

The Religious of St. Vincent de Paul

*by Yvon Laroche, RSV
Superior General*

Dear brothers and sisters of the Vincentian Family,

allow me to introduce the **Religious of St. Vincent de Paul** to you.

Made up of priests and brothers, the Religious of St. Vincent de Paul (formerly The Brothers of St. Vincent de Paul) are a congregation of pontifical right whose constitutions, after Vatican II, were approved in 1985.

The origins.

It dates from the day when Msgr. Angebault, the bishop of Angers, blessed the newborn community at the foot of the shrine of St. Vincent, in the chapel of the Vincentians on the Rue de Sèvres in Paris. There stood Jean-Léon Le Prevost, who had initiated this undertaking, Clément Myionnet, co-founder, and a young man, Maurice Maignen, who would soon join his two companions.

Le Prevost had joined the first conference of charity (conference of St. Vincent de Paul), some months after its foundation. On 11 September 1844, Clément Myionnet, himself also a Vincentian member, had come from Angers to meet M. Le Prevost in Paris. Both had the same desires and views: to give their lives to the service of the poor in a new religious congregation.

Le Prevost's intuitions.

For eleven years, Le Prevost had committed himself to visiting the needy in their homes, to the education of young prisoners and of orphan/apprentices. Moreover, he had founded an association for impoverished families, called 'the Holy Family.' Three intuitions had directed him. His experience had shown him the importance of missions in the towns, especially in the capital of France. He had also discovered that the practice of charity is the best way to reconcile the mass of workers to God and to the Church. "Divine Providence," he wrote, "wants, in our time, to save the world by charity." Finally, this type of work required the union of priest and religious brother for the evangelisation of the people. From this he understood that the works of his institute would be "essentially missionary" and that the exercise of charity, in all its forms, would be of primary importance for revealing the love of God towards all. Finally, among the Religious of St. Vincent de Paul, priests and brothers form a single spiritual and apostolic family.

Spirituality.

Formed in the school of St. Vincent and St. Francis de Sales, influenced by the French School of Spirituality of the seventeenth century, the founder gave his religious a double rule: to conform themselves to Jesus Christ and to show him to the world through their works.

Works.

From the beginning, the first brothers directed clubs for apprentices and students, then groups for young workers, the 'Holy Family' centres, popular works like libraries, soup kitchens, etc. They also opened local chapels linked with many works. Maurice Maignen became involved in the foundation of a 'Workers' Circle' and took part in the Catholic social movement which would prepare the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* of Leo XIII.

The congregation of the Religious of St. Vincent de Paul grew in France and, in 1884, established itself in Canada. Following that, and responding to the call of the Popes, new works were founded in Brazil and in Africa (Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Congo-Kinshasa). The Religious of St. Vincent de Paul now number close to 300. The Generalate is at 26, Via Palestro, Rome.

They still have the clubs (the 'Patros') and other works for youth, like hostels for workers and students and circles for young people. Their field of action reaches out to street children, the handicapped, the aged, the homeless and the unemployed.

In France and in Canada, they have taken on parishes in areas of high population. In Brazil especially, and in Congo, in parishes in highly populated areas, they work at evangelisation and the formation of basic communities. These parishes are, naturally, connected with numerous and varied works: basic literacy, secondhand clothes shops, courses in catechesis, family associations, retreats. On the occasion of the Great Jubilee, may we receive a new grace, that of working with the Vincentian Family.

(Translated by Eugene Curran, CM)