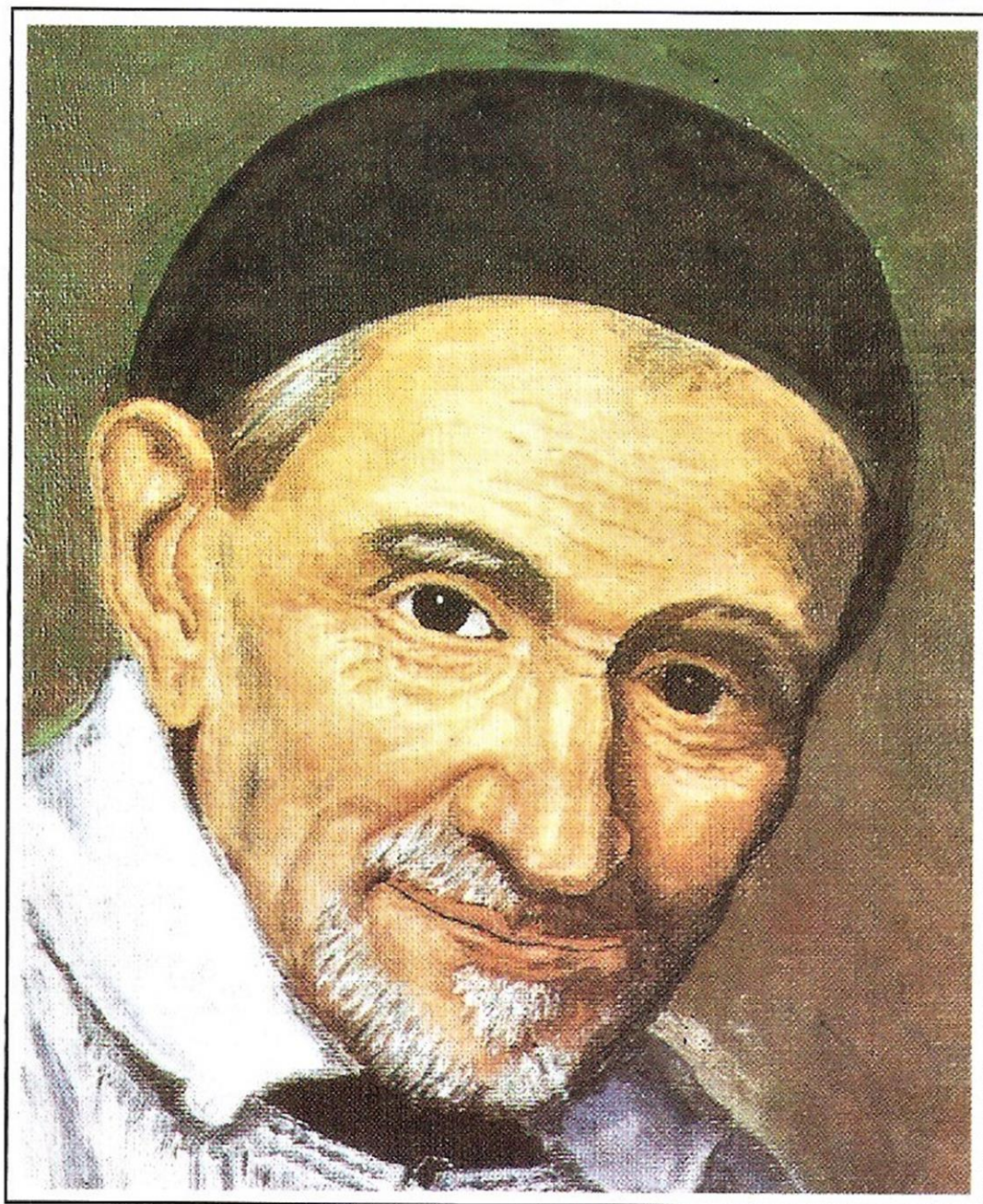


VINCENTIANA

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FEATURE:

Echoes of the Vincentian Family

CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION
GENERAL CURIA

December 24, 1997

To the Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission

My dear Confreres,

Several months have now passed since last summer's Vincentian Month, on the Popular Missions, in Paris. It was a very rich experience which I hope will bear much fruit in many of the provinces of the Congregation.

This Vincentian Month brought together participants from many countries on all the continents. For the first time not only members of the Congregation of the Mission participated, but also sisters and lay people who work with us in our missions. Their presence was very enriching for everyone and reflects our growing missionary collaboration with sisters, especially the Daughters of Charity, and with lay men and women. In spite of differences in the way of envisioning and carrying out the mission, all felt united in the same Vincentian charism and the same passion for the evangelization of the poor in today's world.

The Month concluded with the publication of a "Final Document" which was presented to me. In it are ten propositions which the participants approved and which aim at promoting and developing the popular missions. This document was published in a special issue of *Vincentiana* (1997/4-5) which also reproduced all the Month's conferences. We studied these propositions at a recent General Council meeting. I write to inform you about our reflection on them.

Of the ten propositions, only the tenth one is addressed directly to me. It requests the creation of an International Secretariat for the Popular Missions, in order to assure better collaboration and more facile exchange of information among missionaries. This objective is important and is promising for the future, so I want to encourage it.

At present, we are reflecting in council on the possibility of naming a delegate of the Superior General to focus on and coordinate activities among the various branches of the Vincentian Family. He could also be asked to promote, on the international level, coordination in regard to the popular missions, given that these often take place with the participation of members of the different branches of our family. This would not be exactly an International Secretariat for the Popular Missions, which could be rather difficult to organize and manage, but an international

center of unity and communication. However, I do not envision that this will be realized in the months immediately ahead.

I would like therefore to suggest another complementary formula, which I hope will also be an effective means of attaining the desired objective and can begin at once. I propose starting at the base and gradually moving toward the summit. That is, I want to encourage the formation of coordination committees among the missionary teams on the provincial, interprovincial, and regional levels in order to arrive little by little at the formation of an international network linking these committees. Modern means of communication make the creation of such a network relatively easy. This would permit a broad exchange of information, experiences, and documents, as well as requests for help in personnel or materials. I encourage the Visitors, the Conferences of Visitors, and the missionaries themselves, to see how this might be put into practice.

We also studied the other propositions and concluded that the fifth one, addressed to the General Assembly, should be passed to the Preparatory Commission for the Assembly in order to determine how it should be treated.

The other propositions fall under the competence of the Visitors or the Conferences of Visitors. So, I transmit them to you and invite you to examine them attentively in order to see what follow-up you can give them. Behind the various propositions there lies a fundamental idea which is closely related to the theme of our next General Assembly: that collaboration among confreres of different provinces and countries, as well as with the sisters and lay men and women is a source of renewal and apostolic energy for the mission.

If confreres, sisters or lay people went from your province to the Vincentian Month, will you please give each of them a copy of this letter, so that they might be aware of the reply that I am giving to the propositions they addressed to me.

On this Christmas Eve, I ask the Lord to bless you, and all the confreres of your province, and to fill each of you with a deep sense of his presence and his love.

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.
Superior General

To Vincentians throughout the world

My very dear Confreres,

May the grace of Our Lord be always with you!

The desert plays a special role in both the Old and New Testaments. It is a place of wandering and purification, of trial and temptation, of dryness and death. But it is also a mobile school where God's people learn to live in solitude, to meditate, to grasp life in its essentials, to depend on God. One of the great themes of Exodus is the abiding presence of a provident, loving God during the journey through the desert: "The Lord walked at the head of the group by day as a pillar of cloud to guide them on the way..., and at night was a pillar of fire to lighten their path" (Ex 13:21). The Lord's presence was constant, caring _ supplying them with food in the desert and nourishing them with his word, his law. The Lord rebuked them when they sinned and forgave them when they repented. The Lord tested and strengthened their fidelity, then defeated their enemies, and finally led them into a land flowing with milk and honey. In a lovely image, Hosea sees the desert as the courting place for God's ongoing, sometimes tumultuous, relationship with the chosen people: "So I will allure her. I will lead her into the desert and speak to her heart" (Hos 2:16).

This year's gospel for the First Sunday of Lent reminds us that the desert is also a place of demons. There Jesus, led by the Spirit, meets Satan, who places before him, in symbolic form, the temptations of bread, power, fame. In our Vincentian Family we recall that Luke uses Jesus' "desert-experience" precisely as the introduction to his entrance into the synagogue at Nazareth where he proclaims, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, therefore he has anointed me, to bring glad tidings to the poor he has sent me" (Lk 4:18).

In preparation for the coming of the third millennium, the Church asks us, in 1998, to focus on the Holy Spirit. So I encourage you in Lent to allow the Spirit to lead you into the desert, as Jesus did, that the Spirit might empower you for a renewed mission. Our Christian tradition tells us that the journey will be turbulent but rewarding. Let me reflect with you briefly about three aspects of that journey.

1. The gospels call us to grow in confidence that the Spirit accompanies us in the desert. Luke's gospel, which we read every Sunday this Lent, emphasizes the Spirit's presence in all of life's moments, both in light and in darkness. In Luke, the Spirit comes down upon Mary at the moment of the Incarnation (1:35). The Spirit also fills Jesus at the time of his baptism and then leads him into the desert for forty days (4:2).

Having conquered Satan, Jesus returns to Galilee in the power of the Spirit (4:14) and opens his ministry (4:18). Jesus rejoices in the Spirit (10:21). He assures his followers that his heavenly Father will give the Spirit to all who ask him (11:13) and tells them that the Spirit will teach them everything they need to say in times of persecution (12:12). Luke's second book, the Acts, accents the Spirit's abiding presence in the life of the Church. For Luke, the Spirit is God's providence, his accompanying love. Luke calls us to trust in the Spirit of Lord with exuberant confidence.

Remember how eloquently St. Vincent exhorted us to entrust ourselves to God's provident care: "We must abandon ourselves to God `as a little child does to its nurse.' If she puts him on her right arm, the child is content. If she moves him over to her left, he does not care. He is quite satisfied provided he has her breast. We should, then, have the same confidence in Divine Providence seeing that God takes care of all that concerns us just as a nursing mother takes care of her baby" (SV X, 503). As evangelizers our mission is to communicate words of hope to the poor. If our own trust in providence is deep, our lives will testify, whether we are preaching or whether we are silent, that the Spirit abides within us and breathes out through us.

2. I urge you to reflect, during Lent, on the temptations that we inevitably meet as the Spirit guides us through the desert. None of us is spared these. The Spirit is a pillar of fire to lighten our path on the journey, but daily events allure us to follow other pillars of fire as we wander through the desert. For those holding authority, the temptation of power is great; for those laboring in the market place, the temptation of money; for those engaged in preaching, the temptation of popularity; for those longing for relationships, the temptation of easy or irresponsible sex; for those serving in the face of dire poverty, the temptation of discouragement; for those living in the midst of violence, the temptation of violent response. None of these ever satisfies. None brings ultimate meaning. None plumbs the depth of the mystery of the human person. We find our hunger satisfied, our thirst quenched, only in the person of a loving, provident God who walks with us always. That was the lesson the Israelites learned in the Exodus. This Lent each of us must ask himself: what is the greatest temptation I face as a missionary?

3. Finally, this Lent the word of the Lord calls us to preach the presence of this provident God out of deep personal conviction. The Scriptures pose the challenge: Do you yourself, the evangelizer, sense that God walks with you everyday? When others hear you speak of God, are they stirred to believe? Do you see God, as the psalmist does, in the rising of the sun and in its setting? Is God's name written, as the author of Deuteronomy suggests, on the doorposts of your home so that you think of the Lord in your coming in and in your going out? Do you also see God in the daily life of the poor: in their struggles, in their search for justice, in their hoping against hope, in their suffering, in their hospitality, in their gratitude? Each of us who preaches can ask himself those questions. Our mission focuses on God's loving, provident presence, on God's indwelling Spirit. That is the good news. Are we able to state to others with conviction that God is our Father, our Mother, our all, as St. Vincent said (SV V,

534)? If we can do that, the popular missions we preach will be very much alive, the seminaries where we teach will be centers of God's indwelling, our foreign missions will be vibrant forces for evangelization.

"There is no better way to assure our eternal happiness than to live and die in the service of the poor, within the arms of providence, and in a real renunciation of ourselves by following Jesus Christ" (SV III, 392). That is, I suggest, what the Spirit wants to teach us this Lent.

Amen. Alleluia. May the Spirit of the Risen Lord fill you.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.
Superior General

Apointments and Confirmations by the Superior General

DATE	NAME	OFFICE	PROVINCE
05/02/98	Antonio Estévez Conde	Visitor (2nd mandate)	Venezuela
13/02/98	Dennis Martin	Director D.C. (1/6)	Normandy
26/02/98	Noel Mojica	Visitor (2/3)	Cuba

On horizon shifts

_ Some Reflections on the General Assembly of 1997 _

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.
Superior General

As you can imagine, my sisters, many sheets of paper come across my desk. During the last days of the General Assembly, but before its final document had actually been written, an especially interesting one-page analysis of the Assembly found its way there. I suspect that the author, an elected delegate, wishes to remain anonymous. But I reproduce her observations for you today, with only slight editorial modifications, because they seem to me a particularly astute appraisal of the Assembly.

Horizon shifts that were evident during the 1997 general assembly

1. From a Community shaped predominately by European customs to an international Community where the customs of all regions are honored.
2. From an attitude of "rescuing" and giving to the poor to an attitude of solidarity with persons in need, working hand in hand with them to promote change, engaging the poor in their own promotion.
3. From a tight focus on the affairs of the individual provinces to a focus on sharing the Company's resources on a worldwide basis.
4. From an understanding that unity depends largely on external signs to an understanding that unity is founded predominately on common motivation, common convictions, and common action.
5. From preaching the gospel to those we serve to searching for the seeds of the gospel in their culture: "reaping before sowing."
6. From a highly centralized administration to a more decentralized one.

Of course, these horizon shifts did not take place suddenly nor did they happen precisely during the month of the Assembly; rather, they have been evolving gradually in the minds and hearts of Daughters of Charity in recent years. The Assembly, however, made them evident for all of us to see, and, in fact, promoted these shifts by its atmosphere, its discussions, and its decisions. Let me examine these horizon shifts with you today one by one.

1. *From a Community shaped predominately by European customs to an international Community where the customs of all regions are honored.*

a. *Signs of this horizon shift.*

In the book of the Acts, as he is about to ascend into heaven, Jesus sends his disciples out to be his "witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). But actually only in the latter part of the 20th century has Catholicism truly become a "world-Church."¹ During the pontificate of Paul VI a striking shift took place in the Church's statistical center of gravity. The turning point arrived in 1970: 51% of the Catholic population was living in the southern hemisphere.²

A similar shift has been taking place gradually in the Company of the Daughters of Charity. Though numerically the Company's numbers are still by far greatest in Europe, many young provinces are now flourishing in Asia, Africa, and Central and South America. The responsibility for formation and for the leadership of those provinces is passing more and more into the hands of those born there. It is striking that, during the Assembly, an extra delegate was awarded to Vietnam as the province with the greatest number of young sisters in formation.

Some of the most powerful moments during the General Assembly were the times when we listened to testimonies presented by sisters from various countries with strikingly diverse cultural backgrounds.

Among the most important decisions of the Assembly was a change in Statute 39 whereby from now on Africa will be represented on the General Council by an African sister and Asia will be represented by an Asian sister.

b. *Challenges for the future.*

I am convinced that one of the greatest challenges facing the Daughters of Charity, and many other communities, is to hand on your tradition integrally but flexibly. I say *integrally* because you have a wonderful heritage that you want to preserve: giving your lives to God in community through a love for the poor that is practical and effective, lived out in simplicity and humility. But I also say *flexibly* because you do not want to build a European community in non-European cultures. You do not want to make the mistake that architects frequently made in the past, when they constructed European or North American style buildings in cultural settings where they seemed as foreign as a pagoda would seem here in Paris.

¹ K. Rahner, "The Abiding Significance of the Second Vatican Council," in *Theological Investigations* XX, 90-102; cf. also "The Future of the Church and the Church of the Future," in *Theological Investigations* XX, 103-114.

² W. Bühlmann, *The Church of the Future* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1986) 4-5.

Good initial formation is the key to handing on the tradition integrally but flexibly. I offer the entire Company this challenge, my sisters: focus your energies on good initial formation. As the twig is bent, so grows the tree.

2. *From an attitude of "rescuing" and giving to the poor to an attitude of solidarity with persons in need, working hand in hand with them to promote change, engaging the poor in their own promotion.*

a. *Signs of this horizon shift.*

The word "accompaniment" has become very much a part of the vocabulary of modern communities. This is not merely a linguistic shift. Rather, our language is expressing an attitudinal change. Today, especially in the Church and often in secular society, we recognize how important it is that the poor themselves be engaged in their own promotion. We see that human dignity demands self-determination. We believe in personal involvement in one's own education, in the acceptance of responsibility for creating one's own future. In recent decades a remarkable shift of emphasis has taken place, from "assistentialism" in works of charity (giving alms, providing "things" for the poor) to "human promotion" (accompaniment of the poor person in the overall process of personal formation and self-help).

The fourth commitment of the General Assembly of 1997 states this all very clearly. We pledge "to give our life to the Poor and offer them a service responding to their real needs, taking into account their desires, aspirations and values in order to enable them to become agents of their own promotion."

Notice how often the Assembly document emphasizes *solidarity*. It does so in the eighth, tenth, and twelfth commitments. Notice too how strong is the Assembly's emphasis on *collaboration* with the laity, with the Vincentian Family, and especially with our Vincentian Marian Youth Groups.

b. *Challenges for the future.*

The challenge of this second horizon shift is already stated very clearly by the Assembly itself: "to join forces with people who defend life and human rights, as well as with those who struggle for justice and solidarity for those who are excluded from society, especially women and children who are the poorest of the poor in many parts of the world." I encourage you once again, my sisters, as the third millennium dawns, let the Daughters of Charity be known as a Company that stands in solidarity with those excluded from society, and especially with women and children, who are the poorest of the poor in so many parts of the world.

3. *From a tight focus on the affairs of the individual provinces to a focus on sharing the Company's resources on a worldwide basis.*

a. *Signs of this horizon shift.*

This shift has actually been taking place very notably over the last several decades. I mention here two important signs.

* For years, numerous Daughters of Charity have volunteered to go to missions in other countries. Formation programs have been organized to help them in inculturating and in acquiring new languages. Over the last six years the Company has gone to Albania, Cambodia, Ghana, Angola, Byelorussia, Ukraine. The Company has been able to count on interprovincial personnel assistance in emergency situations in Mexico, Guatemala, Burundi, Rwanda, Somalia, and Egypt. One hundred fifty-five Daughters of Charity have gone to the missions *ad gentes* over the last six years.

* The Company shares remarkably its financial resources on a worldwide basis. Those provinces which have greater financial resources have channeled, through the General Curia, huge amounts of financial assistance to the service of the needy in poor countries.

b. *Challenges for the future.*

The challenge under this heading is very clear too. In the past six years the Mother General has placed great emphasis not only by her writings but also in her actions, on the missionary identity of the Company. So I say to you, my sisters, during the next six years as the third millennium dawns: Go! Go, as missionaries. Do not hesitate to offer yourself to go where the poorest of the poor dwell, either in your own province or in the missions *ad gentes*. Go. Go without fear.

4. ***From an understanding that unity depends largely on external signs to an understanding that unity is founded predominately on common motivation, common convictions, and common action.***

a. *Signs of this horizon shift.*

The Company has placed great emphasis over the past several decades not only on initial formation, but also on ongoing formation. The provinces themselves organize frequent formation workshops touching on the various aspects of our lives: spiritual, apostolic, community, Vincentian, professional. On an international level, two or three programs are organized every year here at Rue du Bac, with sisters coming from all of the countries where the Daughters of Charity live and work. All of these programs recognize that the foundations of community are not so much external signs, but rather common motivation, common convictions, and common action, as the philosopher Bernard Lonergan frequently pointed out.³

³ Bernard Lonergan, *A Third Collection* (Mahwah, New Jersey: 1985) 5-6.

The fifth commitment of the General Assembly of 1997 states this very clearly. It binds the Company "to recreate communities rooted in Jesus Christ who share their experience of God, live communion by dialogue and discernment, in a mutual attitude of servants energized by common plans which are creative, realistic, demanding and able to be evaluated."

Moreover, the decision that the Assembly made concerning the habit confirms the Company's recognition, already clear in recent years, that its unity does not depend on uniformity of dress. In fact, this decision acknowledges that the needs of the poor and the varied sensibilities of different cultures should be key factors in determining what the habit of the Daughter of Charity is. The Assembly decided:

"The official habit of the Daughters of Charity is:

- that proposed and chosen by the 2nd Legislative General Assembly (the present habit)
 - or a modified habit: navy blue skirt, coiffe, white or blue blouse
 - or a habit modified according to the different cultures and needs of the service of the poor and approved by the Visitatrix and her council."
- The wearing of the coiffe comes within the competence of the Visitatrix and her council.

All the sisters wear a distinctive universal sign of their belonging to the Company."

b. Challenges for the future.

As I see it, my sisters, the Company already has a rather clear grasp of the common motivations, the common convictions, and the common actions that ground its unity. The challenge is to deepen these continually. There is always a tendency in groups, especially large ones, to confuse uniformity for unity. That can be a serious malady in an international community because it leads to the imposition of detailed practices that seem strange to young people coming from other cultures. When I was a novice, we were permitted to shower only twice a week. As young people, we griped continuously about this strange practice and sometimes laughed hilariously about it. Once the novitiate was over, all of us showered every day just as we had before the novitiate. This odd regulation of our bathing had contributed nothing to the deepening of our motivations, convictions, and actions, even though for some reason it had seemed important to those responsible for formation. The challenging question for us today is this: What will really deepen the deepest motives of a Daughter of Charity (her desire to give herself to God in the service of the poor)? What will deepen her deepest convictions (that she wants to live in simplicity, humility, and practical charity)? What will deepen her commitment to action done in common with others (especially communal prayer, a joyful life together, and common service of the poor)?

5. *From preaching the gospel to those we serve to searching for the seeds of the gospel in their culture: "reaping before sowing."*

a. *Signs of this horizon shift.*

Church documents these days address few themes more frequently than inculturation. Pope John II, who has spoken about inculturation again and again, wrote to all the Daughters of Charity: "Love of the poor entails respect for their cultures, which reveal the soul of their human communities, as well as recognition and acceptance of the values which make up its richness."

The word "inculturation" has been frequently on the lips of every Daughter of Charity during the two years of preparation for the General Assembly and during the time of the celebration of the Assembly itself.

The fourth conviction expressed by the Assembly states: "we are convinced of the need to engage in a continual process in order to discover personally and in community the 'seeds of the Word' and the values they present in all cultures and among the Poor:

- solidarity, the struggle for justice and freedom
- recognition of the dignity of every human being
- close personal relationships, hospitality and the sense of celebration
- trust and hope in Providence...

and to discern the counter-values which are opposed to the Gospel and to our Vincentian identity:

- increase in poverty and exclusion
- economic exploitation
- violation of human rights
- loss of a sense of God
- the 'culture of death'..."

b. *Challenges for the future.*

The challenge is already implicit in the conviction above expressed so clearly by the Assembly. Today I want to encourage especially the Visitatrixes and the formators in all the provinces of the Company to discern with the sisters of the province what are the seeds of the word in each culture and to discern too what are the counter-values, those opposed to the Gospel, in each culture. There are surely abundant seeds of the word all over creation, because God made it. But there are also abundant weeds, Jesus assures us, because all human persons, ourselves included, are sinful.

6. *From a highly centralized administration to a more decentralized one.*

a. *Signs of this horizon shift.*

Immediately after Vatican II, Pope Paul VI told religious communities that their "mode of government should be such that the exercise of authority is rendered more effective and expeditious, as our times demand. Superiors, therefore, at every level, should be given appropriate powers so as to minimize unnecessary and too frequent recourse to higher authority".⁴

The revised Constitutions and Statutes of the Daughters of Charity succeeded only partially in implementing this "principle of subsidiarity" that Paul VI enunciated. One of Constitutions' most significant steps toward decentralization was its emphasis on the local community plan as the instrument for concretely defining the life of the local community and for engaging the sisters in a mutual covenant for living out that life. The Constitutions also expanded the powers of Visitatrixes and increased the involvement of the sisters of provinces in the choice of their leaders through broad consultation.

During the Assembly, the decision on the habit, which I just described, was a key step in the direction of decentralization. Formerly, almost all decisions concerning the habit had to come to the Mother General and her council. Now these can be handled on a provincial basis.

b. *Challenges for the future.*

The principle of subsidiarity is clear. The challenge is to apply it consistently.

The Assembly recognized that more still needs to be done in regard to decentralization. Too many things that are actually decided on a provincial level still arrive in Paris, unnecessarily taking up the time and energies of the members of the General Council and the Secretariat. The General Assembly decided that a committee should be appointed which will draft a revision of the Constitutions and Statutes that will then be proposed to the next General Assembly. One of the challenges facing this commission, and therefore facing the next General Assembly, will be to come to fuller grips with the question of subsidiarity and decentralization.

Horizon shifts are very important, my sisters. They influence what we actually see. From the roof of the General Curia, I can view much of Rome. I can catch a glimpse of the dome of St. Peter's, and I look out at homes where poor people live. Occasionally I watch drugs pass from hand to hand. The other day I even spotted

⁴ *Ecclesiae Sanctae* (August 6, 1966) 18.

someone who had once robbed me. When I descend to my office, which is only one floor below, the horizon is very different: I can see neither St. Peter's nor the poor. So it is good for me to go up on the roof from time to time to change horizons! Your Assembly has done just that, my sisters. In fact, the whole Company has been doing it, especially over the last six years. Its horizons have expanded toward internationality. Its service of the poor has taken on new perspectives and new overtones. Its relationship with new cultures has become a source of enrichment.

I encourage you, my sisters, and the whole Company today, to rejoice in these new horizons. Let your eyes be filled with the varied colors of God's creation. Read and study well the document of this Assembly. Make its convictions your own and live its commitments in solidarity with your sisters. Let this document set you on fire, as the Assembly says. *Be* a new fire. Let the burning charity of Christ go out from you to communicate itself to the hearts of others, especially the poor.

Address to the international gathering of those responsible for the Vincentian Marian Youth Groups

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

It is good for us to be here, my brothers and sisters, as we celebrate this first gathering of those responsible for the Vincentian Marian Youth Groups throughout the world.

Your Association has a wonderful origin: it sprang from a message that Catherine Labouré received from the Virgin Mary. The Church officially approved your groups 150 years ago. They spread quickly to many nations, and today your numbers are increasing very rapidly throughout the world. We estimate that more than 200,000 young people are members of Vincentian Marian Youth Groups. You, who are their leaders, have come together from almost fifty countries to represent these young men and women.

Today, I want to express to you my hopes for the future of the Vincentian Marian Youth Groups. As we look toward the third millennium, the future lies in your hands. If the Church is fully alive in the year 2000, 2010, 2020, it will be because you are fully alive. So, these are my hopes for you.

1. I hope that you will be more and more deeply rooted in the person of Jesus.

This seems so obvious, but there is nothing more important that, as an older brother, I can say to you. "Remember," St. Vincent de Paul once wrote, "that we live in Jesus Christ by the death of Jesus Christ and that we ought to die in Jesus Christ by the life of Jesus Christ and that our life ought to be hidden in Jesus Christ and full of Jesus Christ and that in order to die like Jesus Christ it is necessary to live like Jesus Christ."¹ The gospels ring with this conviction: Jesus is the absolute center. "I am the way, the truth, and the life," Jesus says. "No one comes to the Father except through me."² "I am the vine."³ "I am the gate."⁴ "I am the shepherd."⁵ "I am the light."⁶ "I am the true bread come down from heaven. The one who feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood will live forever."⁷

¹ SV I, 295.

² Jn 14:6.

³ Jn 15:6.

⁴ Jn 10:9.

⁵ Jn 10:11.

⁶ Jn 8:12.

⁷ Jn 6:51.

Let me simply recall to you today the wonderful prayer attributed to St. Patrick:

*Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me.
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.*

I recommend two principal means for focusing on the person of Jesus.

The first is daily prayer. Make Christ the center of that prayer, especially the crucified and risen Lord. Engage in a well-defined period of reflective prayer each day and let the Lord capture your mind and your heart. Speak to him in your own words. Tell him with great simplicity of your joys and your sorrows, your fears, your anxieties. Tell him that you love him and be deeply confident that he loves you. Trust that he walks with you. When you fall, be sure that he is there to pick you up and embrace you forgivingly. Hide nothing from the Lord. Know that you can always come to him with exuberant confidence, as St. Vincent de Paul once put it, trusting in his pardon and love.

The second means, and it is not completely distinct from the first, is to find, love, and serve Christ in the person of the poor. They are our lords and masters, St. Vincent de Paul tells us. Jesus continues to live on in them in a special way, particularly in the crucified peoples. It is so easy for the "world", and for us too, to become numb to their plight: the 5.7 million people of Haiti, who have been so poor for so long that their pain is no longer news; the 2.5 million Bosnian refugees who are victims of "ethnic cleansing"; the 1.5 million Somalians on the edge of death by starvation; the countless Rwandans, Zairians, and Cambodians who have been brutally slain. Our contemplation of the crucified Lord cannot remain merely a pious exercise; nor can it be simply meditation on a past event. The Lord lives on in His members. He is crucified in individual persons and in suffering peoples. The call is to see Him and to serve Him there. "When I was hungry you gave me to eat. When I was thirsty you gave me to drink. When I was naked you clothed me."⁸

2. *I hope that you are deeply rooted in the scriptures.*

The word of God never fails. It is effective, creative. It runs beyond mere pragmatic "calculation" and unfolds a deeper wisdom that lies hidden in the mystery of God's love. I encourage you to know the scriptures and, like Mary the mother of

⁸ Mt 25:35-36.

Jesus, to turn God's word over again and again in your hearts, treasuring it. The scriptures are water that gives us life, as Isaiah (55:10-11) puts it, when our hearts and minds are dry. They are a hammer for us, as Jeremiah (23:29) puts it, when we are complacent, too set to budge. They are food that is sweeter than honey, as the Psalmist (19:11) puts it, when we are hungering to know what God is asking for us. They are a two-edged sword, as the author of Hebrews (4:12) puts it, so that when we preach to others, it cuts into us too. In knowing the scriptures, we know Jesus himself. So, read the word of God daily. Let it be your rule of life.

You are a Marian Association. I encourage you therefore to learn from your mother. In the New Testament Mary is the model listener. She is the first to hear the good news. She is the ideal disciple, the example for all believers. Mary listens reflectively, in the infancy narratives, to:

Gabriel, who announces the good news of God's presence and tells her of the extraordinary child whom she is to bear;⁹

Elizabeth, who proclaims her blessed among women because she has believed that the word of the Lord would be fulfilled in her;¹⁰

Shepherds, who tell her and others the message which has been revealed to them about the child, the good news that a Savior is born!;¹¹

Simeon, who proclaims a canticle and an oracle: the first, a song of praise for the salvation that has come to all the nations; the second, a prophecy that ominously forebodes the scandal of the cross;¹²

Anna, who praises God in Mary's presence and keeps speaking to all those who are ready to hear;¹³

Jesus himself, who tells her about his relationship with his heavenly Father, which must take precedence over everything else.¹⁴

3. *I hope that you learn from the poor and are inventive in serving them.*

St. Vincent tells us this very directly: it is only the simple and humble who really grow in the Lord's life. Only they can learn the depths of God's wisdom. The saints knew this very well because they had made the gospel teachings their own.

⁹ Lk 1:26f.

¹⁰ Lk 1:39f.

¹¹ Lk 2:16f.

¹² Lk 2:25f.

¹³ Lk 2:36f.

¹⁴ Lk 2:41f.

That is why St. Vincent urged all his followers to grow in simplicity and humility. Learn especially from the poor. They can teach all of us about gratitude for small gifts, about patience in waiting, about hoping against hope, about loving those around us, about solidarity with others in the midst of suffering and oppression, about sharing the little that we have with our brothers and sisters.

It is only when we have learned from the poor that we can be inventive in serving them. It is they who will explain to us their deepest needs, so that we can bring to them gifts that will really be helpful. Your creativity and imaginativeness as young people will be nourished by what you can learn from them.

4. *I hope that you allow the Lord to set you free.*

Jesus acts with wonderful freedom in the gospels. He cures on the Sabbath, much to the chagrin of the pharisees. He moves readily from place to place in a mobile ministry. He speaks the truth without fear. He wants his followers too to enjoy this "glorious freedom of the children of God."¹⁵

A first sign of freedom is mobility, flexibility, availability in the service of the poor. I want to encourage you as young people today: be adventurous. Be willing to risk. Be truly missionary. Resist the temptation to allow yourselves to be tied down by the hunger for material things that is so characteristic of present-day society. Material things are good, surely. God created them. But they can also weigh us down. They can keep us fixed in a single place, always wanting to have more and more. They can wall us off from others. Now, especially when you are young, be sure to use the freedom that the gospel gives you. Be willing to explore the possibilities that Jesus offers you. Make wise vocational choices by which you can truly make a contribution to life. How can you best serve the Lord in freedom?

Another sign of freedom, and one that I have often seen in good people, is great honesty. Jesus liberates us to speak the truth. Not long ago I read the secret diary of Cardinal Mazarin, the prime minister of France in the mid-seventeenth century, when St. Vincent de Paul was organizing works among the poor and was training the clergy. In his diary Mazarin counts Vincent among his enemies. And why? because St. Vincent spoke the truth to the queen, whom Mazarin was trying to dominate. Vincent was fearless in that regard. He was prudent. He was gentle. He was charitable. But he knew how to speak the truth clearly. In that sense, he was truly free, as were so many saints.

Real freedom involves a love that a modern writer has called "reckless but disciplined." It is "reckless" because it knows no bounds. It cannot be tied up. It breaks the chains that attempt to hold it back. But it is at the same time "disciplined" because it knows that real freedom needs to be channeled toward a single goal. I

¹⁵ Rm 8:21.

encourage you, as young people, to dare great things and to work with discipline at achieving them.

5. *I hope that you minister to other young people.*

Although the elderly often have many gifts to offer to the young, it is clear that you who are young have special gifts for ministering to other young people. Today I urge you to make ministry to other young people one of your principal objectives. The young are the future of the Church. They are the servants of the poor of the 21st century. They are searching for ways to give their lives generously. One of the great challenges that lies before the Church is to offer the young a relevant, attractive, worthwhile way of giving their lives to God in the service of the poor. Your own Vincentian Marian Youth Groups are one of those ways _ call others to join you.

Let me suggest three concrete means by which you can gather other young people together:

a. Organize more Vincentian Marian Youth Groups - Create youth groups everywhere you go, especially in parishes and schools. These groups can offer a well-articulated program of formation to young people, a spirituality in the service of the poor. The parish is often the initial center for nourishing the faith of the young. If parishes fail in this task, the Church grows weak at its grassroots. Schools have a huge influence on the lives of the young. Many of their values in the future will be the values their school offers them. Provide young men and women, in both their parishes and schools, with the opportunity to be members of Vincentian Marian Youth Groups.

b. Seek Mission Volunteers - Many young people are eager to give a year or two or three or five of their lives in the service of the poor. Look for ways in which you can provide them with opportunities for doing so, along with good personal accompaniment. If young people are well-formed to engage in such experiences, they will enjoy the opportunity of a lifetime. Their lives will never be the same afterwards. These experiences can open the hearts of the young to a deep love for the poor and a practical ongoing commitment to serve them.

c. Promote Ministries for Young People - Today the Church emphasizes the wide variety of ministries that are possible within the Christian community. It is important to provide good formation to young people so that they might begin to engage in these ministries early in their lives. Many young people will be eager to be acolytes, lectors, ministers of the Eucharist, music ministers, catechists, liturgical artists, visitors of the sick, peer ministers.

6. *I hope that you will have a global perspective, that your world view will be more and more international.*

The world has changed dramatically since the time of St. Vincent. When an event took place in 17th century Europe, it might take a year before the news reached the other continents. In fact, people were still addressing letters to St. Vincent more than six months after he had died. News traveled very slowly! Today on television we watch global events as they happen. In the Gulf War, television cameras actually accompanied the troops as they entered Kuwait and Iraq. We know of earthquakes and natural disasters within minutes after they happen.

We can also get to places quickly. Even at the beginning of the last century it might take six months to go to China. Today I can arrive in Beijing on an 11-hour non-stop flight.

The Vincentian Family too is becoming more and more worldwide. Our members live in more than 120 countries. There are few nations in the world where we are not represented. Just in recent years we have moved into Tanzania, the Solomon Islands, Albania, the Altiplano of Bolivia, a new part of Mozambique, new places in China, Kharkiv in the Ukraine, and Siberia.

Today I want to encourage you young men and women to raise up your sights toward broad horizons. It is important to love your own country. But global solidarity is even more important. All of the recent popes have emphasized our universal brotherhood and sisterhood. They call us to create a civilization of love, to bridge the widening gap that exists between the rich nations and the poor nations.

Recently in Bolivia I met young lay Vincentian missionaries who gave 3, 4, 5 years of their lives in the service of the poor. Are there ways in which all of us can serve the global community? Are there steps that we can take to reach out to the poorest of the poor? My hope is that you young men and women will meet the challenge of the global community of the future.

7. *I hope that you engage in an ongoing, lifelong formation.*

As I grow older, I become more and more convinced that life is a never-ending journey. In fact, Jesus promises us eternal life, life without end. Of course, it has very different stages. In youth we possess drive, enthusiasm, spontaneity. In the middle years we have the experience, hard-earned skills, projects that we have developed over time, a network of relationships that we have built up in trust. Aging often brings with it the richness of wisdom, of a contemplative dimension to life, and sometimes of a new liberty that is no longer preoccupied with success or the applause of others.

But to live all of these stages well, we need formation. The sad error that so many often make is to think that formation ends with formal schooling. On the contrary, it is a lifelong project. To live vitally as a Christian in youth, in the middle years, in aging, and in dying, one must be continually nourished. One must be

surrounded by a teaching and learning community that supports us to meet the new challenges that each of life's stages brings.

I encourage you to drink deeply from the sources of ongoing formation. As the poor reveal to you their needs, seek to be as competent and as creative as possible in their service. Make a firm commitment to being continually formed in an integral way: spiritually, humanly, apostolically, within a believing community that lives and prays in the Spirit.

My young brothers and sisters, I express these hopes to you as the representatives of Vincentian Marian Youth Groups throughout the world. I pledge you my own deepest support too as the successor of St. Vincent.

Pope Paul VI said at the end of Vatican II that the strength and charm of youth is "the ability to rejoice with what is beginning, to give oneself unreservedly, to renew oneself, and to set out again for new conquests."¹⁶ Use these gifts well. Dream youth's dreams, but also work hard at making them come true. Pray with passion, but let the peace of the Lord penetrate you too. Reach out to other young people, and help them to see and know Christ, who is working in your lives. And I pray that the Lord, even later in the autumn and winter of life, will continually renew the joy of your youth.¹⁷

¹⁶ Closing Message of Vatican II, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 58 (1966) 18.

¹⁷ Cf. Ps 42:4.

Meeting of Directors of the Association of the Miraculous Medal

Rome - December 15-20, 1997

Called together by the Superior General, six directors of the Association of the Miraculous Medal from around the world gathered as a commission. We met December 15 - 20 at the General Curia of the Congregation of the Mission. We shared information of mutual interest, reached common conclusions, and made recommendations. We believe our meeting will benefit the Association, the Congregation, and the Church we serve.

Those present at the meeting were:

Rev. Joseph Benoit, C.M., from Paris, France
Rev. William O'Brien, C.M., from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA
Rev. Jesús Rodríguez Rico, C.M., from Madrid, Spain
Rev. Benjamín Romo, C.M., from México City, Mexico
Rev. Charles Shelby, C.M., from Perryville, Missouri, USA
Rev. Francisco Vargas, C.M., from Manila, Philippines

Description of Apostolates

We shared with each other the structure and activities of our various apostolates. We discovered that there is often a close relationship between the Association of the Miraculous Medal and the Vincentian Marian Youth, formerly known as the Children of Mary. We found we have much in common, yet we all have made adaptations suitable to our respective regions.

As described in the statutes, general membership in the Association of the Miraculous Medal is open to all the faithful and serves as an opportunity for them to benefit from the graces and blessings that flow through the intercession of our Lady of the Miraculous Medal. In addition, each of us leads activities for the particular members of the Association under our pastoral care. These activities, though not mentioned in the existing statutes, serve to promote the gospel and serve the poor.

Based in parishes, schools, and other institutions, our particular members join in small groups for their personal sanctification, Christian formation, and works of charity toward the most abandoned. One work of these groups is propagation of the Miraculous Medal. Another is the devotion attached to the statue of Mary (urna) which moves from home to home, popularly called a home visit. Here people are evangelized and led to practice Christian charity. These groups serve to strengthen the

family in a society where it is threatened on all sides. They are the source of a nucleus of Catholics committed to their faith, to catechesis, and to serving the poor.

- * In Mexico, for example, over the last three years the number of members committed to the service of the poor has doubled each year. Participation in the annual convention for the formation of members began with 250 in 1995 and is projected to be 2,000 in 1998. The Association itself is publishing and distributing a series of pamphlets confronting questions raised by the missionaries of evangelical sects.

- * In the Philippines, the home visits have taken place in virtually all dioceses since 1917. They have become the setting for the foundation of basic ecclesiastical communities in many parts of the country.

- * In Spain, more than 500,000 families receive the home visit each month. In 1994, 687 people attended the second National Marian Congress specifically for registered members of the Association. In 1997 there were 19 full day “encounters” for the leaders of the Association in Spain, attended by a total of 2,127 leaders. The Association sponsors 227 catechetical teams for adults who minister in homes. They have inaugurated weekend retreats for married couples who are members. Since 1993 the Association has developed its own pastoral plans, integrated with diocesan and parish plans.

- * In France, the Association sponsors the home visits in Madagascar, where there are special adaptations to the culture.

On a national basis, we engage in spiritual ministries, giving pastoral care to our members and uniting them through prayer and action for the intentions suggested by our Lady of the Miraculous Medal. Members receive materials instructing them in the truths of the faith, encouraging them to live the Christian life, and enabling them to participate in the work of the Congregation through their financial support.

- * In the United States, for example, over 50,000 personal letters of encouragement are sent to people recently bereaved, facing serious illness personally or in their families, or experiencing other pastoral problems. Contributions from members of the two particular groups in the United States together contribute over US\$3,000,000 per year directly to the works of the Congregation, including the worldwide missions.

- * In the Philippines for the last six years, the gathering of Promoters of the Miraculous Medal Apostolate draws 500-600 people to the Shrine for prayer and instruction. This gathering is offered at no cost to those attending, even for transportation and food. And contributions to this apostolate help support the

province's seminarians, most of whom do not have the resources to support themselves.

The Association in Paris publishes the attractive magazine *Message et Messagers* to report on the evangelical and spiritual celebrations at the rue du Bac and to report on the missionary works of the province. The Association in Paris also assists the Daughters of Charity in the pastoral activities at the Chapel of the Apparitions, where 5,000 to 7,000 pilgrims come each day. And on feast days as many as 20,000 may come to the chapel. Over 400 confessions in various languages are heard there each day.

Convictions

As we reflected on our different works, we recognized six convictions, or principles, which unite us. They direct the ongoing life and renewal of our apostolates.

1. We are convinced of the important role and mission of the laity in the Church and in the future of evangelization. As it has been said, "The third millennium will be the age of the laity." We are especially aware of the importance of the laity in Saint Vincent de Paul's spirituality and in his mission of evangelization and charity.
2. Mary's apparitions to Saint Catherine Labouré are a message of love and of salvation for our Vincentian Family. Through us they can become a message of salvation especially for the poor. The message of the rue du Bac is a prophetic, Christocentric, and truly evangelical message. In the apparitions we find a manifestation of God's fatherly love and a revelation of Mary's motherly concern. And they challenge us with a mission to serve and evangelize all, especially the poor.
3. Today we continue to meet the conditions faced by Saint Vincent. The poor continue to grow in number, and they do not know where to turn. Day in and day out we see new poor and new forms of poverty. The message of the Virgin Mary to Saint Catherine, together with the Vincentian charism, represent a liberating force, a saving word for the poor of today, and a challenging response to the new forms of poverty.
4. We recognize the family as the "domestic Church." Yet all around us we see it facing lack of love, infidelities, loss of gospel values, disintegration, hopelessness, economic crises, consumerism.... The presence of Mary in the midst of the family is a saving presence. She offers an abundance of peace and unity, love and hope. Through its apostolates the Association of the Miraculous Medal comes face to face with these realities. It reaches out to isolated communities, simple people, needy families. It brings Mary into our midst, interceding with her Son as once again she says, "They have no wine."

5. We are convinced that the Vincentian Family is a powerful force for contemporary evangelization. The world of today longs for our charism, a charism we should share with the laity, especially with youth. God asks us, as we serve and evangelize the poor, to collaborate with the Vincentian Family and to work in unity.
6. We have discovered great wealth and dynamism alive in the Association of the Miraculous Medal. It is more imperative than ever to continue our serious and systematic reflection on our Association. What we have accomplished during these six days has only begun to expand our horizons and to reveal many new opportunities for serving the gospel and the poor. As we reevaluate and renew our Association, we continue to grow in appreciation of this gift of God to the Vincentian Community for the service of the whole Church.

Requests to the General Curia

We examined the International Statutes of the Association and the Rite of Blessing and Imposition of the Miraculous Medal. We drafted revisions which express our mission better and bring our norms and rites more into conformity with Vatican Council II and the new Code of Canon Law. The revisions of the Statutes and of the Rite were proposed to the General Curia for the process of official approval.

We came to realize that the role of Director General of the Association has been exercised very little since the Association was entrusted to the pastoral care of the Superior General in 1909. For this reason we have recommended to the General Curia that a secretariat be established for the Association as a means of assisting the Superior General in his role as Director General. The first project we proposed for the secretariat is to conduct a survey on the existence and leadership of the Association of the Miraculous Medal and the Vincentian Marian Youth in the provinces of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity. Ongoing tasks for the secretariat would include facilitating communication between the Director General and the Association, as well as among the leaders of the Association worldwide. The secretariat would also be available to help inaugurate the Association in regions where it is beginning.

Finally, we asked the General Curia to submit a postulatum to the General Assembly of 1998 urging the promotion or establishment of the Association and of Vincentian Marian Youth in each province, and encouraging responses to the questionnaire from the secretariat. It is the tradition of the Association in each area where it is established, that it be free to adapt to the local needs, circumstances, and culture. In that spirit the postulatum urges the visitors to help the members of the provinces to support the ministries of the Association and Vincentian Marian Youth and to encourage the spread of our distinctive Vincentian charism as we involve the laity in the mission of the Church.

Conclusion

In solidarity with the worldwide Congregation, our brothers in Saint Vincent, we offer our encouragement to each confrere and all the provinces. Together let us search creatively for ways to establish and strengthen the Association of the Miraculous Medal and the Vincentian Marian Youth in each of our regions as means of evangelizing the poor.

As sinners, we have fallen short of what the Blessed Virgin Mary has entrusted to us through her apparitions of the Miraculous Medal. And as stewards of her special gift to the Congregation, we are convinced that it is well worth the time and resources we invest in it.

Through this meeting we have come to realize that the apostolates of the Miraculous Medal and Vincentian Marian Youth offer to the whole Church a great new opportunity for evangelization of the poor. Gathered in prayer with Mary, the mother of Jesus, we ask her intercession for a new Pentecost in each confrere and province. We especially request your prayers for the success of our apostolates.

A I C from the origins to the present day
380 years
1617-1997

Mauricette Borloo, AIC Vice-President
Marie Claire Guichard, Executive Board Member

Origins

Châtillon-les-Dombes : 1617

On August 1, 1617, Mr. Vincent takes possession of his new parish. It includes about 2000 people. In a few weeks, he will turn everything around.

A small event, apparently trivial, grabs his attention. He tells the story :

"Although unworthy, I was priest of a small parish. I was fetched to go see a poor man, ill and badly put up in a barn, just as I was about to go to church to read the announcements. I was told of his illness and his poverty in such terms that I was seized with compassion and recommended him with such feeling that all the ladies were moved. More than fifty left town; as for me, I did what others did, I visited him and found him in such a state that I decided to hear his confession; and as I was bringing the Holy Sacrament, I met a group of women and God gave me this thought: "Couldn't we get these good ladies together and encourage them to give themselves to God in order to serve the poor who are ill?" (IX, 208-209).

I suggested to all these good women brought there by charity that they could collect money, each give a day and form a group, not only for themselves but for those who would follow: and that was the first place where Charity was established (IX, 244).

This August 20, 1617. Three days later, on the 23rd, Mr. Vincent organized the first team of women in charge of visiting the sick in their houses. He wrote the first rules of the association. It contains the gist of all future rules. The goal is clearly defined: "to assist the poor, physically and spiritually". The reason given is that "charity is the infallible mark of God's real children." The method is set up: the poor don't lack charitable people, they lack "an organized manner of helping them"; priorities are set: to go to the poorest and most isolated.

The first "*Confraternity of Charity*" is established, it is officially recognized by the Archbishop of Lyons on November 24, 1617 and set up on December 8.

Fast Development

In September 1618, while preaching in Joigny, he tours a small hospital. He meets many abandoned ill people and proceeds to orient the "Joigny Charity" in the direction of this new crisis (XIII, 441). In 1619, following the intervention of Mr. de Gondi, he is made "General Chaplain of the Galleys." In this way he discovers the horrible situation of galley slaves and immediately launches another Charity to answer the needs of these prisoners (XIII 475).

His ministry, his relations, his observations make him discover other catastrophic situations: the extreme poverty of street children, that of old people, of adults without work, of orphans, of abandoned children, of widows, of those he calls "the bashful poor," those ruined by war. Everywhere he adapts the structures of "Charities" in order to meet all those needs and soon all of France will know this new association.

In addition to the huge work of the Charities, Mr. Vincent founds the Congregation of Mission priests in 1625. He would tell each of his missionaries: Establish a Charity everywhere you preach a mission. If it is already there, visit it, restore enthusiasm, recruit new members. Let your passage be a source of renewal...(Coste, The Great Saint of The Great Century - t. I, 312).

He had also met a remarkable woman who was to become his most valuable assistant: Louise de Marillac. He entrusted her with the running and coordination of the Confraternities of Charity. For several months, she will travel throughout the country, visit, encourage, solve conflicts, remind people of fundamental objectives. So she was the first coordinator of the Charities and all through her life she never ceased to be attentive to their actions and work at their development.

In 1633 she opens her house to girls wishing to devote their lives to serving the poor. This was the beginning of what was to become the Company of the Daughters of Charity, united with the Ladies in the service of the poor.

In 1634, the first Charity is established in Italy. On September 27, 1660, Mr. Vincent leaves this world. The page of his life had come to an end. It was the first page of a book which is still open. Today the Châtillon foundation stretches to all five continents. Under the name "International Association of Charity" (AIC) it includes 250 000 women who, faithful to their founder, are committed to fighting poverty. They believe that "serving the poor should be preferred to all things at all times" (IX, 216). They try "in the light of the faith" to discover Christ in them, in answer to his call (XI, 32).

What are St. Vincent de Paul's "Charities"

They have three characteristics: composition, mode of action, objectives.

- **Composition:** they are essentially women's organizations
- **Mode of Action:** they operate in teams

- **Objectives:** all poverties but especially the most hidden and most forgotten.

A Women's Organization for a Women's Mission

Through doing this, he came to discover more pointedly the vocation of women and their place in the church. In 1657, not long before his death, looking at the Charities already spread out through the world, he rejoices of the place and role thus given back to women:

It has been about eight hundred years since women have not had public functions in the Church. There used to be women called deaconesses. Around Charlemagne's time, this custom stopped and was not replaced; and then some of you ladies, today, get the call: you yourselves can tell, from your good deeds, how terribly these would be missed if they were suppressed (XIII, 810).

Indeed the "Charities" give to Christian women a role to play in the Church, a ministry in the service of all wounds, wounds to hearts, bodies and souls.

The "Charities" have a mission that is both social and pastoral, and through their participation, women are able to return to a real feminine vocation.

Women's "genius" does indeed lead them to be particularly attentive to human elements. John Paul II does not hesitate to state that they are more capable than men of attention to the individual human being and that this commits them to a mission of service and love (Apostolic Letter on the Dignity of Women, No. 29-30). Women find themselves by giving themselves.

Team Action

Another characteristic of St. Vincent's "Charities" is their mode of operation.

The "Charities" were born out of the observation that "the poor suffer more from lack of organized help than from lack of charitable helpers" (XIII, 423).

Because no one person can solve the problems of poverty efficiently, St. Vincent de Paul organizes another type of response: it is collective, organized and somewhat "planned."

St. Vincent's idea was that a "Charity" is not simply a group of charitable people but a community engaged in planned activities. "Acting together" is his essential goal.

Structure

Each "Charity" has its own activities related to local needs, but all the "Charities" of a country are gathered in a national association. In turn, the national associations are joined to form the International Association of Charities (AIC). Thanks to these structures, AIC provides national and international coordination and activities, and several general services.

This flexible structure, planned by St. Vincent, is probably the reason this association has lasted almost four centuries.

Community Spirit

The common action of "Charities" implies common ideals and friendships. Nothing can be accomplished without a common marching with the same ideal.

It is also indispensable to adhere to the essential objectives of the association and to the pedagogy of charity that it offers. Together volunteers must discover the requirements for solidarity, respect and sharing that are the framework of our activities. No community can exist without life as a team.

Beyond warm friendship there is a common plan. Mr. Vincent insists therefore on monthly team meetings, on times for thinking and praying, on the necessary training to accomplish the services required. Nothing will last, he said, if there isn't "this common spiritual union." That is why he writes a detailed body of rules in 14 pages.

Each "Charity" becomes the visible sign of Christ and the Church. Its existence says more than any preaching. It answers Christ's wish: "that they be one so that the world recognize that You sent me."

St. Vincent also insists on the special place of the Eucharist. He asks each team to have it celebrated every month (XIII, 430). It is not an individual act of piety but the very source of Charity.

Towards the poorest and most forgotten

After Châtillon, Mr. Vincent was thinking of starting, in every village on the Gondi land, a team of women dedicated to visiting ill people at home. He thought these were the most forgotten people; however in 1618 he discovers the sufferings of poor people in hospitals and in 1619 those of prisoners. He will immediately adapt the first Confraternities. His reflex is already obvious. We must discover the different types of poverty then adjust plans and adapt structures.

The mission of "St. Vincent's Charities" is to discover hidden sufferings. The important thing is to be attentive to the most forgotten miseries, to generate solidarities, to create friendly places where those who are excluded or marginalized by society can meet.

The Charities are not specifically spiritual associations but the social actions that they carry out are based on faith requirements. St. Vincent does not usually separate personal "sanctification" from serving the poor. For him there could be no Christian life without concern for suffering brothers, wherever or whoever they were. "That is the infallible mark of God's children" (XIII, 423). The love of one's brother is a test of the love of God.

The spirituality of the "Charities" is that of their founder. Mr. Vincent is obviously a child of his century. He is influenced by the religious and sociological circumstances of his time, but his main objectives and the inspiration for his work remain those we follow today.

Dimension of service

"To go to the poor is to go to Christ," but there are different ways of going to Christ.

There is a danger in our relations to the poor: that of centering on ourselves, in order to feel good, to turn our actions into a sort of spiritual lever. St. Vincent was very aware of this. "A man, however charitable, does not have charity if he is not humble; without charity, even if he had enough faith to move mountains, even if he gave his possessions to the poor... all that would be useless" (Spiritual Conferences, April 18, 1659, p. 627).

The second danger is to position ourselves as mere donors. St. Vincent again reminds us many times of the Gospel text that inaugurates Christ's public life. St. Luke describes this event for us.

The mission that St. Vincent assigns the "Charities" is first and foremost a mission of liberation.

When we start, we commit ourselves to taking the good news of the Gospel to the poor, to liberate them from a series of bonds, to lighten up the way for the blind, to work for freedom from all kinds of oppression.

This will take us not only to a relationship with the poor, but also to an action of pressure on institutions, in order to defend and liberate the poor.

Mr. Vincent was not only a man of emergencies, he was also a man of development. For him, service was only meaningful if it led to more security and respect for human beings.

As he often said, the purpose of a service for the poor is to ensure that "they are not a burden for anyone." We cannot just give away material things. There are many conversations and letters dealing with this point.

He always preferred giving tools, seeds, skills, rather than regular help. Faced with the rejecting attitude of 17th century society, which locked the poor away, he reacts strongly. With this in mind he founds the Hospice of the Name of Jesus to free beggars through training and work. In the same spirit, he asks the Daughters of Charity to be able to teach (XI, 43).

Intervention in Society

The mission of liberation of the poor brings the Charities to action within society. Mr. Vincent discovered the horrifying situation of prisoners: that brought him to work at reforming the prison system. He met the sick and played a part in reforming the hospital system. He met victims of war and fought for peace in his relations with the higher authorities of the state. On January 6, 1649, he does not hesitate to ask Mazarin, Prime minister of France, to step aside. Today, social structures built on economic domination and exploitation cause marginalization and injustices for many populations. If priority attention to the poor sends us back to efforts of reinsertion and reintegration, it also redirects us toward intervention before opinion and public authorities. "There is no charity, St. Vincent tells us, that is not accompanied by justice" (II, 54).

These are the essential requirements of our relationship with the poor:

- he is Christ on our road,
- our mission is one of liberation,
- this mission requires solidarity and brotherly sharing,
- it brings us to institutional and social actions.

The Mission ***"To assist spiritually and materially"***

St. Vincent summarized in these words the Charities' mission: "To assist the poor spiritually and materially." The word "assist," in the XVIIth century, has a totally different connotation than it has in our modern times.

It is linked to the Latin verb "assistere" which means "to stand next to," "to be with" more than "to help." It includes notions of sharing, accompanying, bringing solidarity with the person as a whole.

The objective is to rescue the poor from all their sufferings, with special emphasis, as we mentioned before, on promotion and empowerment, liberation and access to God.

When he started this plan in 1617, Mr. Vincent probably did not realize its potential. Vatican Council II and its own objectives allow us to understand its meaning more and more.

Using St. Vincent's terms today, we can say that the Charities' mission includes a socio-charitable aspect and a pastoral aspect.

Social Action - Charitable Action

Even if states are in charge of social actions, the Church has not given up its mission in this field. It has even become more and more involved in it even as states increased their involvement.

Therefore the Church is developing a social doctrine: it invites Christians to tackle the evils which disfigure Man, as well as their causes; there is no charity without justice. Charity goes beyond justice, but justice is a requirement.

In accordance with the views of their founder, the Charities' action is at the same time charitable and social. The issue is not only to assist people in need but also to build a world in which all men can live a life that is fully human.

A Pastoral Mission

Pastoral work is the means utilized to spread the Gospel within realities lived by today's men and women.

For St. Vincent there is always a link between spiritual and material assistance; the relief of sufferings of body and soul normally leads to spiritual enlightenment. In the religious context of his time, he goes into details that could surprise us today.

The first effort to spread the Gospel, for us, is called "charity." It is first through a type of relations, a state of sympathy (in the Greek sense of the word "sun patein" to suffer with) that we get to express our faith. Everything goes through this relation first; that is where the Spirit acts as it wishes, beyond all our plans.

St. Vincent had a sharp sense of belonging to the Church, which he loved with all his soul. In his mind, any charitable activity is carried out within a Church context. Our pastoral mission therefore leads us to a double action:

- to express Christian charity in the world
- to participate in building the Church.

More specifically, we are responsible for a Church that embodies service and solidarity with the poor. Today the Church talks about a "new Gospel" which requires the "creative love" St. Vincent talked about.

Vincent de Paul not only assigned a mission to the Charities; he also specified their mode of operation, which still remains today:

- to discover
- to be with
- to promote

- to work in teams
- to act on structures.

The organization of "confraternities of charity" was studied at length by Mr. Vincent. In 1660, not long before his death, he decided to write a body of general rules for the different types of Charities which he helped create.

However, rules were not enough. There was a need for a minimum of relations and harmonization. Vincent de Paul asked Louise de Marillac to visit the Paris confraternities. In addition the priests of the mission founded by St. Vincent in 1625 were also put in charge of this work.

Set up Charity wherever you preach the mission. If it already exists there, visit it, revive it, recruit new members. May your passage give it renewed life (Coste, *The Great Saint of The Great Century*, t. 1. p. 312).

In 1630, Monsieur Vincent recommends a number of girls from the countryside to Louise de Marillac to help Paris's Charities. This experiment led to the founding of the Company of Daughters of Charity. Without them the Charities would have soon wilted and might have died. Thanks to the work of the priests of the Congregation of the Mission and Daughters of Charity, the Charities spread throughout the world.

This cooperation continues today. The priests of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity are involved in founding groups of volunteers in countries which need them, and actively cooperate with the existing associations. It is a fundamental cooperation with a deep motivation, since the Priests of the Mission, the Daughters of Charity, and the AIC volunteers have the same father and belong to the same family.

AIC in the world

Associations, groups or local teams

Grassroots volunteers gather in local associations or groups. These teams which often exist within parishes, suburbs, welfare centers, etc., tend to specialize today in order to react more efficiently to problems and the reality of their living circumstances.

National associations

With the purpose of getting organized to better "act together," teams from a country gather in a national association which most often takes the form of a federation.

The structures of national associations vary according to countries and generally include a General Assembly which elects a national president and a national council.

If structures and organizations vary, the mission of these national associations is well defined. Indeed all national associations:

- are places of common reflection and cooperation,
- inform, form and animate the local associations (grassroots volunteers) thanks to news bulletins and documents, the organization of formation days, regional and national meetings as well as visits to the different groups of the country,
- coordinate the activities in the field, promote exchanges and experiences,
- represent all the teams working with State and Church institutions and collaborate with the various national movements.

The International Association

We have already seen that, at the time of St. Vincent the "Charities" became international and we have just rapidly recalled the history of the links which united them up until the official creation of AIC.

At Vatican Council II, the Church emphasized the importance of the role and the mission of the laity within the Church. The Association then understood it was time to revise its structures and its work. An important survey enabled it to define the situation of the "Charities" in the world and to undertake the task of updating.

When the extraordinary international meeting was held in Rome, Italy, in 1971, the association was baptized "International Association of Charity." This new name included the word "Charity" indicating the desire for renewal and fidelity to the spirit of its Founder.

At this extraordinary meeting, the delegates of the national associations elected an International Executive Board, and an International President and adopted action guidelines and common programs.

AIC chose Brussels, Belgium, for its international headquarters and a Basic Document was published. It organized international seminars (Assemblies of Delegates) and regional meetings (mainly in Latin America and Europe).

The AIC headquarters in Brussels is the center of the international association. Up to this date, the International Presidents have been Belgian, French, Italian and at the present time Mexican. The headquarters remains in Brussels, Belgium.

In 1976, the AIC Assembly of Delegates was held in Mexico; the theme was "From assistance to participation" and the objective was the promotion of individuals, with special attention to women who are the first victims of poverty.

In 1990, the Assembly of Delegates was held in Assisi, Italy; at this meeting AIC adopted operational guidelines in matters of formation, communication, solidarity and self-achievement. These guidelines are common to all the national associations.

In 1994, the most recent Assembly of Delegates was held in Antigua, Guatemala; the guidelines were clearly defined and developed, going from solidarity to the culture of solidarity, from self-achievement to the culture of self-achievement, emphasizing action on the structures.

The next Assembly of Delegates will take place in November 1998 in Santiago de Querétaro, Mexico.

Structure of AIC

The International Association is based on two essential structures: the Assembly of Delegates and the Executive Board.

The Assembly of Delegates is composed of the member associations.

The Executive Board is composed of the members of the different regions of AIC and is invested with power of decision and management and executes the decisions taken by the Assembly of Delegates. It meets once a year.

The Holy See appoints an international spiritual advisor on the advice and approval of the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission. The Spiritual Advisor and a Daughter of Charity representing the Superioress General of the Daughters of Charity attend the meetings of the Executive Board and have a consultative vote. The Executive Board is assisted by the Permanent Committee which is composed of the

International President, Vice-Presidents and those responsible for AIC Services. This Committee meets twice a year.

The International Secretariat is directed by the Secretary General, it is in charge of administration, management and the animation of the Executive Board; it is the center of AIC communication. Some AIC Services are also located in the secretariat.

AIC Services are directed by the Executive Board which ensures creation of these Services and appoints those responsible for them. The Services are in charge of important work sectors. Today there are seven AIC Services: Bulletin, Study and Research, Finance, Formation, Projects, Public Relations and Representations.

The International Bulletin is published in the three official languages of AIC (Spanish, French and English). It is also published in German, Portuguese and Italian thanks to the work and the collaboration of the Associations in Germany, Brazil and Italy.

The AIC Regions. To facilitate the animation and the formation of the volunteers, the national associations are grouped by regions and each one of them has a regional animator. These regions are: Africa/Madagascar, Latin America, Asia, Europe/Middle East and the United States.

AIC in the World

AIC is recognized in the world as an INGO (International Non-Governmental Organization), and an ICO (International Catholic Organization).

As such, AIC is invited to assist and participate in the preparation of important international conferences and meetings at which it represents its member associations and transmits its information and experience. During the past few years AIC has participated in preparatory encounters for the Meeting of the World Summit for Social Development, the World Conferences for Adult Education and Habitat II in collaboration with other INGO, and speaking at the World Conference on Women, etc.

As an INGO, AIC has consultative status with UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) and contributes to activities in different fields such as literacy, adult education, the Decade of Culture, the Decade for the Eradication of Poverty, etc. Through AIC, UNESCO brings its support to field projects and projects in favor of member associations and mentioned in its publications.

To ensure its presence at the international level, AIC counts on many specially trained and informed volunteers who are permanent representatives with the various international bodies whose headquarters are in Paris (France), Vienna (Austria), New York (USA), Strasbourg (France) and Rome (Italy).

As an ICO, AIC is recognized by the Holy See. It is also a member of the Conference of ICO and actively participates in the work groups of this Conference.

AIC is also a member of various Pontifical Councils and maintains close relations with Cor Unum, the Council for the Laity and the Council for the Family.

Mission of the International Association

AIC is the guarantor of the fidelity of its members to the common project defined by St. Vincent de Paul on December 8, 1917. This project is being updated constantly so that it clearly expresses the spirit of St. Vincent within today's context.

Policy of updating the Mission of the Charities and Expansion

This is a question of putting St. Vincent's fundamental project into concrete form and to spread the "Charities" to all the countries and regions of the world. At the present time, with the collaboration of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity, there is hope for new national associations. Groups are being formed in Africa, Asia, Latin America. The support given by St. Vincent's other foundations is a sign of a future filled with hope.

Policy of Representation

This is a question of developing the vitality of the national associations and their capacity to animate their teams or local associations and help them to set up projects and innovate.

Formation Policy

This means helping national Presidents in their policies of formation of their volunteers: this task is becoming increasingly important in an environment concerned with more efficiency. Apart from the support given concrete situations, upon the request of the National president, AIC also organizes seminars and formation courses; it also publishes many documents and is ready to help the associations and the AIC Formation Service.

Coordination Policy

This means promoting the creation of an international network by organizing mini transnational seminars and joint projects.

At the end of this rapid presentation, we would like to quote St. Peter addressing the Christian Communities: "Be aware of the hope that lies in you." In creating the Charities, St. Vincent made these words his own. What could this mean but "building living stones" in a new world?

Our objective: act together for more justice and more solidarity, becoming artisans of a dynamic of charity.

"The service of the poor should always be preferred to everything else" (IX, 216).

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Friendship and Evangelization in the Vincentian Tradition

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My reading over the years has tended to confirm the impression that the link between friendship and evangelization is not only biblical, it is a key to understanding the Vincentian charism and mission. In this article the "Little Method" will be used to examine the nature of the connection, together with the motives and means we have of fostering it.

I. Friendship and Evangelization in the New Testament Church

The New Testament community believed that there was a close connection between friendship in the community and evangelization. St Luke described the link in these words in Acts 4:32: "All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need."

A number of comments can be made about these verses. Firstly, the opening one echoes the teaching of the Greeks, Jews and Romans on the nature of friendship. For example, in the 5th century B.C. Pythagoras founded a community of friends. It had four guidelines.

- ☐ Friends share in the perfect communion of a single spirit. Later Aristotle was to say that "friendship was one soul dwelling in two bodies."
- ☐ Friends share everything in common.
- ☐ Friends are equals and friendship is an indication of equality.
- ☐ A friend is a second self.¹

Perhaps the outstanding Old Testament passage on friendship in Sir 6:14-18 was influenced by Greek thinking after the conquest of Palestine by Alexander.² The

¹ Rosemary Radar, *Breaking Boundaries: Male/Female Friendships in Early Christian Communities*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), 24.

friendship between David and Jonathan in 1 Sam 18:1-5 epitomized this ideal: "Jonathan became one spirit with David and loved him as himself... he swore eternal friendship for him. He took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, together with his armor and also his sword and his belt."

In the Roman era Cicero echoed the Greco-Jewish ideal to a certain extent when he wrote: "All I myself can do is to urge you to place friendship above every other human concern that can be imagined! Nothing else in the whole world is so completely in harmony with our nature.... Real friendship is more powerful than kinship; for the latter may exist without goodwill, whereas friendship can do no such thing.... It may be defined as a complete identity of feeling about all things in heaven and earth, an identity which is strengthened by mutual goodwill and affection. With the single exception of wisdom, I am inclined to regard it as the greatest of all the gifts the gods have bestowed upon mankind.... Moreover, it is to moral goodness that friendship owes its entire origin and character. Without goodness, it cannot even exist."³

It would probably be accurate to say that Luke was consciously and deliberately saying that, thanks to the transforming power of grace, the early Christians fulfilled these ancient ideals of friendship; i.e., unity of mind and heart expressed in a community of goods. Although some members of the early Christian Church may have been intimate friends, I do not think that Luke was implying that all the members were necessarily sharing their inmost thoughts and feelings with one another. They were one in mind and heart in so far as they were conformed to the mind and heart of Christ. St. Paul seemed to endorse this interpretation when he said in Phil 2:2, 5: "Be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.... Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ." This ideal was echoed in many other New Testament epistles; e.g., Rm 15:5-6; 1 Cor 1:10; 1 Pt 3:8.

What is really significant is the fact that Luke inserted a verse about evangelization into the middle of a passage on community relationships; i.e., "With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them." What he seemed to be saying was this: friendly, loving relationships in the community and effective evangelization in the world were inextricably linked. This was true for a number of reasons.

- As the story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus shows, the risen Jesus is experienced in the liturgical community where the members share their lives in the context of God's word and the breaking of bread (cf. Lk 24:13-36; Acts 2:42).

² James McEvoy, "Friendship and Love" in *Irish Theological Quarterly* (No. 1, Vol. 50, 1983/1984), 38-39.

³ *Laelius De Amicitia*, 4.15-5.19. In the 12th century, St. Aelred of Rievaulx was very much influenced by this treatise.

□ As members of this community, the apostles _ like the disciples on the road to Emmaus _ had the desire and the power to witness to the resurrection of the Lord in an effective way. Their preaching of the kerygma was energized by the loving mercy they themselves experienced on a daily basis in the Christian fellowship.

□ Not only that, the loving Christian community _ the body of Christ on earth _ was a living embodiment of the apostle's inspired preaching of the Good News, so that the hearts of those who heard it burned within them (cf. Lk 24:32) and enabled them to exclaim, "God is really among you" (1 Cor 14:25). As a result, more and more people joined the Christian community.

II. St. Vincent de Paul on Friendship in Community and Evangelization

Friendship has been valued throughout Christian history. It was a key theological construct in the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas. He used it to understand many subjects such as the Trinity, grace, contemplation, etc. Around the same time, St. Aelred of Rievaulx articulated the monastic ideal. In his classic work, *Spiritual Friendship*, he said: "God is friendship, it does sound strange does it not? And there is no authority for it in scripture, but I would not hesitate to attribute to friendship anything associated with charity, as for instance, "he who abides in friendship abides in God and God abides in him."⁴

In the 17 century, a number of French, Post-Tridentine reformers established long-lasting heterosexual friendships. For example, Jean Eudes was a friend of two women, Madame de Camilly and Marie des Valleees. Francis de Sales was a close friend of Jane de Chantal, founder of the Visitation order.⁵ His affectionate relationship with the latter influenced the sections of the *Introduction to the Devout Life* and the *Treatise On the Love of God* which are devoted to the subject of friendship love.⁶ The love shared by the Bishop and the widow expressed itself in many fruitful forms of evangelization. St. Vincent was aware of all this. It is significant that his only recorded vision affirmed and encapsulated his understanding of the bond that simultaneously united Francis and Jane to one another and to God. "There appeared to him a small globe of fire which rose from the earth to the upper regions of the air to be united with another globe which was larger and more luminous, and these two became one, mounting even higher, entering and being incorporated into yet another globe which was infinitely greater and more resplendent than the others."⁷

⁴ (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications Inc., 1977), 66; Aelred Squire, "God is Friendship," in *Aelred Of Rievaulx: A Study*, (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications Inc., 1981), 98-111.

⁵ Cf., Elizabeth Stopp, Trans. & Ed., *St Francis de Sales: A Testimony by Jane de Chantal*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1967).

⁶ Wendy Wright, *Bond of Perfection: Francis de Sales and Jane de Chantal*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1985).

⁷ Louis Abelly, *The Life of the Venerable Servant of God, Vincent de Paul*, Vol. 2, (New York: New City Press, 1993), 283.

Viewed in the light of this experience, it is not surprising that Vincent formed a close if not an intimate friendship with Louise de Marillac. Wendy Wright says that his relationship with Mademoiselle Le Gras, was "colored by a certain austere reserve reflective of his personality."⁸ That said, their collaboration was generative to an extraordinary degree. Together, they and their followers served and evangelized tens of thousands of poor people, both at home and abroad.

Vincent on community as friendship

Vincent's spiritual friendship with Louise taught him many things which he might not otherwise have learned. There is good reason to believe that it highlighted, in an experiential way, the important link between loving friendship in community and inspired and inspiring evangelization in society. In 1655 he said in an experimental version of the *Common Rules*: "Brotherly love should always be present among us, as well as the bond of holiness, and these should be safeguarded in every possible way. For this reason there should be great mutual respect, and we should get along *as good friends*, always living in community. We should particularly avoid exclusive friendships, as well as any sort of ostracism, as experience has shown that these give rise to factions and destroy Congregations."⁹

This ideal later found its definitive expression in the *Common Rules* of 1658 in Chapter 8, paragraph 2. Although Vincent was aware that individual confreres could form intimate friendships of the non-exclusive kind, he did not think that this would be the norm. What he had in mind was a oneness which was based on conformity to the mind and heart of Christ. For example, he said to eight confreres who were being sent to Ireland: "Be united together and God will bless you. But let it be in the love of Jesus Christ, for any other union will never be cemented by the blood of this Divine Savior and cannot last. It is therefore in Jesus Christ, by Jesus Christ, and for Jesus Christ, that you should be united to one another. The Spirit of Jesus Christ is a spirit of union and peace."¹⁰

Vincent said that friendship in the community would have a number of typical characteristics.

□ *Friendliness or cordiality.* The two words seem to be virtually synonymous in Vincent's writings. By cordiality he meant emotional warmth. In 1658 he told the Daughters of Charity that friendliness/cordiality was the midpoint between two extremes, cold gloominess on the one hand, and an over demonstrative gushiness on the other. "Friendliness is, strictly speaking, the outward effect of charity in the heart. It springs from the heart and shows how glad you are to be with a particular sister.... It is joy felt in the heart when you see the person you love and it shows in

⁸ *Bond of Perfection*, 26.

⁹ John Rybolt C.M., Ed., "Codex Sarzana," in *Vincentiana* 33 (1991), 307-406.

¹⁰ SV XII, 487-488.

your face."¹¹ Speaking about the affective dimension of charity, Vincent said in 1659: "We have to let each other see that we really do love one another.... We should be prompt in letting others know of our affection, not at the wrong time or in the wrong way but at a suitable moment and in a suitable way, and not overdoing it."¹² There is nothing cold or dutiful about Vincent's conception of cordial relationships. On the contrary, he obviously believed that there should be real warmth of feeling informing community life.

□ *Gentleness and compassion.* It is clear that Vincent wanted community members to relate to one another in a gentle and compassionate way. He maintained that gentleness and forbearance were necessary in and outside of the community. "Gentleness," he said, "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."¹³ Speaking about the need for compassion, Vincent said in a conference on charity in 1659: "One of the effects of love is to enable hearts to enter into each other and feel what the other feels. This is far removed from the sort of people who have no feel for the pain of those who suffer or for the plight of the poor.... These duties of friendship have come down to us, coming from the roots of Christianity.... In line with this we ought to look on the misfortunes of others as our own."¹⁴

□ *Mutual respect.* A person has respect when he goes beyond appearances, to esteem and reverence another person, because he knows and believes that he or she is made in God's image and likeness and has been redeemed by the blood of Jesus. Speaking of the relationship between friendliness and respect Vincent said: "Just as respect without friendliness is not true respect, so friendliness without respect is not solid but will sometimes engender familiarities that are scarcely proper and will render friendliness thin and changeable, which will not happen if friendliness is joined to respect and respect to friendliness."¹⁵

□ *Love expressed in action.* Vincent said that affective love needs to find expression in effective action. In other words, the way we feel about the confreres should find expression in charitable deeds. For example, he stated in his conference on charity: "Having charity in the heart and saying so is not the end of the affair; it must be spread out into what we do; in that way it is perfect; it has an effect, since it stirs up love in the hearts of those who experience it; it conquers the world."¹⁶

¹¹ SV XII 274-275.

¹² SV XII, 192.

¹³ SV XII, 270-271.

¹⁴ Abelly, *op. cit.*, II, 166.

¹⁵ SV IX, 143.

¹⁶ SV XII 274.

Friendliness and Friendship Contrasted

In modern psychological writing a distinction is drawn between closeness and intimacy.¹⁷ Closeness is love experienced in feelings of warmth, affection, tenderness, esteem, etc. Intimacy goes beyond closeness by engaging in deep and honest communication of all one's thoughts and feelings. In these terms St. Vincent advocated closeness rather than intimacy, friendliness rather than friendship in community.

Research has indicated that, in practice, most men prefer closeness to intimacy. For example, the McGill report on *Male Intimacy* observes: "To say that men have no intimate friends seems on the surface too harsh, and it raises quick objections from most men.... However, only one man in ten has a friend with which he discusses work, money, marriage; only one in more than twenty has a friendship where he discloses feelings about himself."¹⁸

Research also shows that when a man does form an intimate relationship, it is usually with a woman. Sadly, intimacy between men is rare.¹⁹ So, much as they may be desirable, deep, non-exclusive friendships between confreres are the exception rather than the rule. However, some of us have formed friendships of this kind with people, both male and female, outside of the community.

In spite of the dangers and difficulties involved, these relationships can have many desirable benefits.²⁰ They can banish loneliness, energize one's spirits, protect celibacy, heal hurting memories, increase self-awareness, develop empathic skills and mediate the presence of God. St. Aelred of Rievaulx celebrated the fruits of these kinds of friendship in the *Mirror of Charity* when he wrote: "It is such a great joy to have the consolation of someone's affection _ someone to whom one is deeply united by the bonds of love, someone in whom our weary spirit may find rest, and to whom we may pour out our souls... someone whose conversation is as sweet as a song in the tedium of our daily life. He must be someone whose soul will be to us a refuge to creep into when the world is altogether too much for us; someone to whom we can confide all our thoughts. His spirit will give us the comforting kiss that heals all the sickness of our preoccupied hearts. He will weep with us when we are troubled, and rejoice with us when we are happy, and he will always be there to consult when we are in doubt. And we will be so deeply bound to him in our hearts that even when he is far away, we will find him together with us in spirit... as the grace of the Holy Spirit flows over you both. In this life on earth we can love a few people in this way, with heart

¹⁷ Thomas and Patrick Malone, "Balancing Closeness and Intimacy," in *The Art of Intimacy*, (London: Simon & Schuster Ltd., 1987), 25-29.

¹⁸ Quoted by Donna Tiernan Mahoney, *Touching the Face of God: Intimacy and Celibacy in Priestly Life*, (Boca Raton, Florida: Jeremiah Press, 1991), 104.

¹⁹ Cf. Daniel Levinson, *The Seasons of a Man's Life*, (New York: Ballentine, 1978), 335; Lillian Rubin, *Intimate Strangers*, (London: Fontana, 1985), 129-131.

²⁰ See Pat Collins C.M., "Maturing as a Priest" in *The Furrow*, (November 1990), 605-615.

and mind together, for they are more bound to us by the ties of love than any others."²¹ As a result of friendships like these, affective and effective love flows out both to community members and the poor alike, in such a way that there is a congruence rather than a conflict between the different forms of affection in our lives.

²¹ Quoted by Aelred Squire, *Aelred of Rievaulx: A Study*, (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1981), 49-50.

Vincent on the connection between friendliness and evangelization

There are clear indications that St. Vincent related affective love in community to effective evangelization in the world, much as St. Luke had done. There were at least two ways in which this was true.

- Firstly, his God was, before all else, a God of compassion. It was out of love for suffering humanity that the Father sent his beloved Son. It was Jesus' compassionate love for the poor that motivated his preaching, works of charity, and deeds of power (cf. Mt 9:36). Vincentian missionaries will be motivated by the same compassion if they have first experienced this form of Christian love in community.
- Secondly, Vincent believed that unless there was unity of mind and heart in the community, united witness to Christ would be impossible. Speaking to the missionaries who were soon to depart to Ireland, he said: "How will we ever be able to draw souls together in Jesus Christ if you are not united among yourselves and with him? It will not be possible. Have then but one heart and one will. Otherwise you will be acting like horses who, when they are hitched to a chariot, pull some in one direction others in another, and thus they will spoil and ruin everything. God calls you to work in his vineyard. *Go then, as having one heart and one intention, and by this means you will produce fruit.*"²²

III. Today's Vincentians on the Connection between Friendship and Evangelization

There is agreement in the Congregation nowadays that the community exists in order to evangelize. For example, the 1980 version of the Constitutions states: "This fraternal life together, nourished continually by the mission, forms a community which promotes both personal and community good and renders the work of evangelization more effective."²³ In the recent book on the vows we read these striking words: "The following of Jesus can be understood and lived only in friendship and fraternal relationships. True fraternal communion supports the missionary in his response to the gift of celibacy which he has received. Community life should be a privileged space for expressing the affectivity that is part of everyone's life."²⁴

The same interrelationship was acknowledged in the charism statements which were produced in the three regions of the Irish Province in 1985. For example, the Dublin version stated: "We Vincentians are called to experience the gentle and

²² Abelly, *op. cit.*, II, 166.

²³ Quoted by John Rybolt C.M., "'As Good Friends' Reflections on the development of the Concept of Fraternal Life in the Congregation of the Mission," in *Vincentiana*, (1994), 475-478.

²⁴ *Instruction on Stability, Chastity, Poverty, and Obedience in the Congregation of the Mission*, in *Vincentiana* (1996/1), 24.

compassionate love of Christ in community and to share that love with those to whom we are sent." Reverential compassion is the quality, *par excellence*, that needs to inform our community life, our friendships, and, *ipso facto*, our evangelization. It is clear in Lk 6:36-39 that three attitudes are alien to such loving-kindness: judgment, condemnation, and un-forgiveness. They weaken trust, quench affectionate love, and grieve the Holy Spirit. For cordiality to flourish, communities need to agree that they will abstain from these negative attitudes in thought and word. When they make such a covenant _ it might be stated in the community plan _ they create a zone of psychological safety where mutual trust gives rise to a growing spirit of freedom, joy and peace.

The 1986 *Lines of Action* paragraph 13, drew attention to some other barriers to cordiality in community:

- ☐ On occasion, excessive individualism or autonomy in decision making.
- ☐ A superficial way of living together that impedes our ability to listen and our respect for persons.
- ☐ There are, moreover, missionaries who live together without knowing each other well enough, without time to listen to one another, and who look outside the community for the dialogue and support that they do not find within it, or which they themselves fail to contribute to.
- ☐ At times the stress is placed on life in common and regularity without a genuine deepening of lived communion; this impedes the search for the prophetic dimension of community.²⁵

Cordiality in community is usually the result of the spontaneous and informal sharing that the confreres engage in. But as Robert Maloney C.M. has observed,²⁶ a good community plan can be a powerful tool in creating structures that foster Vincentian ideals, e.g., friendship in community. The following suggestions could be considered. They were proposed at the Irish Regional Meeting in 1996. Any of them could be included in a plan that intended to foster unity of mind and heart.

- ☐ *Reflection days.* For example, during Advent and Lent, where the confreres themselves give the conferences and/or homily.
- ☐ *Faith sharing.* This is a part of our patrimony. St. Vincent encouraged the confreres to engage in repetition of prayer. Nowadays we need to devise imaginative and creative ways of doing this. For example, a community could use the Benedictine *Lectio Divina* in order to prayerfully reflect on a designated piece of scripture. Afterwards they could share their insights and experiences. It can be incorporated into days of reflection and retreats, e.g., after the gospel has been read at the Mass.

²⁵ *Lines of Action, 1986-1992 and Other Documents*, 37th General Assembly, (Rome: Vincentian Publications, 1986), 40.

²⁶ "Community Living and the Community Plan," in *The Way of Vincent de Paul* (New York: New City Press, 1992), 130-141.

□ *Theological reflection.* It can be defined as follows: "It is that moment when our ministerial experience and theology, our personal faith and Tradition dialogue with one another."

It involves four stages.

- It begins with the ministerial experience, e.g., dealing with parents whose son committed suicide.
- It continues with an analysis of the experience, e.g., its socio-cultural setting.
- Then it proceeds to theological reflection: What theological issues are relevant to the experience? What does Tradition have to say about these issues? What do these issues have to say to the Tradition?
- Finally, it concludes by trying to see what the practical implications might be. What new insights, sensitivities, convictions, behaviors will be taken back to the experience as a result of the reflection process.²⁷

Some communities arrange to have one or two sessions like this each year. It takes time and effort to appreciate the purpose and methodology informing this kind of theological reflection.

□ *Homily preparation.* Some communities read the scripture texts for the following Sunday sometime early in the week. They prayerfully reflect on them, e.g., at morning prayer on Monday, and spend ten to fifteen minutes toward the end of the designated period, sharing their insights.

□ *Community conferences.* They can deal with community issues, e.g., how to handle conflict and anger in a constructive way; how to overcome barriers to trust; stress management, etc.

□ *Facilitated meetings.* Some communities arrange to have meetings, about twice a year, which focus specifically on community relationships. A trained and trusted facilitator is invited, with the community's consent, to spend an hour or two with the confreres. Each one is free to share how he *feels* about his life in the house. It gives each man an opportunity to speak about any negative emotions he may be experiencing, e.g., as a result of being hurt, annoyed, misunderstood, etc. Meetings of this kind can be painful, but they have a great ability to clear up misunderstandings and to deepen the bonds of unity.

□ *Prayer/liturgy.* Creative initiatives can enliven the spiritual life of the confreres, e.g., the weekly Vincentian-type prayer recommended by the Superior General.

□ *Recreation.* Confreres can devise imaginative ways of participating in community and inter-community activity, e.g., golf tournaments, dinners out, celebrating birthdays, jubilees, etc.

²⁷ Cf., "Guidelines for Theological Reflection," in *Guidelines for Pastoral Formation*, (Dublin: Irish Association for Pastoral Formation, 1991), 27.

Conclusion

I was fortunate to spend eight years as a member of the Irish Mission Team. That time on the road proved to me, if proof were needed, that the effectiveness of our efforts to evangelize were proportionate to the quality of our cordiality and unity. The extent to which we lived after the manner of dear friends was the extent to which we experienced zest and joy in our vocation. As a result, our cordial relationships tended to counteract loneliness, hardship, and discouragement. Many was the time when people told us during missions that the obvious unity and affection of the confreres not only edified them, it added real credibility to what we had to say. It seems that in our individualistic culture increasing numbers of people are longing for the comfort and consolation that only loving communities can provide. On one occasion, St. Vincent spoke about the joy that results from such relationships when he said to the Daughters of Charity in 1658: "St. Paul says in another place that whoever abides in charity has fulfilled the law.... Our Lord teaches forbearance.... It is a means of *establishing a holy friendship* among you and of living in perfect union, and in this way enabling you to make a paradise in this world; and therefore, if God gives you the grace to bear with one another, your life will be a paradise begun."²⁸ He echoed these sentiments when he said to the confreres in 1659: "If God gives this grace to the missionaries what is your opinion of the Company as a whole? Their life is a life of love, the life of the angels and the blessed, the earthly and the heavenly paradise."²⁹

If we live in unity of mind and heart, we will experience God's gentleness and compassion. We will, as a result, have the desire and the power to proclaim that same divine love in many effective ways while demonstrating its reality and attractiveness, by the manner in which we live together. As Ps 133:1, 3 says: "How good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in *unity*!... For there the Lord has *commanded* his blessing."

²⁸ SV X 478.

²⁹ SV XII, 275.

An unpublished letter of St Vincent

-- a 1645 submission --

by Bernard KOCH cm

A notarised letter, signed by M. Vincent,
of which the original and a facsimile are in private hands

I was staying in Fain-les-Moutiers, giving a retreat, and the Daughters of Charity of that house showed me a photocopy of an unpublished letter of St Vincent. It had been given to the archives of the Motherhouse of the Daughters on 3 May 1994 by the owners of the original. The sisters, in turn, made their own photocopy of it, and this is what I worked on that same day and subsequently.

It seemed worth publishing this text, for it throws additional light on Monsieur Vincent's activities in the management of money, as well as on the financial dealings of the French kings. It gives interesting precise details, and gives us a glimpse of a whole network of resources for the missionaries and the sisters, complementing the huge amount of work I had already done on this topic.

Monsieur Vincent, apart from his missionary work, which was always done gratuitously, carried on an ever-growing charitable campaign all the time. This meant constantly finding new resources and means to conserve them at a time when all sources of funding were coveted, challenged and became subjects of lawsuits. And on top of all that, this was a period of unending war which endangered the agricultural enterprises and transport undertakings in which he had invested and led the king to confiscate the revenue from these in order to meet his military expenditure.

Monsieur Vincent had come to rely especially on farms and agricultural estates, of which I have discovered seventeen, as guaranteed sources of revenue for the poor and for the numerous Congregations for which he was responsible (the Congregation of the Mission, the Visitation, the Daughters of Providence, the Daughters of the Cross, the Daughters of Charity, not forgetting some abbeys).

The earliest farms and agricultural estates are those which depended on the priory of St Lazare, which was united with the Congregation of the Mission on 7 January 1632 (SV XIII 234).

The recently discovered letter informs us that these lands were not the property of this priory, but of the Crown, and that only their revenues were available for the care of lepers, or, since the arrival of St Vincent, of the poor and the missionaries, subject to paying a small annual rent to the State.

We already knew, from many letters and notarised documents, that possession of the various estates and revenues did not go uncontested, and that M. Vincent had to fight all the time in order to retain them.

This submission which we are now publishing is one further piece of evidence for this. It informs us that in April 1645, during the war against Lorraine, the Royal Council (i.e. the Queen Regent and Mazarin) wanted to auction these properties to swell the finances of the State, which was normal practice at that time. This could be confiscation of one or two, or even three, quarterly rents, seizure of municipal dues, as in 1647 (cf A. Dodin: *Saint Vincent de Paul et la Charit.*, p. 168), etc. After his coming of age on 7 September 1651 Louis XIV continued these same practices.

Our letter is an official submission that His Majesty intervene and have this judgement overturned.

One can see from it, once again, how closely St Vincent monitored his business affairs, and that he knew how to learn from archives at a time when every right had to be justified by official title-deeds. He was able to base his claim on royal edicts of 1147 and 1181, which brings home to us the very long history of the priory of St Lazare.

(Thomas Davitt CM,)

A PETITION OF SAINT VINCENT
IN FAVOUR OF THE ESTATE
OF THE MILLS OF GONESSE

HVHVH

A NOTARISED LETTER SIGNED BY ST. VINCENT

Facsimile and original preserved at the Chateau d'Époisses, Côte d'Or.
Photocopy in the Archives of the Daughters of Charity, 140 Rue du Bac
and with the Daughters of Charity in Fain-les-Moutiers.

B.KOCH

Transcribed at Fain-les-Moutiers, Monday 17th July 1995. Typed at Paris on Friday 28th. -
<..>means "doubtful reading"; [..]means "addition."

1645

19th June

*To Their Lordships the Commissioners
General deputed by His Majesty for
carrying out the Decision of the Council of the 26th
April 1645.*

A humble submission from Vincent de Paul Superior General of the Congregation of the priests of the Mission established at the Priory of St. Lazare at Paris, to say that the estate of the mills of Gonesse belonging to his Majesty is burdened by mortgage to the said Priory of St. Lazare for two barrelsof corn by way of annual rent and royalty, by Briefs of Louis VII, of the year 1147, as also the Estate of His Majesty in the Provost District of Paris, to the amount of three hundred and sixty five Pounds, similarly due ti the above mentioned Priory, by other Briefs of King Phillipe, <Il, Auguste> <number not in text> of the year 1181.

For these reason, My Lords,

and because it has come to the knowledge of the Petitioner that the said estates are being sold under pledge signed in the presence of a notary, on foot of a decree of the Council of 26th April. May it please Your Graces to receive the Petioner, as he opposes the sale and award of the above properties. And while passing judgment on the aforesaid objection <no signature-mark-> to order- that these properties shall be and shall remain moritaged to the said Priory of St. Lazare. And that those inentioned shall continue for the future the payment of the said annual rents of two barrels of corn in the one case and three hundred and sixty five pounds in the order, according to and in keeping with the said Constitutions of rents given in the said Briefs, and [*they will do well*]

Vincent Depaul [F F F] [??? = Ind.Pr.Miss.]

Choux <with elaborate flourish>

<Apostille> Order is given that the present request shall be shown to the procurator of the king in the Commission on...

and communicated to the rival claimant in order that the act

may be in due form <reasonably>. Decided in the Council room of the Château du Louvre at Paris, on the 19th of June 16 forty five.

Carré <with elaborate flourish>

(Andrew Spelman CM, translator)

Vincentian Bibliography

ANDRÉ SYLVESTRE, C.M.

François-Régis Clet

Prêtre de la Mission, Martyr en Chine (1748-1820)

Moissac, France, 1998 (202 pages)

This biography presents the life of Blessed Clet from his birth to his martyrdom and includes the veneration of him which followed. The many years he spent as a missionary in China are developed at length. The author situates the life of Francis Regis Clet in its historical context, and on the political, social, and religious levels. Many quotations, in particular from the missionary's letters, give this account its force and authenticity, while the judiciously chosen maps and illustrations liven up the work. Eight appendices complete the work in order to satisfy the curiosity of the reader about the environment of Blessed Clet's life.

RONALD RAMSON, C.M.

Praying with Frédéric Ozanam

Published by St. Mary's Press, Winona, Minnesota, USA, 1998 (128 pages)

This book, published in the collection "Companions for the Journey," offers 15 meditations embracing commentaries on the life and action of Blessed Frederick Ozanam, texts from him, reflection points and passages from Scripture for further contemplation.

It will be a help for personal or group reflection, especially due to the very real insight which it offers into laity in the Church. It will also help one find Christ in the poor.

The author, national chaplain for the St. Vincent de Paul Society in the United States, is known on the international level for his retreats on the spirituality of Ozanam.

PALMARITA GUIDA, D.C.

Caterina Labouré

e le apparizioni della Vergine alla Rue du Bac

Per una rilettura del messaggio

della Medaglia Miracolosa

Published by San Paolo, Turin, Italy, 1997 (169 pages)

A "new" book on the apparitions of the Virgin Mary to St. Catherine Labouré! In a fresh and simple style which is at the same time deep and passionate, the author proposes to us once again the origin and message of the Miraculous Medal, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the canonization of St. Catherine and the 150th anniversary of the approval of the Marian Youth Association by the Holy See.

The book has two parts: first of all, it has us enter Catherine's world in the first half of the 19th century; then, it interprets for "today" the life of the seer, translates the symbolism of

the medal and its action in the daily life of people and, finally, opens a window on the place of the apparitions.

LOUISE SULLIVAN, D.C.

The Core Values of Vincentian Education

Published by DePaul University, Chicago, USA, 1997 (48 pages)

The educational mission of St. Vincent and St. Louise has often been minimized to the profit of the more famous works of corporal and spiritual service of the poor. This little book shows that education, far from being marginal, holds a very important place in their global approach to the service of the poor – an approach expressed through the seminaries and the little schools. After having traced a portrait of St. Vincent, then St. Louise in this perspective, the author presents the essential values of a Vincentian education.

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_ AUREO MERINO RUÍZ, C.M., *Un hombre, Un Sueño... Antología Poetica*, Puebla.