attend the Cell meetings, by request, just to "see" what was happening.

By the end of January 1988 Fr P G, in the presence of the Vicar General, gave an account of it all at the Sunday masses and invited all the parishioners who wanted to join these Parish Evangelization Cells. There was a huge response. It was possible to set up twelve adult Cells and three for young people. An Executive Cell was also set up, with the task of keeping open lines of communication between the Cells and the parish priest; it meets

once a week. Today there are about 110 Cells, and constantly increasing. The increase is in geometric progression, and so is becoming ever more rapid. At the moment they bring together about 1,500 people, most of whom had been far from the faith and the Church.

What is a *Parish Evangelization Cell*?

The cell image comes from biology. The cell is a living micro-organism which forms an integral part of a larger living organism and which is capable of growing and multiplying. The Parish Evangelization Cells are like this. They form part of the parochial, and even the diocesan, organism; they grow thanks to the evangelizing work of each member, and when they have become too large they split and give birth to daughter-cells.

The cell is a small community of Christians who have natural links between themselves and who wish to evangelize in their *Oikos* (Cf Acts 10 & 11, for example). What is that? The *Oikos* corresponds to the totality of persons with whom I am naturally linked: family, neighbours, friends, workmates, school and leisure friends. It is with those, in normal daily contacts, that I am called by God to share my faith.

The members of the cell meet in a house or flat once a week to help one another to become truer disciples of Jesus and better evangelizers. During the whole week they try to serve their neighbours, and to have a helping and charitable relationship with them. At the cell meeting they pray, reflect on the word of God, guided by a cassette recorded by the parish priest, and they share their faith and their efforts at evangelization. The essential questions at each meeting are: *What did the Lord do for me in the course of this week?* (Discover God at work in my life and in that of my brothers), and *What did I do for the Lord?* (Share how I tried to serve my brothers during the week, how I tried to evangelize). The cell is animated by a leader, who has completed the formation course referred to above, and who leads the prayer and sharing.

But how does one evangelize in one's life situation? Everyone feels straight off that they are ill prepared for this mission which seems to be difficult. What plan is put forward?

Stages in Evangelization

Each one is asked to think of the members of his *Oikos* and to write down their names on a sheet of paper.

From then on, we must pray every day for each of those persons, and especially for those whom, we think, the Lord is calling us to evangelize in a more particular way. Prayer is the most important element in the evangelization process. It is its starting point and must accompany it step by step so that it may become really effective. It is, of course, the Holy Spirit who converts a heart and not some method which, in any case, is only secondary.

Next, and parallel, comes the level of service. **To love someone else by serving them.** This is the Lord's great commandment, so how could we omit it from an evangelization process? This is the way in which we mostly bear witness to the life which is expected of Christians. It means giving our time, our person, perhaps even our money and possessions, without limit. By serving those who do not have the faith we are building friendship bridges with them which later on can carry these people to the gospel.

From the moment in which we get someone else's trust our non-believing friends will become more open to the gospel. It will become possible for questions to arise, and we will have to reply **by sharing our faith-experience**, explaining as clearly and concretely as possible what the Lord has done in our own life. Fr P G likes saying to his parishioners: "Whatever little of Jesus you know, share it". , since they often feel they are incapable of witnessing to their faith.

Sharing our experience of the gospel with someone else can give rise to several questions. We must, at the appropriate moment, be able to answer anyone who asks of us the reason for our faith (1 Pt 3:15). We must be able to help the first steps in the faith of the person we are evangelizing, answering his questions, his objections, his fears, etc., so as to remove the obstacles which block him from giving himself to the Lord.

A moment will arrive when we help our friend to commit himself to **a personal relationship with Jesus** and to change his ordinary life in accordance with the gospel.

As soon as our friend has accepted the idea of committing himself to following Jesus he is invited **to share in the life of the cell**, where all the members have already heard about him and have been praying for him. Life in the cell, which is a Christian community of faith and prayer, will allow him to go along with others and little by little deepen his spiritual life. It will also serve as a sort of decompression chamber between his life outside the Church and **the Eucharistic Community** which he can join when he feels himself ready, and in which he will be able to find his place and accept responsibilities like the other members.

The Parish Assembly

The eucharistic assembly in the parish of Sant'Eustorgio is a large community, living, joyful, shared, in which there are various ministries, with the choir, altar service, readers, etc., etc.

In the parish there are almost numberless services, ranging from catechesis to evangelization in other towns or other countries. The parish priest said that he has about one thousand laypeople committed to various services in the parish. It was also mainly laypeople who gave us the talks and who animated the discussions during the Seminar on the cells. They also took on the whole organization of the Seminar, from registration to simultaneous translation, and took care of all the administration from lodging to meals.

You'll also notice in the parish, especially in the liturgy, a way of expressing things that has been influenced by the Charismatic Renewal (singing, and so on), which is present in the parish. But it should be noted that this type of evangelization by cells develops also in parishes where the Charismatic Renewal is not present.

Helen's Witness

To finish off, I will give Helen's witness, which well illustrates the sort of evangelization which is lived in Sant'Eustorgio. During a coffee-break at the Seminar I met her and asked her to tell me her story. Here it is. She is a young Frenchwoman who, for reasons of work, has lived in Milan for several years, and for the past three is married to a local Italian. She was born in the Paris area, in a totally non-believing family, or rather one antagonistic to the faith and to the Church; she received no religious education. Her husband is also an unbeliever. In their apartment block there is a woman -- let's call her Sylvia -- who is a member of a cell and who is always very kind towards her, always ready to render any little service. She hardly ever speaks about her faith, but she is known to be Christian.

One night Helen had a serious health problem: she had a miscarriage, followed by a haemorrhage. The panic-stricken husband did not know what to do. Although it was midnight, they had only one idea: knock at Sylvia's door, since she was always so available. Sylvia took Helen to hospital and did everything necessary for herself and her husband. They were both very touched at this. As Helen went into the operating theatre Sylvia gave her a small picture of the Blessed Virgin and told her she was praying for her.

Helen was very touched by such devotion and kindness. She wanted to find out more about what motivated this woman to such rare generosity, and to ask her why she did all this and what made her live. Sylvia then began to tell her of the very concrete faith-experience in her life, and of how the Lord did so many things in her life. They became closer and closer friends and sharing deepened between them. Helen also wanted to know more about this Jesus, about whom up to then she had nothing but ridiculous caricatures. After some time Helen, guided by Sylvia, gradually discovered the Lord and

began to live by him and feel his benefit in her personal everyday life. One day she was invited to Sylvia's cell, where she continued her journeying forward. Later she asked to be able to come to the church "*to see if there is as much love among those who go there as there is at Sylvia's place*". And... her answer was "Yes"! In the parish she found life, joy, brotherly-sisterly love. Now she is trying, in her turn, to evangelize, even if this still scares her. She prays for her husband who so far has not taken the first step in the faith, respecting his own journeying. That is how, reaching out to new members, the cells grow, and so the parish community.

The Experience of *Parish Evangelization Cells* spreads in Europe

Having come from the United States the experience of evangelization cells is progressively spreading into different European countries (France, Austria, Ireland, Belgium, Germany and, of course, different parts of Italy, especially Sicily, etc.). Every year there is an informative Seminar on the *Parish Evangelization Cells* which lasts five days. For all useful information contact: Parrocchia Sant'Eustorgio, 20122 Milano, Italy.

For us Vincentians

It seems to me that this *System of Parish Evangelization Cells* ought to attract the attention of St Vincent's disciples, which we are, whose vocation is to evangelize. It is, in fact, a method of evangelization adapted to a world in the process of being de-Christianised or badly Christianised, based on the power which God gives in prayer, on the witness of charity in everyday affairs, on community living in small groups, and on the concrete commitment of all laypeople to the apostolate. Haven't we here, all together, eminently Vincentian means, which set in motion the great missionary movements of the Church since Vatican II?

(Thomas Davitt CM, translator)

AN EXPERIENCE OF THE VINCENTIAN SPIRIT

IN THE PANAMANIAN NATIONAL MISSION

(1987-1993)

INTRODUCTION

I. HISTORY OF THE VINCENTIAN INTERPROVINCIAL MISSION TEAM

II. THE BEGINNINGS OF THE NATIONAL MISSION IN PANAMA

III. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NATIONAL MISSION IN PANAMA

1) PRE-MISSION

2) THE MISSION PROPER

A) MISSIONS IN THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

B) SPECIALIZED MISSIONS

3) POST-MISSION

IV. THE VINCENTIAN SPIRIT IN THE NATIONAL MISSION IN PANAMA

1) THE POOR

2) FORMATION

3) RECONCILIATION

3) METHODOLOGY

CONCLUSION

INTRODUCTION

On February 1, 1987, the National Episcopal Conference of Panama asked two Vincentians to organize a national mission as part of the preparation of the Commemoration of the 500 years of evangelization in the Americas. This article is a brief sharing of that experience from the perspective of the Vincentian spirit. It is presented only as one of many experiences that are being developed in many of our provinces throughout the world. My hope is that this may serve in showing the lasting importance of the Vincentian spirit in the missions, but creatively adapted to the different and changing realities in which we live.

The article gives a little historical background of the Vincentian Missionary Team (Equipo Misionero Vicentino - "EMIVI"), the development of the national mission in its three phases (Pre-Mission, the Mission Proper, and the Post-Mission), the Vincentian spirit within the National Mission (especially in respect to the poor, the formation, reconciliation and the methodology) and a general conclusion.

I. HISTORY OF THE VINCENTIAN INTERPROVINCIAL MISSION TEAM:

In 1983 the Conference of Latin American Vincentian Provinces (CLAPVI) organized a seminar on Popular Missions in Santiago, Chile. Father Francisco Javier Barcenas, C.M. from the Central American Province and I, Father Thomas Sendlein, C.M. from the Panamanian Mission of the Eastern Province of the United States were among the participants. Through the sharing of the Vincentian spirit, of our pastoral experiences in Latin America, and of our organizational ideas, the group managed to put together a first draft of guidelines for a Latin American Vincentian Popular Mission Directory. During this encounter, Fr. Barcenas and I shared some of our missionary hopes for the future. Through this encounter, we were animated towards the future and received some practical guidelines on the popular missions. We then returned to our regular assignments in Panama.

In 1986 Fr. Barcenas and I, through our respective provincials, organized a Vincentian interprovincial missionary team (EMIVI). The team consisted not only of the two of us, but also of the members of Fr. Barcenas's lay youth group (Centro Juvenil Vicentino - "CEJUVI") and some members of other Vincentian lay groups and, for about one year, some Daughters of Charity. Later in 1988, Sister Silvia Lopez and Sister Gumecinda Fajardo of the Panamanian Missionary Catechist Community, which was co-founded by our deceased confrere, Bishop Francis Beckman, joined the team as full-time members. From February, 1986 to August, 1987, the missionary team received the benefit of 14 different experiences of mission from the rural zones to the marginal areas of the city in the country of Panama. Since it was an interprovincial team, we also received the opportunity to mission with the Indians in Guatemala and the peasants in El Salvador. Both of these latter experiences were done with the help of the Vincentian seminarians from the Central American Province.

These missions gave us various experiences on how to work as a missionary team of priests, sisters, seminarians and laity, on how to be creative in adapting to different realities, and on how to develop teaching material with the help of the missionaries themselves in order to have dialogue with the people who were actively attending the missions.

II. THE BEGINNINGS OF THE NATIONAL MISSION IN PANAMA

Having had these experiences and in order to offer this experience of mission to the different parishes in the various dioceses of Panama, we requested an intervention at the meeting of the National Episcopal Conference in the beginning of 1987. Our hope was to open a few doors in some of the parishes to the possibility of popular missions. During our presentation and to our surprise, the bishops informed us that Fr. Barcenas and myself were already chosen to organize the National Mission as part of the Commemoration of the 500 years of evangelization in Panama under Bishop Oscar Mario Brown as President of this Commission. Instead of a few doors opening, all of a sudden the whole country was opened!

To begin such an undertaking, we organized the National Commission for Missionary Animation (Comision Nacional de Animacion Misionera - "Co.N.A.M."). We invited persons from all the ecclesiastical areas of Panama and some persons with special expertise. From February 1 until September 1, we finished our specific EMIVI commitments and started to integrate the spirit and experience of EMIVI into the National Mission as a base and starting point.

III. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NATIONAL MISSION IN PANAMA

According to the first draft of the guidelines for the popular missions, there are three moments in the missions, namely, the pre-mission (a time to prepare everything for the mission), the mission proper (a time for the missionaries to accompany and evangelize with the people) and the post-mission (a time for the fruit of the mission to grow). Without the pre-mission, the mission itself becomes very difficult and the fruit of the mission becomes very limited. Without a post-mission, the fruit of the mission barely survives or even disappears.

1) PRE-MISSION

In order to begin this enormous project of a national mission, the Co.N.A.M. decided on the theme for the coming six years of evangelization: "New Persons in New Communities for a New Society!" A poster and a Mission song were developed with this theme. We decided on a tentative schedule for the mission in the different dioceses for the next 6 years, starting with the Diocese of Chitre, which was celebrating its 25th anniversary. With these decisions made, we started to get down to the basic work of the Pre-Mission.

We started to meet with the bishop, the pastors, the religious and the laity of the diocese in order to understand the socio-economic and religious realities of the different communities and to help them organize the various diocesan, parish, and rural community level committees that would be necessary for the mission.

Committees for liturgy, finance, living and eating accommodations, transportation, propaganda and visiting were organized. Each committee had its own part and responsibility in the preparation for the mission. Each committee tried to involve as many people as possible, for example, where the missionaries lived and had breakfast for the two week mission was not normally to be the place where they ate lunch and supper. They would eat with different families each day or for each meal so that more people would be able to take on the responsibility for the missionaries. Each parish or community made a census of all the families in their area and so everyone was visited even before the missionaries arrived and we received information about the reality of the area beforehand. From that information we were able to know how many communities and how many missionaries were needed for those areas.

In September, 1987 we started the recruitment and formation of the missionaries throughout the country of Panama. The team from EMIVI were the basic trainers in the formation of the missionaries. We went from diocese to diocese since the missionaries would come from the whole country in order to evangelize in the 14 mainly rural parishes of the Diocese of Chitre. Each year a group of missionaries even came from the neighboring country of Costa Rica. They were formed by us using the Vincentian "Colegio Seminario" facilities in San Jose, thereby making the National Mission have an international flavor from the beginning.

The teaching material that we used in the EMIVI missions served as a starter for the National Mission formation. However, the evaluations of each of the formations helped to develop further and improve both the content and the methodology. All the material was based on dialogue with and participation of the people and so it could respond to the various realities of the different groups of people. Religious sisters, seminarians and laity all participated in the formations.

Basically, every year we worked on the pre-mission from May to December as we went from diocese to diocese. In certain years, up to 3,000 persons participated in some formation to be missionaries. In 1988, we formed some missionaries to be trainers in the formation of other missionaries in the Diocese of Veraguas, thus multiplying the possibility of training more people. It is noteworthy that most of these trainers came from a Vincentian parish. After this successful experiment, in 1989 we started to do the same in each of the dioceses.

2) THE MISSION PROPER

Each year from January to April, during the dry summer months in Panama, we sent the missionaries in teams to the various rural communities, to the towns and to the mission centers of the city parishes for a two week commitment. When we arrived for the mission in Panama City in 1992, because of the number of big parishes and the reality of the city environment, we missioned half the parishes in the summer of 1992 and the other half in the summer of 1993. From May to December of 1992, we developed specialized missions to certain groups.

A) MISSIONS IN THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

Since many of the missionaries were poor, the Co.N.A.M. made sure that the lack of money was not a hindrance to being a missionary. From the central point of departure in their respective diocese to their return, the transportation, board and lodging were cared for either directly by Co.N.A.M. or by the various diocesan and parish committees. Sometimes this involved the movement of 1,000 missionaries at the same time, from different parts of the country.

There was one more full day of formation and organization, which included the possibility of conversing with the pastor about the situations of the various communities to be missioned. During the Mass celebrated by the bishop of that diocese, the missionaries received the mission cross and were sent out to the communities. Some laity from those areas would be present to accompany them. Most of the time the community would be waiting to receive the missionaries. That same day the missionaries would begin to visit the homes and in the evening have the first dialogue with the people.

During the two weeks, the children would get together in the mornings, the youth in the afternoons and the adults in the evening. Each group had themes and material adapted to their level and using the little method of St. Vincent. The themes for the adults moved from the individual to the community to the society, thus developing the basic theme of "New Persons in New Communities for a New Society."

From 1988 to 1993, more than 3,000 communities were evangelized in Panama, which averaged out to about 200 mission centers or rural communities, each with its missionary team, during each two week mission. The missionaries worked in teams of 2 to 8, depending on the size of the mission center and there was a total of 9,399 two-week missionary commitments in order to realize this task. Despite the Latin American "machismo" mentality, namely, that church is for the women, there were more male missionaries than female. The missionaries were more or less equally split between youth and adults. 90 percent of the missionaries were lay. At first there was much skepticism about the laity being the main missionary agents, but after the first 2-week mission in January, 1988, those fears proved to be completely unjustified. However, in order to emphasize that the missionaries were being sent, none of them worked in their own communities as missionaries. (For more detailed information on numbers, please confer the page "Statistics of the National Mission in Panama.")

During the same years, 1988 to 1993, CLAPVI offered two more Latin American encounters of the popular missions, one in Columbia and the other in Panama. During the latter, many of those attending the seminar participated in one of the two-week missions.

Although the National Mission had as its main thrust evangelization and not the sacraments, the Sacrament of Reconciliation was offered in most of the communities. Many persons were brought back to an active participation in the Church after years of separation. The sacraments of Baptism, First Communion, Confirmation and Marriage as such were not celebrated during the mission proper since they belong to the ordinary pastoral activity of the parish with their own specific preparation. The pastors and the pastoral agents had much to do in the post-mission since, in the course of the 6 years, we gave to the respective pastors

lists totaling 5,921 couples who wanted to get married and 13,214 youth who wanted to be confirmed.

During the two weeks, mass concentrations were held for the children, for the youth and for the whole community. At the end of the two weeks "a farewell Mass" was celebrated, not "a closing Mass". The reason is simple, but very important. Even though the missionaries leave, the mission continues in the post-mission. The agents of the post-mission are the people who participated in the mission. Their aim is to help the fruits of the mission grow in union with their pastors and pastoral agents and also to extend the spirit of the mission to all those who did not participate.

B) SPECIALIZED MISSIONS

Despite the difficulty in traveling and communication, we found out that it is easier to mission in the rural areas than in the big cities. As we came closer to populated areas, the percentage of persons who participated in the mission became less and less. There are probably many reasons for this phenomenon: more indifferentism, more diversions, a lack of the sense of community, etc. For this reason, we organized specialized missions. If many people in the cities would not come to the mission, we would go to them.

One of the specialized missions that reached many persons was the school mission. With the necessary permissions from the Ministry of Education, missionaries went to the majority of the grammar and high schools and the various universities in Panama City in order to share the word not only with the children and the youth, but also with the teachers and professors. Once again special teaching material was developed for each group.

Co.N.A.M. developed both missions to factory workers and missions to the owners of the factories, businessmen and professional persons. The themes for both were based on the social teachings of the Church.

In coordination with the prison chaplain, missionaries went into the various prisons in Panama City. Another group gave missions to the National Police, including the Security Police for the President of Panama. There were even short missions for those who worked in the Legislative Assembly and for those in civic groups.

In collaboration with the Archdiocesan Pastoral Committee for the Family, the Co.N.A.M. helped in developing the themes and the formation for a Family Mission Week throughout the country. Also other specialized missions were organized for the sick in the hospitals and to the Afro-Panamanian and the Chinese-Panamanian communities of Panama.

3) POST-MISSION

The mission does not end with the departure of the missionaries, but continues both through the normal pastoral activities and through the extension of the mission to other people and to other areas. Therefore the main agents are the

people themselves in union with their bishop, their pastor and the various pastoral agents.

As a help in the post-mission, the missionaries assembled a list of more than 7,000 persons who actively attended the mission and of whom the missionaries thought would be good pastoral agents. On the evening before the farewell Mass, during the celebration of the Word, the people had the opportunity to make individual and communal commitments to continue the mission in their communities. Over 1,000 groups or commissions were organized during the National Mission for this purpose.

Both the missionaries and the people who received the mission have come to realize the need for more formation in order to evangelize better. Many of those who participated in the mission in their own communities have become missionaries. Many groups of missionaries in union with their bishop and the pastor have continued to mission on diocesan and local levels.

Several pastoral programs either have been started or have been given new fervor in their role within the Church, for example, to the prisoners, to the Afro-Panamanian community, to the Chinese-Panamanian community.

The Co.N.A.M. has taken on the role of accompanying the various dioceses and parishes in the post-mission by the formation and organization of renewal missions, formation of pastoral agents, creating new missionary teaching material according to the need, giving support for the various pastoral programs, animating and maintaining a network of communication among the missionaries of the various dioceses, developing new specialized missions to specific groups and, at times, assisting the work of the Pontifical Mission Societies in their missionary thrust to share the gospel beyond the borders of Panama.

IV. THE VINCENTIAN SPIRIT IN THE NATIONAL MISSION IN PANAMA

When EMIVI became part of Co.N.A.M., two interactions happened:

- 1) EMIVI was able to offer the National Mission part of the Vincentian spirit, especially concern for the poor, for the formation of the clergy and the laity, and for the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- 2) The National Mission widened the scope of EMIVI to include more than just the poor. The mission was directed to the whole Church and persons from many different and diverse movements participated as missionaries. Each offered their unique charism for the benefit of the whole Church.

1) THE POOR

The Poor as receivers of the missions:

The poor in the distant rural areas, the poor both on the outskirts and in the slums of the cities, the prisoners, the sick and the workers all were attended by the National Mission. There are communities that receive a visit from the parish priest only once a year, and yet they were served by a team of missionaries for two weeks. The missionaries traveled by bus, truck, boat, horseback and on foot

in order to insure that all the communities received their missionaries. On a few occasions we even had to fly them to the communities in small planes and helicopters. Since the National Mission was for the whole country, no community was rejected because of lack of funds. As was mentioned before, the people in the poor rural areas are the ones who responded most to the mission.

The Poor as missionaries:

Excluding the Archdiocese of Panama, which has half the population of the country, one of the poorest and smallest provinces of Panama constantly had the largest number of missionaries. In order to participate in the formations, some had to travel some 14 hours on foot and then two hours by bus. One young person who had lost one leg from a snake bite when he was small constantly would travel by horseback from his community in order to come to the formations and then get around on crutches. When the time came to assign him to a community, he was open to any place despite his impediment. The spirit of sacrifice (mortification), the humility, the simplicity and the meekness in dealing with others are only surpassed by their tremendous zeal in wanting to learn more of the gospel so that they could share the Good News with others.

The Situation of the Poor as subject matter:

In Latin America, the gap between the rich and the poor has constantly increased. In Panama, because of the political situation and the economic sanctions early in the National Mission, unemployment became a tremendous problem. Although some economic indicators showed that there was some recovery in 1991, the fact was that the poor were not benefiting from it. With this in mind, we organized a specialized mission for professionals and businessmen in 1992. Economic experts presented the concrete actual situation of the poor in Panama, a priest applied the social teachings of the Church to the situation and then the participants broke into small discussion groups in order to take concrete steps to respond to the situation.

The Poor as experienced personally:

It is so easy to talk about the poor in general, but not experience what it means to be poor or to know any poor firsthand. Many missionaries who came from the affluent society worked hand in hand with the poor missionaries on the team. They also had the opportunity to live among the poor and learn from them. Those experiences have left a profound and lasting effect on the missionaries.

2) FORMATION

Formation of the clergy:

Besides our Vincentian seminarians, every year seminarians both from the diocesan seminaries and from different religious communities participated in the formation and in the missions. Some of their formation was done by our lay trainers. During the mission they became one of the members of the team which included the laity from different parts of the country. They worked with the poor in rural areas and now many are pastors in rural communities. In January, 1995,

for example, six priests were ordained from one of the dioceses - and all had participated in the missions.

Formation of religious:

Many different communities of sisters were represented and presented their charism of the religious life to people who rarely would have the opportunity of getting to know a sister. Their fervor, sincerity and creativity helped a great deal to maintain the continuity of the mission.

Formation of the laity:

The laity of the Church is like a sleeping giant within the Catholic Church. Given the opportunity, they can be a tremendous factor in evangelization. Through the formation we were able to communicate a missionary spirit to them and help them look beyond the narrow confines of their small parochial world in order to see the needs and life-styles of others especially the poor. They are anxious to participate more actively within the Church and the mission opened up that possibility. Furthermore, many of the young missionaries are seeking a deeper commitment within the Church.

3) RECONCILIATION

One of the most important elements in the traditional Vincentian mission is the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This sacrament has not lost its role within today's mission. During every mission, because of the number of communities and the distance between them, the large number of persons who wanted to confess and the scarcity of priests, we were always hard pressed to try to respond to this need. Many people after years of not approaching confession were reconciled with God and with the community. Unfortunately, sometimes it was just impossible to reach all the areas.

As in St. Vincent's day, the mission was a chance to be reconciled also with family members and with one's neighbors. In one rural community, where over a hundred and fifty persons sat on make-shift bamboo benches under a huge thatched roof, members of the same family were attending the mission, some on one side and the others on the far side. Half way through the mission, the daughter-in-law started to talk to the mother-in-law - the first time in 5 years. Later on in the same mission center, two neighbors shook hands and started to arrive at an agreement. The one had put up a fence on the land that the other claimed for himself.

4) METHODOLOGY

The methodology was based on dynamic dialogue whereby the missionary becomes a facilitator and a guide in the discussion thereby making the people participate in the mission and be active agents.

The major themes for discussion were developed by St. Vincent's little method: nature, motive and means. What is the theme, especially in our reality; why

should we do it or avoid it; how can we put the theme into practice in our reality. These questions were developed through readings from Scripture and the documents of the Church, certain songs and socio-dramas, analysis of prayers and Panamanian sayings, drawings and photographs, panel discussions and testimonies, etc. Depending on the question, the people were divided into groups of 2 or 3, 4 to 5, or 7 to 10. Sometimes secretaries were used to give the summaries of the discussion to the whole group. Each answer was respected, but sometimes clarified by the missionary and little by little even the shy adult who never had the opportunity to go to school would start to share.

This dialogue methodology was incorporated into all the missionary teaching material for the children, the youth, the adults and the various specialized missions.

On the second Sunday of the mission, we brought together the neighboring mission centers for a "convivencia" - a sharing of the Christian faith in the Eucharist, a panel discussion on Christian vocations, food, and fun and games for the whole family. The panel discussion was organized in the following way: the missionary-coordinator or priest dialogues with the people about the reading of Ephesians on marriage and the Gospel according to Matthew about the Apostles being "fishers of men," then he gives each panelist 2 minutes to explain or give a testimony about his or her vocation. There were usually 6 on the panel: a priest, a religious sister, a missionary, a married couple and a catechist or lay minister of the Sunday service. After this, anyone from the assembly could ask anyone of the panelists a question about his or her vocation.

CONCLUSION

The spirit of the Vincentian Popular Missions is still very valid in today's evangelization, however, a process is needed to adapt this spirit to the different realities of the world. The CLAPVI encounters on popular missions helped to reinforce the validity and adaptability of this spirit to a Latin American reality. We who are called to be "Evangelizers of the poor" should strive to help the "Poor become Evangelizers" not only in their own immediate surroundings but also in other parts of their country and of the world.

The challenge that the CLAPVI seminar presented to us in Panama found its expression in EMIVI. Could it be providence that offered EMIVI a way of sharing the Vincentian concerns for the poor and the formation of future clergy and of the pastoral agents with the whole Panamanian Church through the National Mission?

The expansion from the missionary experience of EMIVI (missioning 20 communities in one parish at the same time) to the national missionary experience of Co.N.A.M. (missioning 200 communities in one diocese at the same time) was made possible through much prayer and through the creative endeavor of the whole Panamanian church. It called for the delegating of the different tasks and specialized missions to many people and groups who all responded joyfully and generously to the occasion.

As I mentioned in the beginning, this missionary experience is "only one of many experiences that are being developed in many of our provinces throughout the world." As we have learnt from the experiences of the other parts of Latin American, hopefully the missionary experience of EMIVI/Co.N.A.M. can serve to stimulate this process of adaptation to other realities. Furthermore, I hope that other experiences of the creativity of implementing this spirit of Vincentian missions in other parts of the world can be shared.

As I close, I ask for your prayers for the preservation and growth of the fruits of this mission in Panama during its post-mission phase.

STATISTICS OF THE NATIONAL MISSION IN PANAM

YEAR OF THE MISSION	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	TOTAL
No. OF 2 WEEK-MISSIONS ¹	1	3	3	4	3	2	16
NUMBER OF PARISHES	7	20	23	25	47	35	157
NUMBER OF MISSIONARY COMMITMENTS ²	300	1,655	2,241	2184	2,183	836	9,399
COMMUNITIES (CENTERS OF MISSION) ³	121	667	755	669	575	261	3,048
NUMBER OF HOMES VISITED	14,500	35,000	48,572	42,927	73,851	32,880	247,730
AVERAGE DAILY ATTENDANCE	11,500	67,500	74,831	38,724	48,013	16,572	257,140
COUPLES WANTING TO BE MARRIED ⁴	300	2,200	1,540	1,058	722	101	5,921
YOUTH WANTING TO BE CONFIRMED ⁴			5,760	4,107	2,764	583	13,214
POSSIBLE FUTURE PASTORAL AGENTS ⁵	450	1,700	1,878	1,596	1,150	390	7,164
COMMISSIONS FORMED FOR THE POST-MISSION ⁵			816	193	186	43	1,238

NOTES:

- 1) Number of Two-Week Missions: Each Mission consisted of two weeks in which a team of missionaries lived within the community or mission center in order to visit, to meet with the children, with the youth and with the adults, and to celebrate concentrations and a community get-together.
- 2) Number of Missionary Commitments of two-weeks: Some missionaries worked on more than one 2-week mission a year.
- 3) Communities or Mission Centers: Each rural community and each mission center in the cities had its own mission team for two weeks.
- 4) Since the National Mission had more an evangelizing thrust than a sacramental one, we gave the lists of those interested in Confirmation and Marriage to the pastor, so that he could give a good sacramental preparation according to the pastoral norms of the diocese.
- 5) We also gave the pastor the lists of possible future pastoral agents and the commissions that were formed, so that they all could work together during the post-mission.

Bibliography

VINCENT DE PAUL

**Correspondence, Conferences, Documents
volume 5**

published by New City Press, 1995 (651 pages)

This book is the English translation of the letters of St. Vincent from August 1653 to June 1656. It is edited by Sisters Marie Poole, Julia Denton, and Elinor Hartman, D.C.

It can be ordered from: *Vincentian Translation Project* - St. Joseph's Provincial House - 333 South Seton Avenue - Emmitsburg, Maryland 21727-9297 - USA.

BETTY ANN MCNEIL, D.C.

**Monograph 1.
The Vincentian Family Tree**

published by the "Vincentian Studies Institute," 1995 (250 pages)

This book presents a genealogical study of the various communities throughout the world which are linked to St. Vincent de Paul. It gives a list of 268 lay associations, institutes of consecrated life, societies of apostolic life, and non-Catholic institutes in 40 countries which have an historical or spiritual tie with St. Vincent de Paul.

It can be ordered from: *De Paul University Bookstore* - Vincentian Heritage Department - 25 East Jackson Blvd. - Chicago, Illinois 60604 - USA. Tel 312-362-8792.

BENITO MARTÍNEZ, C.M.

Las cuatro cumplieron su misión

Ediciones Fe y Vida, 1994 (64 pages)

This is a short presentation on four of the first Daughters of Charity: Marguerite Naseau, Marie Joly, Barbe Angiboust, and Henriette Gesseaume. It is intended for young people in parishes and Vincentian centers. The author wished to show how these young women of the 17th century responded to the call of God by following Jesus Christ in the service of the poor.

It can be ordered from: *Asociación Feyda* - Avda Sagunto 9, 1_ A - 44002 Teruel, Spain.

LUIGI MEZZADRI, C.M.

**Con San Vincenzo ai piedi della santa montagna
Le Beatitudini**

C.L.V. - Edizioni Vincenziane, 1995 (159 pages)

Climbing to the top of a mountain is never an easy undertaking, nor one without risk. A guide is always very useful: he reduces the strain, points out the paths which are sure and trodden and helps avoid the temptation to abandon the climb.

The pages of this book provide a sure guide toward the summit of the Beatitudes, a focus of every Christian life.

The meditations are developed on a gospel basis, interpreted in the light of the life of St. Vincent and some of his contemporaries.

It can be ordered from: *C.L.V. Edizioni Vincenziane* - Via Pompeo Magno, 21 - 00192 Roma - Italy.

JEAN-FRANÇOIS GAZIELLO, C.M. AND LUIGI MEZZADRI, C.M.

**Vieni e seguimi
In ritiro con S. Vincenzo**

C.L.V. - Edizioni Vincenziane, 1995 (159 pages)

"*A man filled with fire,*" is the way St. Vincent described Fr. Le Vacher, who died a martyr for Christ. "*Our soul must... glorify God*" St. Vincent says in another place.

We are sent to respond to the cry of the poor, to extend the presence of Christ in our time and in our world. There really is a need for men "*filled with fire.*"

These pages, which place us listening to Christ and St. Vincent and at their school, nourish our meditations and our moments of solitude in view of the ardor which the Vincentian vocation requires.

It can be ordered from: *C.L.V. Edizioni Vincenziane* - Via Pompeo Magno, 21 - 00192 Roma - Italy.

ELISABETH CHARPY

**Spiritualité de Louise de Marillac
Itinéraire d'une femme**

Desclée de Brouwer, 1995 (120 pages)

For the first time, the spiritual journey of Louise de Marillac is presented with its searchings, its doubts, its convictions. Francis de Sales, Bérulle, Vincent de Paul were her mentors. Her anthropology is anchored in the mystery of Christ as Redeemer and testifies to the deep unity realized among her prayer, her theological culture, and her commitment.

With persevering tenacity and reflective boldness, Louise de Marillac leads the Daughters of Charity along very new paths in order to respond to the needs of the poor of her time. She expresses with vigor that the goal of love supposes respect for every person, in particular the lowly and the poor, and that loving in truth implies a person to person relationship. With Vincent de Paul, Louise de Marillac aroused in the Church a renewal of faith and dynamism.

It can be ordered from: *La Procure* - Maison Mère - 95 rue de Sèvres - 75006 Paris - France.

GIUSEPPE MENICHELLI, C.M.

**"Li avete sempre con voi"
I poveri come sfida permanente alla chiesa e alla società**

**Published by the Società de San Vincenzo de' Paoli
Via della Pigna, 13/a - Roma**

This small 64 page booklet proposes a program of reflection to the members of Vincentian Associations.