

# VINCENTIANA

61<sup>st</sup> YEAR

January-March 2017

N°1



## Mission and Charity in our Vincentian Charism

CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION  
GENERAL CURIA

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# Introduction

## Editor's Note

This year, 2017, is a year of grace, a Jubilee Year for all those who are members of the worldwide Vincentian Family. This year we celebrate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the Vincentian charism, a celebration that leads us to reflect on Matthew 25:35, *I was a stranger and you welcomed me!*

This year, the four issues of *Vincentiana* will be dedicated to reflections on the various ways in which our charism continues to be vital and relevant in the present era.

In this first issue, the reader will find documents prepared by the General Curia that refer to the reconfiguration that occurred among the Provinces in Spain (Barcelona, Madrid, and Salamanca) and that resulted in the formation of the new Province of Saint Vincent de Paul – Spain. There is also a document relating to the election and appointment of the new Visitor.

This issue also includes the Decree from the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, which presents the final edition of the Liturgical Calendar of the Congregation of the Mission and the Company of the Daughters of Charity. Note: the celebration of the feast of Saint Louise is 9 May and the celebration of the feast of Saint Francis Regis Clet has been moved from 18 February to 9 July. We have also included the letter from the Holy See with regard to the granting of indulgences to all members of the Vincentian Family during this Jubilee Year.

Following the tradition established in previous years, this first issue includes the statistics of the Congregation of the Mission for the year 2016. The reconfiguration of the Provinces of Italy and France are highlighted in these statistics and the reader will also notice the erection of the Vice-Province of Cameroon and the new Region of Venezuela that is connected to the Province of Colombia.

We publish in this issue the various letters of the Superior General: his letter on the anniversary of the Foundation of the Congregation (25 January), his Lenten Message, his letter announcing the Vincentian Symposium which will be held in Rome (October 2017). This last letter contains much information for those persons who will participate in this event. Finally, there is the report of the Superior General concerning the March *Tempo Forte*.

We offer in this issue an article on Jorge Garcia Isaza, CM, Bishop Emeritus of the Apostolic Vicariate of Tierradentro, Colombia. We highlight his apostolic zeal and his life-long love for the Congregation and for the Church.

We could not ignore certain events that highlight our celebration of this Jubilee Year. The Episcopal Conference in Portugal recognized the 400 years of living the Vincentian charism and the 300 years of presence of the Congregation in that country. We also publish the message of Pope Francis on the occasion of the General Assembly of the AIC in Châtillon. It was there that 400 years ago the first Confraternity of Charity was established. We also include the words of the Advisor to the AIC in France, words that were spoken during the celebration that took place in the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris.

The central theme of this edition is *Mission and Charity: elements of our Vincentian charism*. This theme has been developed by various members of SIEV. Javier Álvarez, *Mission and Charity in the Congregation of Today*, (presents recent statistical information and a reflection on the various ministries of the confreres); Armada Riyanto, *Missionary Charism of Vincent de Paul in the Asian Context* (contains numerous insightful references from various Vincentian texts); Corpus Delgado, *God's Providence Has Inspired the Company with This Holy, Ingenious Means* (a reflection on the nature of those heavy labors of our state and why, in order to accomplish those works, Vincent felt it necessary to make it clear *that we do not intend to be religious, but to remain always in the ranks of the clergy*); Andrés Motto, *Vincent de Paul's Experience of the Charitable Mission* (a presentation of the theology of the mission and a perspective of the popular mission as a means to transmit the faith). This series of reflections concludes with an article written by Robert Maloney, *Saint Vincent as a Mystic of Charity* (an historical review of contemporary authors who address the issue of Vincent's mysticism).

May this issue of *Vincentiana* provide you with material for reflection on the charism that is our heritage, a gift from our founder, and may you be strengthened to make this charism real in all our works and ministries.

Alvaro Mauricio Fernández, CM



## Decree of Establishment of the Province of Saint Vincent de Paul – Spain

The undersigned, Father Tomaž Mavrič, Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission (Padres Paúles), a Society of Apostolic Life and of Pontifical Right, established on January 25<sup>th</sup>, 1625, with residence at Via dei Capasso, #30, 00164, Rome (Italy). Pope Urban VIII gave pontifical approval on January 12<sup>th</sup>, 1633 through the publication of the Bull, *Salvatoris Nostri*.

In accord with canon #621 of the Code of Canon Law and article 107.3 of the Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission and after verifying that the conditions established in the Constitutions for the erection of a new Province within the Congregation have been fulfilled, I, as the legitimate authority responsible for the erection of provinces of the Congregation with the consent of the General Council,

### DECREE

[1] To canonically establish the entity known as the PROVINCE OF SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL – SPAIN, a province of the Congregation of the Mission (Padres Paúles) which will enjoy all the rights, privileges, and faculties and will have the duties and obligations that correspond to provinces and that are in accord with the law that is applicable to our Congregation.

[2] To note that the residence of the Province is located in 28039 Madrid (Spain), calle de Serafin Ramírez #5B and its territory extends to the autonomous communities of Andalucía, Asturias, Cantabria, Cataluña, Comunidad Valenciana, Extremadura, Galicia, Islas Baleares and Madrid; to the autonomous cities of Melilla and Ceuta; to the civil provinces of Ávila, Burgos, León, Palencia, Salamanca, Segovia, Valladolid, Zamora, Toledo and Ciudad Real ... all in the country of Spain and its mission in the Republic of Honduras.

[3] To establish that, for civil purposes, the statutes of the new province will be those that have been written by the Congregation of the Mission (Padres Paúles) and thus registered in the Register of religious entities of the Kingdom of Spain. The form of government of the new province will be that which is common to all the provinces of the Congregation. Consideration will be given to specific determinations which, in such cases, are viewed as necessary for good government and which must also be in accord with the norms of the Constitutions.

[4] To determine that the present Decree will go into effect on the day that it is signed.

[5] To promulgate the present Decree in accord with usual procedures.

[6] To encourage that, as soon as possible and in accordance with applicable legislation, the appropriate procedures related to the erection of the new Province, both in the canonical and in the civil sphere, be undertaken. These procedures should also be followed with regard to civil recognition of the legal entity and its ability to act as a newly erected province.

[7] To authorize Joaquín González Hernando, with personal identity number 51336510G and Roberto Calero Jiménez-Valladolid, with personal identity number 06209275B to make public this Decree and do whatever else needs to be done so that the erection of the new Province might be inscribed in the Registry of religious entities at the Ministry of Justice in Spain.

Any doubt with regard to the application and the interpretation of this present Decree will be submitted by the Provincial Visitor of the Province of Saint Vincent de Paul – Spain to the superior general who will then resolve said matter.

Given in Salamanca on the twenty-fifth (25) day of January, in the year two thousand seventeen (2017), the solemnity of the Conversion of Saint Paul.

Tomaž Mavrič, CM  
Superior General

## **Decree of Erection**

### **from the former Provinces of Barcelona, Madrid and Salamanca comes the one Province of Saint Vincent de Paul - Spain**

Tomaž Mavrič, CM  
Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission,

with the consent of the General Council, in conformity with Article 107, 3° of our Constitutions, suppresses the canonical Provinces of Barcelona, Madrid and Salamanca, and erects the Province of **Saint Vincent De Paul – Spain** on this 25th day of January, 2017. In conformity with our Constitutions and Statutes, the new Province will have all the rights and obligations of the Provinces of the Congregation of the Mission.

Rome, January 25, 2017

Tomaž Mavrič, CM  
Superior General

Giuseppe Turati, CM  
Secretary General



## **Appointment of the Provincial Visitor of the Saint Vincent de Paul Province – Spain**

The undersigned, Father Tomaž Mavrič, CM, Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission (Padres Paúles), a Society of Apostolic Life and of Pontifical Right, established on January 25<sup>th</sup>, 1625, with residence at Via dei Capasso, #30, 00164, Rome (Italy). Pope Urban VIII gave pontifical approval on January 12<sup>th</sup>, 1633 through the publication of the Bull, *Salvatoris Nostri*.

In accordance with canons 625.3, 626, 623, 624 and also in accordance with article 124 of our Constitutions and after verifying that the conditions established in the Constitutions for the appointment of a new provincial visitor have been fulfilled, I, as the legitimate authority responsible for the appointment of provincial visitors within the Congregation, and with the consent of the General Council,

### **DECREE**

[1] To appoint Father Jesús González Antón, with personal identity number 13072288P as Provincial Visitor or Provincial Superior of the **Province of Saint Vincent de Paul – Spain**, a province of the Congregation of the Mission (Padres Paúles), with all the rights and obligations as outlined in the proper law of the Congregation of the Mission.

The present appointment will enter into effect at the time that said appointment is made and shall continue for three years.

I ask that all the members of the Province accept Father Jesús as the legitimate Visitor and that they will assist him and collaborate with him in those matters that pertain to his office as Visitor.



[2] To authorize Joaquín González Hernando, with personal identity number 51336510G and Roberto Calero Jiménez-Valladolid, with personal identity number 06209275B to make public this Decree and do whatever else needs to be done so that this appointment might be inscribed in the Registry of religious entities at the Ministry of Justice in Spain.

Given in Salamanca on the twenty-fifth (25) day of January, in the year two thousand seventeen (2017), the solemnity of the Conversion of Saint Paul.

Tomaž Mavrič, CM  
Superior General

Translated: Charles T. Plock, CM



CONGREGATIO DE CULTU DIVINO  
ET DISCIPLINA SACRAMENTORUM

Prot. N. 5181/15

## **Congregation of the Mission and Company of the Daughters of Charity**

At the request (letter of 12 February 2016) of Father Shijo Kanjirathamkunnel, Procurator General of the Congregation of the Mission and the Company of the Daughters of Charity, by virtue of the faculties granted by the Supreme Pontiff FRANCIS to this Congregation, we willingly approve the Particular Calendar of the Congregation the Mission and the Company of the Daughters of Charity, as in the attached copy, so that, in the future, it will be observed by all those who are bound to it.

In printing the Calendar, mention is to be made of the approval granted by the Apostolic See.

Anything to the contrary notwithstanding.

From the Offices of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, 15 March 2016.

Robert Card. Sarah  
Prefect

Arthur Roche  
Archbishop Secretary



CONGREGATIO DE CULTU DIVINO  
ET DISCIPLINA SACRAMENTORUM

Prot. N. 5181/15

## **Proper Calendar**

### **Congregation of the Mission and the Company of the Daughters of Charity**

**APPROVED**

From the Offices of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, 15 March 2016.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Arthur Roche', written over a horizontal line.

Arthur Roche  
Archbishop Secretary

JANUARY		
4	Saint Elizabeth Ann Bayley Seton, religious	Memorial
7	<i>Blessed Lindalva Justo de Oliveira, virgin and martyr</i>	
25	CONVERSION OF SAINT PAUL, APOSTLE Anniversary of the Foundation of the Congregation of the Mission	Feast
FEBRUARY		
1	<i>Blessed Marie Anne Vaillot and Odile Baumgarten, virgins and martyrs</i>	
3	<i>Blessed Giuseppina Nicoli, virgin</i>	
7	<i>Blessed Rosalie Rendu, virgin</i>	
APRIL		
26	<i>Translation of the Relics of Saint Vincent de Paul</i>	
MAY		
9	SAINT LOUISE DE MARILLAC, RELIGIOUS <i>Co-Founder of the Company of the Daughters of Charity</i>	Solemnity
23	<i>Saint Jeanne Antide Thouret, virgin</i>	
30	<i>Blessed Marta Maria Wiecka, virgin</i>	
JUNE		
26	<i>Blessed Marie Madeleine Fontaine and companions, virgins and martyrs</i>	
JULY		
9	Saint Francis Regis Clet, Agustin Zhao Rong, priests, and companions, martyrs	Memorial
28	<i>Saint Peter Chrysologus, bishop and Doctor of the Church</i>	
30	Saint Justin De Jacobis, bishop	Memorial

AUGUST		
30	Blessed Ghebre Michael, priest and martyr	Memorial
SEPTEMBER		
2	<i>Blessed Louis Joseph François and companions (John Henry Gruyer, Peter René Rogue, John Charles Caron and Nicolas Colin), priests and martyrs</i>	
9	<i>Blessed Frédéric Ozanam</i>	
11	Saint John Gabriel Perboyre, priest and martyr	Memorial
27	SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL, PRIEST AND FOUNDER	Solemnity
OCTOBER		
<i>Sunday before the Solemnity of All Saints or the last Sunday in October</i>		
<i>DEDICATION OF THE CHURCH whose date of Dedication is unknown</i>		Solemnity
NOVEMBER		
6	<i>Blessed Fortunato Velasco Tobar, priest, Melchiora Adoración Cortés Bueno, Josefa Martínez Pérez, virgins and companions, martyrs</i>	
27	OUR LADY OF THE MIRACULOUS MEDAL	Feast
28	Saint Catherine Labouré, virgin	Memorial
DECEMBER		
10	<i>Blessed Marco Antonio Durando, priest</i>	

## Liturgical Calendar

Rome, 8 March 2017

*To all the members of the Congregation of the Mission  
To all the Daughters of Charity  
To all members of the Vincentian Family*

Dear Confreres, Sisters, and members of the Vincentian Family,

*May the grace and peace of Jesus be always with us!*

It recently came to our attention that the information on the updated Vincentian Liturgical Calendar was never communicated to you. Apparently, the letter to be translated was lost between one office and the other of the CM General Curia. We regret the delay in sending you this information, which you should have received last April.

1. Therefore, I am sending you now the updated Vincentian Liturgical Calendar. The Vincentian Liturgical Calendar is approved for the Congregation of the Mission and Daughters of Charity. It is not restricted to the Vincentian Family.
2. The change of date, from 15 March to 9 May, for celebrating the solemnity of Saint Louise de Marillac was communicated to you last year.
3. Another change of date is the celebration of the memorial of Saint Francis Regis Clet. It is moved from 18 February to 9 July. The reason for this is to unite the memorial with that of other martyrs of the same category in the universal calendar. As the calendar is proper, we have the privilege to mention first the name of Saint Francis Regis Clet, followed by Augustini Zhao Rong and companions.

4. On 28 July, you will find the name of a saint who is not a Vincentian. In fact, in the universal calendar the memorial of Saint Peter Chrysologus falls on 30 July. However, in order for us to maintain the date of 30 July for Saint Justin De Jacobis, we had to insert the name of Saint Peter Chrysologus on another date in our calendar. This occurs only when we have a memorial that coincides with that of another saint in the universal calendar.
5. You will observe that some of the memorials have become optional memorials in the present calendar. However, they are obligatory memorials for the country of origin of the Blessed/Saint. This does not mean that others may not celebrate these memorials.
6. It was suggested that we remove the feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul (25 January) from our proper calendar, because it is a universal feast. However, it was accepted that it remain on our calendar because we already have prayers approved for this feast of the Congregation.
7. Where the names of martyrs are not mentioned in the officially approved document of the Vincentian Calendar (for example 26 June), we have the freedom to mention all the names in the Ordo.

Thank you for your attention to these changes. May God bless each of us as we continue celebrating the Jubilee Year marking the birth of our charism.

Your brother in Saint Vincent

Tomaž Mavrič, CM  
Superior General



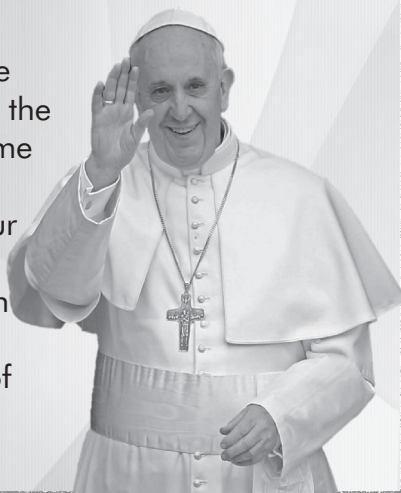


## PLENARY INDULGENCE

The Holy Father grants a Plenary Indulgence to the Vincentian Family

On the occasion of the 400th anniversary of the Vincentian charism, the Holy Father, through the Apostolic Penitentiary, has granted to the whole Vincentian Family, a Plenary Indulgence (Confession, Communion, and Prayers for the Pope).

Those who will receive it are those who participate in the Eucharist or in some public or private prayer service (Our Father, profession of faith, invocation of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of St. Vincent).



## 2016 Annual Statistics of the Congregation of the Mission

### MINISTRIES

Number of confreres involved in the ministries listed below. Each confrere is counted only once, considered under his principal ministry, as of 31 December 2016

MINISTRIES	BISHOPS	PRIESTS	DEACONS	BROTHERS	STUDENTS
01. Parish (popular) Missions to the faithful	2	118		1	
02. Parishes	5	979	17	17	2
03. Pilgrimage sanctuaries		53		4	
04. Seminaries and clerical formation		228	4	8	8
05. Missions Ad Gentes	1	188	3	8	
06. Missions for long term		43	1	1	
07. Daughters of Charity (Director, chaplain)		81			
08. Schools (primary, secondary, superior, professional)		174	1	11	2
09. Social Communications (publications, radio, television)		24		4	
10. Special studies		92	19	5	5
11. Chaplains (military, immigrants, hospital, associations)		119		1	
12. Chaplains (Vincentian Lay Groups)		81		1	
13. Direct Service of the Poor		32		6	
14. Manual work			1	24	
15. Administration	6	131	1	8	
16. Retired, ill, convalescing	7	285	2	24	
17. Other	11	121	5	9	15
18. Absence from the Congregation		163	4	6	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>2912</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>34</b>

PROVINCES	HOUSES & INCORPORATED MEMBERS by PROVINCE							ADMITTED MEMBERS & ASPIRANTS by PROVINCE – 2016										
	Houses	Bishops	Priests	Deacons	Permanent Diacons	Brothers	Students with Vows	TOTAL	MEMBERS WHO HAVE ALREADY MADE THE INTERNAL SEMINARY				MEMBERS WHO ARE STILL IN THE INTERNAL SEMINARY				TOTAL ADMITTED	ASPIRANTS
									CP	CB	P*	PD*	CP	CB	P*	PD*		
General Curia	12	0	30	0	0	0	0	30	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
AFRICA	59	6	365	16	0	19	0	406	120	2	0	0	34	0	0	0	156	122
Cameroun	5		33	5		4		42	9				3				12	24
Congo (Dem. Rep.)	13		52	1		2		55	9								9	10
Ethiopia	6	3	48			3		54									0	
Madagascar	10	2	75	6		8		91	36	2			12				50	10
Mozambique	7	1	17			2		20	4								4	23
Nigeria	11		96	4				100	60				15				75	16
St. Justin de Jacobis - Eritrea	7		44					44	2				4				6	39
AMERICA	183	10	936	17	1	56	21	1041	73	0	0	0	40	1	0	0	114	172
Argentina	7	1	37	1				39	3				4				7	9
Brazil - Curitiba	7	2	70			1		73	1				2				3	21
Brazil - Fortaleza	5	1	37	3				41	1								1	9
Brazil - Rio de Janeiro	7	1	52			8	1	62	6				2				8	6
Central America	11	2	44			3	2	51	6				3				9	8
Chile	7		23	1		2		26	2				1				3	1
Colombia	32		171	4		12	6	193	19				14				33	45
Costa Rica	3		11			2		13	2								2	5
Cuba	4		6				1	7	3								3	4
Ecuador	7		32				2	34									0	
Mexico	18		86	1		2	2	91	5				2				7	16
Peru	12	1	50			1	1	53	7				4				11	5

PROVINCES	HOUSES & INCORPORATED MEMBERS by PROVINCE							ADMITTED MEMBERS & ASPIRANTS by PROVINCE – 2016												
	Houses	Bishops	Priests	Deacons	Permanent Diacons	Brothers	Students with Vows	TOTAL	MEMBERS WHO HAVE ALREADY MADE THE INTERNAL SEMINARY						MEMBERS WHO ARE STILL IN THE INTERNAL SEMINARY				TOTAL ADMITTED	ASPIRANTS
									CP	CB	P*	PD*	CP	CB	P*	PD*				
Puerto Rico	15		57	4		1	1	63	10				3				13		16	
USA - Eastern	20	2	110			7		119	2				4	1			7		15	
USA - New England	6		18			1		19									0			
USA - Western	22		132	3	1	16	5	157	6				1				7		12	
ASIA	80	7	570	12	0	14	9	612	187	0	0	0	37	0	0	0	224		233	
China	3		27					27	4								4		7	
Indonesia	11		98			1	6	105	26				5				31		8	
North India	15	3	93	7		2	2	107	53				11				64		52	
South India	16	1	138	3		2		144	34				3				37		51	
Orient	8	1	31			2		34	7								7		3	
Philippines	14	2	110	1		4		117	1				4				5		13	
Vietnam	13		73	1		3	1	78	62				14				76		99	
EUROPE	167	9	974	7	1	46	4	1041	42	2	0	0	15	1	0	0	60		19	
Austria - Germany	7		29			2		31					1				1			
France	19		99	1		11		111	1	1			1				3		3	
Hungary	3		8					8									0			
Ireland	8		43					43	1								1		1	
Italy	29	3	139	3	1	2		148	3								3			
Poland	27	1	251	2		3	2	259	25				5				30			
Portugal	9	1	39					40	1								1		2	
Slovakia	7		32			4		36	2				3				5		1	
Slovenia	8	2	36			2		40					1				1			

PROVINCES	HOUSES & INCORPORATED MEMBERS by PROVINCE							ADMITTED MEMBERS & ASPIRANTS by PROVINCE – 2016										
	Houses	Bishops	Priests	Deacons	Permanent Diacons	Brothers	Students with Vows	TOTAL	MEMBERS WHO HAVE ALREADY MADE THE INTERNAL SEMINARY				MEMBERS WHO ARE STILL IN THE INTERNAL SEMINARY				TOTAL ADMITTED	ASPIRANTS
									CP	CB	P*	PD*	CP	CB	P*	PD*		
Spain - Barcelona	6	1	35			1		37	2				1				3	5
Spain - Madrid	11		82			11		93	1				1				2	
Spain - Salamanca	11		63			8	1	72	1							1		
Spain - Zaragoza	15		92			2	1	95	4	1				1			6	7
SS. Cyril and Methodius	7	1	26	1				28	1				2				3	
OCEANIA	6	0	37	4	0	3	0	44	7	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	6
Australia	6		37	4		3		44	7	1							8	6
TOTAL	507	32	2912	56	2	138	34	3174	429	5	0	0	126	2	0	0	562	552

CP = Candidates to the Priesthood; CB = Candidates to the Brotherhood; P\*/PD\* = Priests/Permanent Diacons coming from a diocese or another Institute

# 2

## From the Superior General

### Jubilee Year – 400th Anniversary of the Vincentian Charism

Rome, 25 January 2017

*To all the Confreres of the Congregation of the Mission*

Dear Confreres,

*May the grace and peace of Jesus be always with us!*

My heart is overwhelmed with thankfulness and joy for this “gift from Heaven,” allowing the Congregation of the Mission and the entire Vincentian Family to celebrate, throughout the whole of 2017, the 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Vincentian Charism, which has left such deep marks of Jesus’s unconditional love on the world throughout the last 400 years and continues to do so today!

During this year, the Congregation of the Mission and the entire Vincentian Family will choose different dates for beginning the celebrations. Some have started already; some will begin later. But there is one date that is the source, the first reason for the celebration, as it is the beginning of the “way of Saint Vincent de Paul,” the beginning of the Vincentian Charism: 25 January 1617 in the village of Folleville in France.

It was in that small village that Vincent was touched by the tremendous spiritual poverty of people in the countryside. A few months later, he experienced the tremendous material poverty in the town of Châtillon. That experience gave birth to the Ladies of Charity, today known as AIC, who now witness so beautifully to the Vincentian Charism around the world. Vincent began by encouraging others to change their lives from within, as well as to reach out to the people around them, who had material needs. Meanwhile he

experienced his own personal conversion, leading him to dedicate himself totally to the spiritually and materially poor and bringing about the collaboration of so many, who followed in his footsteps, to make the Gospel a reality “here and now” for millions and millions throughout the 400 years that have passed since that time. This mission will not end until Charity is globalized, until Charity has embraced all corners of the world and touched the heart of every person!

The theme of the Jubilee Year, which will accompany us throughout the 12 months is: “I was a stranger and you welcomed me....”

Already there are numerous and incredible initiatives both within the Congregation of the Mission, as well as throughout the entire Vincentian Family, to celebrate the 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Vincentian Charism in all corners of the world on the local, national, and international levels. And there are some initiatives still to come. All of these are keeping in mind Jesus’s words taken from Matthew 25:31-46 so dear to Vincentians and to all those who embrace the charism of Vincent de Paul: “I was a stranger and you welcomed me....”

As we look outward to the cry of the poor, we should not forget to look inward, to the cry of the poor within us, to the poverty within us that cries for help, for freedom, for redemption. It was Vincent’s acceptance and recognition of his own poverty that led him to purify his own heart, the heart that then beat so strongly for persons on the margins of society! Vincent’s approach to each person was not the approach of a theology from “above,” but rather an approach to the person from Vincent’s own poverty, the approach of a theology from “below.” To welcome the stranger within us, to recognize that he exists in every one of us, to embrace this stranger, accept him, and then give it all to Jesus to heal our wounds, to surrender completely to Him and trust totally in His Providence: this was Vincent’s way. Let it be the way of each one of us!



The lasting fruits of these 400 years are seen in the thousands and thousands of our confreres and other members of the numerous branches of the Vincentian Family who have walked before us, lived Vincent's way, the Vincentian Charism, to the best of their abilities. Now it is our turn.

Besides the many initiatives that we will be developing throughout the year 2017 to celebrate the 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Vincentian Charism, I would like to encourage and challenge each member of the Congregation, each one of us, with one more common initiative. The initiative is not new. Many will work very hard on various levels on this initiative in different parts of the world in a special way during this Jubilee Year. On the one hand, the initiative is old, very old; on the other hand, it is always new, ever new, like the Gospel!

I am talking about new vocations to the Congregation of the Mission, new vocations to Brotherhood and Priesthood. It is clear that the initiative always comes from Jesus, but we need to cooperate and help the person Jesus is calling to the consecrated life, in the fullest way possible, for that call to become a reality. To launch this initiative, I would like to use numbers as a source of our orientation.

The Congregation of the Mission presently has approximately 3200 members worldwide and a combined 800 seminarians in theology and philosophy, the Internal Seminary, and candidates.

The initiative is this: each one of us, collectively in groups or individually, will set himself this concrete goal: to pray, be attentive, look for, encourage, and invite one new candidate to join our forces during this Jubilee Year. Could we imagine 3200 new candidates to the Congregation of the Mission? Is this unrealistic? Is this a fantasy? With Jesus all is possible!

Through this initiative, hopefully many new vocations will come forward during the Jubilee Year. Others may join us in the years to come, as the fruit of the 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Nothing is impossible

for Jesus, and we are invited to do all we can to cooperate with him. Providence will do the rest. The initiative and challenge for us is clear. Each confrere sets for himself this goal: I offer myself as a tool to Jesus to bring one new candidate to the Congregation of the Mission in this Jubilee Year. Nothing more, but nothing less!

Let us then go forward in this Year of Grace with the words of Saint Vincent de Paul:

*“I wish you a young heart and a love in its first bloom for Him Who loves us unceasingly and as tenderly as if He were just beginning to love us. For all God’s pleasures are ever new and full of variety, although He never changes”* (Letter 288, CCD:I:408).

May the Jubilee Year be accompanied by the intercession of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, Saint Vincent de Paul, and all the other Blessed and Saints of the Vincentian Family!

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

Tomaž Mavrič, CM  
Superior General

## Lenten Letter

Rome, 22 February 2017



To all the members of the Congregation of the Mission

My dear confreres,

*May the grace and peace of Jesus be always with us!*

Let me take the opportunity, at the beginning of this letter, to thank each one of you wholeheartedly for your many Christmas and New Year's greetings, which I received by regular mail, e-mail, or through different social media! I admire the heroic witness and service of your ministering in difficult times and in remote areas of the globe. My heart is with each one of you as I accompany you daily with my thoughts and prayers.

*The season of Lent is near at hand!*

In my first letter as Superior General for the feast of our Founder on 27 September, I started to reflect on our main sources of inspiration besides the Holy Bible: our Common Rules and Constitutions. The Advent letter was a prolongation of it. In this year's Lenten letter, I would like to continue in the same direction by reflecting on the Common Rules and Constitutions. In fact, the Common Rules and the Constitutions will become the base and source of all the reflections in the Advent and Lenten letters, as well as the letter for the feast of our Founder, in the following six years, leading to our next General Assembly in 2022.

In both previous letters, I expressed my heart's desire, encouraged, and asked each member of our "Little Company" to embrace our Common Rules and Constitutions as an inseparable tool for the development of our vocation, our road to sanctity, and the mission entrusted to each one of us by Jesus, the Evangelizer of the Poor!

Since the first letter five months have passed.

Vincent himself, at the end of the Common Rules, asks each one of us to read them every three months. We now have our Constitutions, as well as the Common Rules. As I did in the past two letters, I would like to ask again, in this Lenten letter, the following questions of every single one of us:

1. Do I carry my Common Rules and my Constitutions together with my Holy Bible and my Breviary?
2. As I do with my Bible and Breviary, do I read-pray a small passage of the Common Rules or Constitutions every day?
3. Since the Feast of Saint Vincent five months ago, was I able to start reading-praying the Common Rules or the Constitutions in order to finish them at the conclusion of three months?

Dear confreres, with all my heart I encourage each of us to help one another to keep walking along this path, or re-embark on it. As I did in my Advent letter, I would like once more to encourage

all the Visitors, as well as the Local Superiors, to be the source of inspiration, encouragement, and example to the confreres on the local and provincial levels.

If the responses to the above three questions are negative, can I ask myself why I did not start the above-mentioned tasks? Why do I not take into my hands our basic sources of inspiration to follow Saint Vincent's charism and spirituality?

Because the identity of a missionary, of a member of the Congregation of the Mission, is so crucial for our mission, I hope and pray that there is not a single confrere in the whole Congregation who does not read and reflect a short passage from the Common Rules or the Constitutions on his own or in community every day.

In my Advent letter, I reflected on "the Incarnation" as one of the central mysteries of Saint Vincent de Paul's spirituality. In this year's Lenten letter, I would like to reflect on the mystery of the "Holy Trinity" as another of the central mysteries of Saint Vincent's spirituality.

Saint Vincent writes in the Common Rules:

*According to the Bull which established our Congregation, we are bound to honor in a special way the Most Holy Trinity and the Incarnation, mysteries beyond words. We should therefore try to carry this out most faithfully and, if possible, in every way, but especially in these three ways: (1) frequently honoring these mysteries by a prayer of faith and adoration, coming from our inmost heart; (2) dedicating certain prayers and good works each day to their honor and, above all, celebrating their feast days with special dignity, and the greatest possible personal devotion; (3) trying constantly, by our teaching and example, to get other people to know these mysteries and to honor and worship them (Common Rules X, 2; CCD:XIIIA:454-455).*

In our Constitutions, we find the following words:

*As witnesses and heralds of the love of God, we ought to show special honor and devotion to the mysteries of the Trinity and the Incarnation (Constitutions, IV, 48).*

What is the message of the Holy Trinity for me personally, for the community where I live and to which I belong, for the people Jesus is sending me to serve?

Jesus helps us understand the Holy Trinity: the identity, mission, and purpose of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Jesus helps us to understand the relationship among the three Persons, the inner connectivity among them, and the influence of the Trinity on each individual person as well as on society as a whole.

As we discover and develop, with God's grace, an unbreakable bond between the Trinity and the individual person, between the Trinity and the community, between the Trinity and humanity, we will get ever closer to the ideal model of "relationships," basic components of our lives. We were created not as islands, separated from one another, but as social beings and as a family, where, in the depth of our being, we are one with God, which means, with the Trinity and with each other.

The Trinity remains a mystery for us. Jesus communicated to us what we know about the Father, Son, and Spirit. Jesus presented the Trinity to us as the ideal model of "relationships."

Our reflection on the Trinity needs to be accompanied by the wish and goal of incarnating that ideal model of "relationships" in the concrete life situation in which I find myself, in the community where I live and to which I belong, with the people to whom Jesus is sending me to serve.

The Holy Trinity is the ideal model of "relationships"! Jesus shows us the ideal.

- The mutual relationship between the Father and the Son.
- The mutual relationship between the Father and the Spirit.
- The mutual relationship between the Son and the Spirit.
- The relationship among the Father, Son, and Spirit.

What can we see in these "relationships"?

1. We can see that the attention is always directed to the other person and not to oneself.

2. We can see that the priority is always given to the other person and not to oneself.
3. We can see that praise, thankfulness, admiration are always given to the other person and not to oneself.
4. We can see that each one of the three Persons of the Trinity always expresses the need for collaboration with the other Person to fulfill the mission.
5. We can see that each of the three Persons of the Trinity always clearly expresses that it would be insufficient and ineffective for each of them to act alone.

What does the model of relationships in the Trinity say to me about my own life in:

- a. my relationship with God,
- b. my relationship to the community,
- c. my relationship with those to whom Jesus is sending me to serve?

Because we are not islands, but beings belonging to the human family, “relationships” are an inseparable part of our mission. The ideal model of the Trinity, that Jesus left us, is the model to follow.

Saint Vincent de Paul made the ideal model of the Holy Trinity one of the foundations of his spirituality. In this year’s Lenten Season, we are invited to take new steps toward the ideal model of “relationships” given to us through Jesus.

If each of us would put the other person first, put him or her before oneself, before one’s own desires, before one’s own interests, before one’s own personal wishes; if each one would give attention to the other person, share time, thoughts, experiences, hardships, doubts, sufferings, joys, etc. by following the ideal model of “the Trinity’s relationships,” then someone would do the same for each of us. In this way, a wonderful and miraculous set of relationships will take shape, where we together, in the best and most effective way possible, will accomplish the mission entrusted to us by Jesus.



To help us reflect on this ideal model of “relationships,” let us use two more passages from Saint Vincent on the Trinity, as well as a short reflection by our confrere Getúlio Mota Grossi:

*If we want to have within us the image of the adorable Trinity and a holy relationship with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, let's establish ourselves in this spirit. What creates unity and single-mindedness in God, if not equality and the distinction of the Three Persons? And what creates Their love if not Their resemblance? And if there were no love among Them, what would be loveable in Them, said the Blessed Bishop of Geneva? So then, there's uniformity in the Blessed Trinity: what the Father wants, the Son wants; what the Holy Spirit does, the Father and the Son do and act the same way; They have only one power and one way of acting. That's the source of holiness and our model. Let's make ourselves uniform; we'll be many as if we were only one, and we'll have holy union in plurality. If we already have a little, but not enough, let's ask God for what we lack, and see in what we differ from one another in order to try to resemble one another and be equal; for resemblance and equality engender love, and love tends toward unity. So then, let's all strive to have the same likings and to be in agreement regarding the things that are done or are allowed to be done among us (Conference 206 of 23 May 1659 on Uniformity; CCD:XII:210-211).*

*Live together as having but one heart and one soul (cf. Acts 4:32) so that by this union of spirit you may be a true image of the unity of God, since your number represents the three Persons of the Most Holy Trinity.*

*I pray for this to the Holy Spirit, who is the union of the Father and the Son, that He may be yours likewise and give you profound peace in the midst of contradictions and difficulties, which can only be frequent among the poor. But remember also that this is your cross, by which Our Lord calls you to Himself and to His peace. Everyone has a high opinion of your work, and good people acknowledge that there is no other work on earth more honorable or holy, when it is performed faithfully (Letter of 30 July 1651 to Sister Anne Hardemont, in Hennebont; CCD:IV:238-239).*

Saint Vincent's devotion to the Trinity was not an intellectual exercise but a search from his heart. It led him and leads us, as a Congregation still living the charism of the Founder, to a two-fold experience:

**a) To imitate the mutual relations of the three Persons.** *The Church finds the ultimate source of its life and action in the Trinity. The Congregation, within the Church, does the same (Constitutions II, 20).* We are called to be an image of the Trinity, the merciful and compassionate God of Love (cf. Conference 152 of 6 August [1656] on "The Spirit of Mercy and Compassion"; CCD:XI:308-309.), the God of the Poor, the least, the weakest, to whom we are destined by our charism. This is true for us, the Daughters of Charity, and the whole Vincentian Family.

Called to union in love; uniformity in plurality; communion of life; unity in the diversity of gifts; animated by the Holy Spirit; sent, like Jesus, for the missionary charity of evangelizing the poor, a charism inspired by the Spirit in Saint Vincent, given to the Company and inherited by us, we are challenged to creative fidelity to the charism of following Jesus, evangelizer of the poor.

b) Therefore, our devotion to the Trinity, like that of Saint Vincent, **must be connected to the Mission** (cf. Conference 118 of 23 May 1655, Repetition of Prayer; CCD:XI:172-174), to the proclamation of the mystery of God's love for the poor, for their salvation (cf. *ibid*, 173). The Word was incarnated, sent out of love by the Father (cf. John 3:16), conceived by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit (cf. Luke 1:35) in the womb of Mary, and anointed by the same Spirit to bring the good news to the poor. In the Incarnate Word, present in the poor, Saint Vincent saw the most perfect manifestation of the love of God (cf. John 3:16, 14:9), the preferential love of the Triune God for the least of this world (Getúlio Mota Grossi, CM).

We are celebrating the 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Saint Vincent de Paul's charism. May this Jubilee Year bring us abundant fruit. With total trust in Providence, through the intercession of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, Saint Vincent de Paul, and all the Saints and

Blessed of the Vincentian Family, we continue the path inward toward our own self, and outward to our communities and to the people Jesus is sending us to serve, to those who may not know the charism yet or to those places where the charism has still to take root.

I hope and pray that this year's Holy Week, Easter, and Easter Season celebrations will bring additional joy and meaning to us and our life's mission as we reflect on the Trinity and take new steps toward the ideal model of "relationships."

May we continue praying for one another!

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

Tomaž Mavrič, CM  
Superior General

## **To all the Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission**

Rome, 8 March 2017

Dear Confreres,

*May the grace and peace of Jesus be always with us!*

It is with great joy that I share with you the news of one of the initiatives for the 400th Anniversary Jubilee Year. A worldwide Vincentian Family Symposium will be held in Rome on the weekend of 12-15 October 2017. Our Jubilee theme, “Welcome the Stranger,” is the focus of this event.

I believe it is a gift from God to us to celebrate this event together with Pope Francis, who will join us on Saturday, 14 October. We too will be privileged to have the reliquary with the Heart of Saint Vincent, which has begun its journey throughout the world, with us in Rome for that weekend. What a beautiful opportunity for us to be renewed in our missionary zeal!

With this in mind, I would like wholeheartedly to invite all the members of the Congregation of the Mission, all the members of the branches of the Vincentian Family, all those who live the Vincentian charism without belonging to a particular branch – parishioners, school and university communities, healthcare and social service collaborators, etc. – to come to Rome for this Symposium.

Thinking of our own Congregation, I would like to extend this invitation to the Symposium to our men in formation. More details about this will follow shortly. It is my hope that this event will animate them and kindle in them a deeper love of the charism and their missionary vocation.

I know that provinces, which presently have many, many vocations, may not have the financial resources to pay for such a trip to Rome. Therefore, we have established a special fund to help these seminarians at all levels of formation to come to Rome in the largest number possible. Please let us know the number you hope to bring and your needs. Together, we will work out a plan for them.

So that this invitation to participate in the Symposium be extended to as many members of the Vincentian Family as possible, I ask that you see to it that every confrere receives a copy of this letter. We hope that they will spread the word to all the corners of the globe, mobilize, and organize those with and for whom they work and serve or collaborate in different groups to come to Rome and participate in the symposium.

We also extend a special invitation to youth (ages 18-28). We hope that the Symposium will be a powerful time to animate them in the Vincentian vocation.

The Symposium will take place from Thursday (for registration only) through Sunday, 1:00 pm (13:00). Details about the Symposium are on the attached Information Sheet. As you will see, we also will be celebrating a prayer vigil in the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside-the-Walls, as well as a closing Mass on Sunday in Saint Peter's Basilica.

The 400th anniversary of the charism provides us with a unique opportunity to celebrate our Vincentian heritage, to give thanks for all that has been done, and to develop ideas and plans for the future. The consideration of our changing demographics and social contexts, the pressing needs of the poor, and our ability to respond best to these as a Family are of great importance.

After receiving the "Save the Date" announcement a few weeks ago, a number of groups began to organize group travel and/or pilgrimages, which would include the Symposium. I ask you to encourage your confreres and their ministry groups – parishioners, schools and their alumni, etc., – as well as members of your volunteer groups, affiliates, and other collaborators to think along those same lines.

The attached Information Sheet includes details about some travel agencies, which may be able to assist you with lodging and transportation.

There is no registration fee for the Symposium. Each participant is responsible for his/her own expenses for travel, lodging, and food.

We have developed a website through which we will update you on the events occurring over that weekend: <http://famvin400.info/>.

To register please click on:

English form:  
<https://depaulhousingforms.wufoo.com/forms/z1435kgz00dvph4/>

before 1 September 2017. For questions regarding the Symposium please write us at: [info.symposium@cmglobal.org](mailto:info.symposium@cmglobal.org).

Please note: if you require a visa to enter Italy and, consequently, a Letter of Invitation in order to obtain that visa, please click on this link:

<http://famvin400.info/blog/2017/03/03/letters-of-invitation/> by 1 July 2017.

I look forward to being with you soon in Rome!

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

Tomaž Mavrič, CM  
Superior General

## Vincentian Family Symposium: Welcome the Stranger

### Information Sheet

**REGISTRATION:** There is no fee to register for the Symposium!

To register:

<https://depaulhousingforms.wufoo.com/forms/z1435kgz00dvph4/>

For questions: [info.symposium@cmglobal.org](mailto:info.symposium@cmglobal.org)

**LETTERS OF INVITATION:** If you must present a Letter of Invitation to enter Italy, please fill out the attached request form. We are not able to provide letters stamped by the Secretary of State, except for members of the Congregation of the Mission and Daughters of Charity. If this is a requirement of the Embassy in your country, please seek alternative means to receive the documentation that is required of you.

If your country requires a hard copy of this form (as opposed to an emailed copy), you are asked to send €30 Euros (\$32 USD) to cover the DHL cost. Please follow this link:

<http://famvin400.info/blog/2017/03/03/letters-of-invitation/>

**ACCOMMODATIONS, MEALS, TRAVEL:** Participants are responsible to arrange for their own accommodations, meals, and travel. If assistance is required, you may wish to contact one of the following travel agencies, or one of your own choosing:

- TMC Travel, Daniela Fecchio Email: [vfs@tmctravel.it](mailto:vfs@tmctravel.it)  
Telephone: +39 06. 85304600
- ERNESTO TRAVEL: Wojciech Goj  
Email: [poland@ernesto-travel.pl](mailto:poland@ernesto-travel.pl)  
Telephone: +48 12633 6556 Website: <http://ernesto-travel.pl>



- Perillo Tours: Email: [info@learningjourneys.com](mailto:info@learningjourneys.com)  
Telephone 855-784-7687
- Catholic Journeys: Jimmy at [jimmy@catholicjourneys.com](mailto:jimmy@catholicjourneys.com) or  
Ann Marie at [office@catholicjourneys.com](mailto:office@catholicjourneys.com).  
Website: <http://catholicjourneys.com/>
- Speed System: Renata Azevedo or Lilian de Paula  
Telephone: 0055313298-1000  
Website: <http://www.speedsystem.com.br/>

**TRAVEL INSURANCE:** Participants are responsible to secure their own travel insurance for medical emergencies. Residents of the European Union may obtain the European Medical Insurance Card (E-111).

### **ROME TRAVEL TIPS:**

Currency: The Euro is the currency in Italy.

Electricity: The electrical current in Italy is 230V 50 Hz. Please make sure to bring your own charger.

Climate: In October, the average temperature starts off at around 19°C (66°F) and gradually drops until it reaches 14°C-15°C (57°F-59°F) at the end of the month.

Visit this website for additional information as you prepare for your trip to Rome.

<http://www.fodors.com/world/europe/italy/rome/travel-tips>

Please visit the Symposium website at <http://famvin400.info/> for the latest updates!!

## Schedule

We ask that you please plan to be present for the entire Symposium

### Thursday, October 12:

9:00 AM - 9:00 PM (21:00) Registration at the Collegio  
Apostolico Leoniano;  
Via Pompeo Magno, 21; Rome (RM)

### Friday, October 13:

9:00AM: Conferences  
12:00 M: Break and Lunch  
3:00 PM (15:00): Conference and Opportunity for Questions  
and Answers  
5:00 PM (17:00): Celebration of the Eucharist  
Evening Free

### Saturday, October 14:

Celebration of the Eucharist in private  
8:30 AM: Paul VI Auditorium (at the Vatican) opens  
9:30 AM: Symposium Program begins  
11:30 AM: Session with Pope Francis followed by  
Break and Lunch  
8:30 PM (20:30): Prayer Vigil at the Basilica of St. Paul  
outside the Walls

### Sunday, October 15:

8:30 AM: St. Peter's Basilica opens  
10:30 AM: Celebration of the Eucharist in St. Peter's Basilica

**Celebration of the Eucharist:** Priests are requested to bring their own albs and stoles for the celebrations of the Eucharist during the Symposium.

Please remember: all meals are on your own.

Further details will be provided as registrations are finalized.

<http://famvin400.info/>

## TEMPO FORTE Circular

(27 February – 3 March 2017)

Rome, 24 March 2017

*To all the confreres of the Congregation of the Mission*

*The Vincentian charism, today as in its beginnings, is based on the discernment of the signs of the times, and is expressed in the creativity of its responses. It joins evangelization and charity; preaching with promotion: dimensions of the same missionary action that seeks the salvation of every human person, and of the whole human person, in service of the Kingdom (Final Document, 2016 General Assembly, # 2.4.).*

My dear confreres,

*May the grace and peace of Jesus be always with us!*

On Sunday, 26 February 2017, we began the *Tempo Forte* with a time for reflection that was directed by Father Luigi Mezzadri, CM. Father used an icon (painted by the Polish artist, Mariola Zajączkowska-Bicho), which depicts Vincent de Paul as a young man, holding the Bible in one hand and bread in the other. Through means of this icon, Father Mezzadri spoke with us about the beauty and the relevance of our charism.

The remainder of the morning was spent in personal prayer. We concluded this time of reflection with the celebration of the Eucharist, which was presided by Father Shijo Kanjirathamkunnel, CM. Father Shijo took advantage of this time to thank the members of the Curia for their kindness during the three years that he served as Procurator and Postulator General. The following day, 27 February, Father travelled to the Mission in Alaska where he will now minister. Thank you, Father Shijo, for your ministry at the Curia and may God bless your ministry in Alaska!

Cardinal Franc Rodé, CM, joined us for dinner. It was a fraternal encounter during which we were able to exchange opinions with regard to current Church news and world politics.

## **DECISIONS OF THE GENERAL CURIA WITH REGARD TO THE CONGREGATION**

### **1. Presentation of Strategies (continued)**

During the time of our first *Tempo Forte* (29 September – 10 October 2016), the General Council, in accord with the *Final Document* of the 2016 General Assembly and in accord with the concerns of the Congregation, selected eight objectives or lines of action that we will focus on during the years 2016-2022. The objectives are: initial formation, international missions, confreres in difficult situations, the Vincentian Family, solidarity (*ad intra* of the Congregation), reconfiguration, a sense of belonging to the Congregation of the Mission and our Vincentian identity.

In the following *Tempo Forte* meetings of the General Council, we will look for appropriate strategies in order to move forward with these eight priorities. At this present meeting, we decided on the following strategies:

- In the area of initial formation, Father Javier presented for dialogue a proposal with regard to formation in Europe. Afterwards, we decided to send this proposal to all the Visitors in Europe and ask them to study it. At the same time, CEVIM will study this proposal. The ultimate objective of this is “*to rethink Initial Formation in Europe (Internal Seminary and Major Seminary)*.” Commitment # 4 of CEVIM taken at the 2016 GA, understood in the light of this line of action: “To organize intercultural houses of formation on the interprovincial and intercontinental levels” (2016 GA, 3. Lines of Action and Commitments, 3.2, a). From this proposal, we will establish a dialogue between CEVIM and the General Council in order to develop a plan with regard to initial formation.

At the same time, the Superior General has sent a letter to the presidents of the other Conferences and to their respective Visitors in order to communicate to them the desire of the General Council to enter into dialogue with them about a common project in the area of initial formation and in the area of the formation of formators.

- To promote solidarity in the Congregation of the Mission, Father Miles presented a new proposal, which included suggestions that were made during the previous *Tempo Forte*, especially with regard to the names of persons who could be members of a commission charged with preparing a Solidarity Plan. All the Visitors and provincial councils would then study this Plan in order to arrive at a definitive plan.
- In the area of international missions, Fathers Zeracristos, Aarón, and Mathew presented a first proposal, based on an objective evaluation of the present missions. However, in order to arrive at a true plan, it has to be enriched by themes like the following: sensitization and missionary formation in the provinces; providing greater stability to these missions; written agreements regarding the administration of these missions; relationships among the missionaries and the laity, the bishops, with the missionaries' provinces of origin, with the Superior General and his Council; preparation and formation of new candidates; vocations that began to emerge in these international missions; movement from an international mission to a mission dependent on a Conference or a province, etc. In the next *Tempo Forte*, a new draft of this proposal will be presented in order to arrive at a plan of action that the Council will undertake during the coming years.
- With regard to the priority of confreres in difficult situations, Father Turati's proposal (in draft form) has been enriched and, during the next *Tempo Forte*, this plan of action will be completed.

## 2. Meeting of New Visitors

This meeting will take place at Casa Maria Immacolata (Via Ezio) from 8-17 January 2018. Currently, there are 14 candidates who ought to participate in this meeting. The Vicar General and the Assistant General, Father Zeracristos, are responsible for developing a draft for this meeting for the next *Tempo Forte* in June.

## 3. Practical Guides for the Visitor and for the Local Superior

It seems apt to prepare a third edition of *A Practical Guide for the Visitor*. The two previous editions date from 1998 and 2005, respectively. The material proposed for the next New Visitors' Meeting (January 2018), the suggestions that will be made during the meeting, and other observations that have been suggested in the General Council will help prepare this new edition.

Given that there are only a few remaining copies of the *Practical Guide for the Local Superior*, it is planned to revise it and, later, publish a new edition of this *Guide*. The General Council will make the revision. The new edition is expected to be ready for the meeting of new Visitors in January 2018.

## OFFICES DEPENDENT ON THE GENERAL CURIA

[1] Father John Rybolt, CM, after a careful examination of our archives and our library, has proposed contracting a lay archivist (full-time) and a librarian (part-time) to organize all these materials in the way that they should be. The Council has endorsed this proposal.

[2] Father Jorge Rodríguez, Director of the Office of Communication, after a meeting with the Vatican's Office of Communication, presented us with an updated plan for communication. In order to implement this plan, we have a grant that a foundation has promised over the next three years. This support consists of a matching grant. The Superior General will request funds for this from some province.

[3] In order to deal with questions concerning CIF, the Director, Father Andrés Motto, CM, and the Sub-Director, Father Adam Bandura, CM, joined us. They explained to the Council the manner in which CIF has functioned and also presented some suggestions with regard to the present and future operations of CIF.

[4] The Office of Vincentian Solidarity (VSO). Father Gregory Semeniuk, CM, is the new Executive Director of this office as of January 2017. He was at the meeting of the General Council to speak about the activities of the VSO during the past three months. He also presented us with a simpler way of approving projects, presented to the VSO, regarding the international missions. The General Council approved this new method, which consists of evaluating those projects in dialogue with the superior of the respective mission, with the Treasurer General, and with the Assistant General responsible for said mission. This will eliminate the need of having to present these projects to the Superior General and his Council. At the same time, and as proposed by Father Gregory, we approved an additional 50,000 dollars in order to complete an already-approved project for the Province of Nigeria.

[5] Father Guillermo Campuzano, CM, the representative of the Congregation to the United Nations, was also at our meeting. He gave an extensive report on his mission. The Congregation of the Mission has the status of an NGO at the United Nations. Currently, the Vincentian Family has five representatives at the United Nations, with ten employees and five separate budgets. According to Father, the power of the Vincentian Family would be stronger and more effective if there were one representative of the Vincentian Family.

Father Guillermo is attempting to develop an international Vincentian network on behalf of *Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation* (Commitment 3.1.d – *Final Document* 2016 GA). This would be composed of a representative of each Conference of Visitors, the Coordinator of the Commission for the Promotion of *Systemic Change*, the Director of the VSO, the Coordinator of the VFO, and, naturally, the representative of the Congregation at the UN. He also proposes forming another network that would be

an international coalition for *advocacy*. The objective of these two suggestions is to develop an efficient information network in the Congregation. These projects will be studied more carefully during the next *Tempo Forte*.

## FINANCIAL MATTERS

The Financial Commission, composed of Mr. Thomas Beck, the Treasurer General, and Fathers Philippe Lamblin, CM, Rafael Eloriaga, CM, and George Shitsukane Busieka, CM, met on Saturday, 25 February 2017, for its annual meeting. On Monday, 27 February, Mr. Thomas Beck, President of the Commission, gave a detailed report to the council, about the work carried out over the two previous days. The Commission decided that, in addition to its annual meeting, it would have a video conference in the middle of the year; thus two meetings a year: one with everyone physically present and another through video conference.

Other matters presented: criteria and the results obtained from investment strategies, presentation of the 2017 budget, possible formation courses for future Treasurers General, insurance coverage of the Alaska mission by the Western Province of the United States, etc.

The discussion on financial matters concluded with some recommendations for the near future. At the end of this discussion, Father Joseph Geders, CM, made a final recommendation and bid farewell to his mission as Treasurer General. Thank you, Father Geders, for the work done and we wish you the best in your new mission! We welcomed the new Treasurer General, Father Paul Parackal, CM.

## INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS

**Bolivia:** On 1 August, Father Aidan R. Rooney, CM, will conclude his service as superior in the El Alto mission. His replacement is being considered.

Fathers Julio César Villalobos Laos (Province of Peru) and Andreas Medi Wijaya (Province of Indonesia) have spent the last three months in Beni (a multi-nationality department of Bolivia),



studying the possibility of establishing a new international mission. Their report indicates positive reasons for opening it. The mission would begin with two missionaries. We will make an appeal to see if other confreres wish to collaborate in this mission.

Father Aarón Gutiérrez, Assistant General, will soon travel to Bolivia in order to meet with all the missionaries and dialogue with them about some themes related to this mission.

**Angola:** There are currently two confreres ministering there. We hope that very soon there will be a third missionary. Several vocations already have arisen. Bishop Alfonso Cabezas Aristizábal, CM, is very interested in promoting these vocations and collaborating with them from a distance.

**Punta Arenas (Chile):** On 16 June 2017, Father Ángel Garrido concludes his mission as superior. He has stated that he would like to return to Spain. We are considering the appointment of a new superior, as well as a fourth missionary. When Father Aarón Gutiérrez, Assistant General, visits Bolivia, he will also visit this mission.

**Alaska:** On 22 May 2017, Father Pedro Nel Delgado, CM, will leave this mission and return to his province (Colombia).

## VINCENTIAN FAMILY

Father Aarón Gutiérrez, the delegate of the Superior General to the Vincentian Family, presented some specific guidelines in order to accompany the Vincentian Family in coordination with the Vincentian Family Office in Philadelphia. These guidelines, concretized with the verbs “to inform,” “to motivate,” “to accompany,” and “to participate,” were the object of dialogue in the Council and will guide its work with the Vincentian Family.

The Latin American Council of the Vincentian Family, known as FAVILA, is preparing for a meeting in Cochabamba (Bolivia) and it is expected that all the Latin-American Branches of the Family will participate in this meeting. These meetings are held every three years. The last meeting took place in 2015 in Guatemala.

During the meeting of the Executive Committee of the Vincentian Family (VFEC) on 6-7 January 2017, a megaproject, focused on the homeless, was approved for the whole Family. It is hoped that the project will begin on 1 July, as a way to celebrate our Jubilee Year and is expected to continue at least until 2030, to coincide with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

Father Giuseppe Turati, Coordinator of the Systemic Change Commission, informed the Council about some workshops carried out recently and about perspectives for the future.

### **CONFERENCES OF VISITORS**

On 17-25 February 2017, the Asia-Pacific Visitors' Conference (APVC) held its annual meeting in Vietnam. The program was quite varied and there was dialogue about the *Final Document* of the last General Assembly, the Vincentian Jubilee Year, and the new evangelization. There was also an opportunity to reflect upon the reality of each one of the provinces of this Conference, as well as upon the international missions of the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea.

The other Conferences have scheduled their annual meetings for the coming months: the United States (NCV), beginning on 19 April; Europe (CEVIM), from 23-27 April; Africa (COVIAM) from 1-8 May; Latin America (CLAPVI) from 22-29 October. We hope that all the Conferences have fruitful gatherings.

### **CALENDAR OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL**

For the next *Tempo Forte*, each member of the General Council will present his plan for the canonical visitations that correspond to him. This will enable the Superior General to plan his visits in coordination with each Assistant.

Beginning in June, the ordinary Council meetings will be held – in principle – on the second and fourth Wednesday of each month. This will facilitate the Council's planning.

The *Tempo Forte* concluded with a brief dialogue on the functioning of the Council itself.

N.B. I would like to make note here of the dialogue between Father David Kinnear, Secretary General of the *Union of Superiors General* (USG) and our Council, on Friday, 3 March 2017. In a wide-ranging exchange, we reflected on the situation of consecrated life today and on the common problems between our Congregation and consecrated life in general.

*Lord, Merciful Father, who instilled in Saint Vincent de Paul a great concern for the evangelization of the poor, infuse your Spirit in the hearts of His followers* (Prayer for the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Vincentian Charism).

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

Tomaž Mavrič, CM  
Superior General



### **A Profile of Bishop Jorge García Isaza, CM (1928-2016)**

By: Mario García Isaza, CM

For nearly two weeks, I, in close union with my brother confreres, lived an experience of pain and faith, of love and solidarity, and of incredible helplessness in confronting the advance of the inevitable future. Yes, as confreres we lived an experience in which we came to a deeper and clearer understanding of the meaning of life and death. At the same time, we all stood in admiration for the words that were spoken, not only verbally, but more significantly “spoken” in the attitude of an individual who was aware that he was living his “Passover” event. Those words and attitudes impacted us because they were spoken by someone who was our brother. I have just experienced the prolonged agony of Jorge and his passing over to the Father’s house.

This experience culminated with our coming together to celebrate Jorge’s funeral rites – a celebration that no one will forget because it was an authentic Paschal feast in which our sadness was mingled with the joyful resurrection acclamation: Alleluia. The Eucharistic celebration proclaimed the comforting certainty that for those who believe, death is not the end, but a new beginning; death is not a leap into emptiness, but a movement and a passing over to true life; death is not a dark, inescapable tunnel, but a door that opens to light; death is not a departure, but an arrival.

Thank you, a thousand thanks to all of those individuals who accompanied us during the time of this profound experience. We felt as though the whole Church accompanied us, as though the whole Congregation of the Mission and the entire worldwide Vincentian

Family were gathered together with us. We felt as though the poor, our friends, our lords and masters, and all those other individuals with whom our brother shared his life, his love and his joy – we felt as though all these persons – were present with us.

As we think about drawing a portrait of Jorge, it seems to be both a difficult and an easy task. Difficult, because certain lines could never express in a satisfactory manner the wonderful, rich, admirable, and multifaceted life that he lived. Easy, because there are so many memoirs and so many wonderful things that we know about this man and, therefore, we would just have to let the memories flow and, in turn, those memories come to life.

Let me highlight some dates, which I believe are milestones in Jorge's personal story (leaving aside many other less relevant dates):

2 July 1928 – birth of the fourth child of a blessed and admirable family.

7 July 1928 – through Baptism Jorge was gifted with a supernatural life.

15 August 1934 – received Jesus into his heart for the first time – Jesus whom he already loved and would continue to love for the rest of his life.

15 September 1940 – entered the Minor Seminary and began to walk in the footsteps of Vincent de Paul. He showed his brothers the path to follow and who could have any doubts about following him. So his brothers, Alberto, Octavio, Germán, Samuel and I followed along the same path (after some time, Octavio saw that such was not his calling and he became a doctor).

14 February 1954 – was ordained a priest by Bishop Tulio Botero Salazar, CM. Our parents and all the members of our family were filled with emotion during the celebration of the event.

5 May 1989 – was appointed by John Paul II to replace his brother, Germán, as Apostolic Prefect of Tierradentro.

17 February 2000 – became the first Apostolic Vicar of Tierradentro.

26 March 2000 – was ordained a bishop; the ordaining bishop was his brother, Germán (the first bishop of Caldas). This was certainly a unique situation and perhaps the first time in the history of the Church that a younger brother ordained his older brother as bishop.

25 April 2003 – the Pope accepted Jorge's resignation which was presented at the time prescribed by law. He comforted and edified all of us when he then dedicated himself to care for his mother (our mother) who was now more than 100 years old. At the time of mother's death, in a gesture of love and humility for the Congregation, he placed himself at the service of his superiors and accepted the ministry that was asked of him.

14 December 2015 – Jorge suffered a heart attack and thus began the final phase of his life, which ended with his death and his arrival into the kingdom on 16 August 2016.

Within that timeframe, a Vincentian, priestly, and missionary life was enriched by events, accomplishments, and virtue. Jorge engaged in various forms of ministry and, at all times, served the Church, the Congregation, and the poor by placing at their disposition all his abilities, his creativity, and his apostolic zeal.

As a person, Jorge revealed some extraordinary values. I would highlight three significant human virtues (other individuals might recall different aspects of his personality): his goodness, his joy, and his generosity. Jorge was a good man even though, by temperament, he was naturally impulsive. He revealed his goodness in his respect for others and in the manner in which he inspired confidence. Many people have spoken about his goodness, especially poor and humble men and women.

If there is some trait that distinguished Jorge, then it was certainly his joy. His joy was contagious and that created calmness even in the midst of very tense situations. His jokes and his ability to laugh at himself were well known by everyone. He was even able to bring levity into the midst of situations that others might have seen as tragic or as events of great concern. At the time of his heart attack in December 2015, he stated that he had arrived at the gates of heaven

but had been turned away because he was ugly. During the time of his agony, I asked him one day if he had slept well; he responded: yes, I closed my left eye and then my right eye became jealous. During family gatherings, which were filled with joy and celebration and love, Jorge always seemed to be the one who could make us laugh and have fun together.

Jorge's generosity knew no limits. Many people were the beneficiaries of his kindness. Jorge possessed nothing for himself; what was his belonged to everyone, especially those who were most in need. As Prefect and later as Bishop, he used great discretion in distributing the goods that he had. He assisted poor families, employees, students. No one was able to guess who the people who were aided by his generosity were. As soon as he became aware of someone in need, he reached out to that individual. He wanted no one to be lacking.

We could say many things about Jorge's priestly and Vincentian virtues. He was zealous and self-sacrificing in his ministry; he never measured the cost. During the last phase of his life, we often chastised him because, even though he was very aware of his limitations, he never refused anyone who asked for some pastoral service, although doing so might prejudice his health. When speaking among ourselves, we stated that the word "no" did not exist in his vocabulary.

I had the privilege of accompanying Jorge during the time of the tragic earthquake that occurred in Tierradentro in 1994. During the years that followed, Jorge dedicated himself completely to the task of rebuilding the area, humanly, socially, spiritually, and materially. He did so with much care and initiative and in a way that perhaps many people were never aware. The recovery process would probably never have been achieved but for the efforts of our confrere Jorge. We should remember that he was a member of the Nasa Quiwe Cooperative that was established by the national government, precisely for the purpose of rebuilding the area. I have been told that Jorge was a protagonist and a guiding light in that cooperative. I will never forget his words and tears and attitude (at that time he was both my pastor and my brother) when, during the evening hours

of 7 June 1994, the first helicopter arrived at the place where we had gathered with the students of the indigenous seminary and with many other indigenous people who had survived the destruction of the village of Irlanda. It was very difficult to convince him to leave us and that we would wait until the next day (or until whenever) to depart from that place. He wanted to remain with us and made a decision to leave only when he was told that his presence was more necessary in Belalcázar.

Jorge's pastoral zeal was a courageous zeal – courageous in the sense that he said what needed to be said and spoke with charitable clarity; courageous also in the sense that he was willing to take the risks that were demanded by his ministry. For some time he had to administer the affairs of the Prefecture from the town of La Plata and he agreed to that situation only because the national army asked him to do so (the army was aware of the threats and assassination plans that the FARC had directed against him). Father's pastoral zeal was nourished by and rooted in the Church's doctrine and that zeal was strengthened by his faithful adherence to the Magisterium. Certainly one of the most fruitful periods of his priestly ministry was the time that he ministered as a parish priest in Medellín. Bishop Tulio Botero Salazar had asked the community to take charge of the administration of a parish in a marginalized area of the diocese. Thus, the parish of Saint Vincent was established in the neighborhood of Córdoba. There, Jorge not only revealed his generous dedication in serving the community, but also manifested his visionary and administrative abilities as he put into practice the orientations and guidelines of Vatican II. As a result of his ministry that was supported by his confreres, (José Manuel Segura, Álvaro Quevedo, and others), the parish became known as a "model parish" in Colombia. In that parish, the Council's guidelines regarding the participation of the laity, liturgical renewal, and the organization of apostolic groups became a reality. Saint Vincent's parish was a place that many priests visited because they wanted to see how the teachings of the Council could be implemented in their own place of ministry. The parish became a true pastoral laboratory. The parish



community was composed of very Vincentian groups of persons: men and women who were marginalized, men and women who were the most abandoned members of society. Yet Jorge reached out to all those individuals with the spirit of Saint Vincent and, at the same time, dedicated his time and his effort to their human and Christian promotion. The archbishop affectionately and lovingly called Jorge, *the slum priest*.

Jorge's simplicity and austerity were a manifestation of his piety. He was not pompous nor did he accumulate superfluous material goods. It would be difficult to find another bishop who, at the time of his death, left the assets that my brother left, practically nothing.

His love for the Congregation was both profound and endearing and was expressed in a thousand different ways. Indeed, one of those most profound expressions can be found in his gesture at the time when he had completed his ministry as bishop and after he had cared for his aged mother – that gesture of placing himself in the hands of his superiors and a willingness to do whatever they requested. That love was expressed in his unrestrained obedience – something that was not always easy because much was asked of him. He was a member of the provincial council and assistant provincial during the time that Luis A. Mojica was Visitor; he was also a formator and in charge of parish missions; he ministered in Bolivia and in the Montería Province of Colombia. During the final months of his life, he accepted the decisions of his superiors even though those decisions were difficult. There are some documents that reveal his concern for the present and the future of the Congregation and the province. He was pained by the abandonment of our ministry of popular missions. On more than one occasion, I had the opportunity to dialogue with him and, therefore, became aware of his concerns. I was impressed, when, two or three days before his death, he spoke deliriously and without coherence and repeated for many minutes the words: “the seminary, the seminarians, they are in the seminary but they are not of the seminary....” I wondered and I keep wondering what pastoral, priestly, and Vincentian concerns about formation could have been going through my brother's exhausted mind.

Jorge was a man of faith, but a faith that went beyond words, a faith that informed his whole being and all his activity. During the long and painful days of his final illness, he edified people with his attitudes and words, which expressed a total abandonment into the hands of God. Everything could be summarized in an event that for us, his seven brothers who accompanied him, was shockingly distressing. When a combination of severe cardiac, renal, and pulmonary complications produced a serious situation with regard to his health, we listened to the suggestions of one of his doctors who offered three distinct procedures: intubation, open-heart surgery, or dialysis. The first option would have prolonged his life in an almost artificial way; the second option entailed the almost certain risk of death (the other doctors had assured us that, in his condition, Jorge would not be able to endure surgical intervention and, therefore, his chances of survival were minimal). The third option was not only as risky as surgery but, given the condition of his heart, if he survived, would mean that during the time he had left, he would have to undergo dialysis three times a week (and each session would be a four-hour procedure). We had to make a decision and so while we were all gathered beside his bed, Jorge, still lucid, told us categorically: look, I learned from Saint Vincent that, during times of illness, the will of God is expressed through the members of the medical profession. I accept with absolute tranquility, and as the will of God, whatever the doctors decide.

During the funeral celebration, as I thanked all those individuals who had accompanied us, I said that Jorge, my dear brother, was a just man in the fullest sense of that biblical word – and here I repeat those words, *Jorge was a just man!*

All that I have stated here is but a small example of what Jorge might have said or written. These thoughts have flowed from my heart. As a homage to my brother, I share these words in a loving manner with the members of my family, with my confreres, and with all the members of the Vincentian Family.

Translated: Charles T. Plock, CM

**Pastoral Memorandum of the  
Portuguese Episcopal Conference  
concerning Four Centuries of Evangelization  
and Three Centuries of Presence in Portugal  
of the Congregation of the Mission**

Fatima, 10 November 2016

**1. Vincentian Charism**

Four centuries have passed since Vincent de Paul was moved by apostolic zeal and received the heavenly inspiration that called him to found a community of missionaries dedicated to the evangelization of the poor and to the delicate responsibility of spiritual, doctrinal, and pastoral formation of the clergy. Thanks to the apostolic fruitfulness of Vincent's founding insight, the Congregation of the Mission, the Company of the Daughters of Charity, and a multitude of institutions of social service were created for the poorest and the marginalized, of which the Vincentian Conferences today are only one example.

In 2017, we also celebrate the third centenary of the arrival of the Vincentian charism in Portugal, brought here by the Congregation of the Mission.

The Portuguese Episcopal Conference welcomes the joyful anniversary and joins in the thanksgiving and praise that the whole Vincentian Family offers the Lord on this commemorative date. Actually, there are the two events, when we remember not only Saint Vincent's ecclesial mission, but also the charism that inspired him, on behalf of the poor, for the reform of the clergy and the charity he was able to bring about in so many social works.

If many of the French aristocracy of that time found counsel and spiritual assistance in Saint Vincent, it was the poor of the rural world and of the cities that most stirred his soul, encouraging him to practice the works of spiritual and corporal mercy. He chose, therefore, to pastorally serve the Church as a parish priest in a humble rural village and, little by little, he discovered that the true reality of poverty refers as much to the lack of bread as to the need for a living and enlightened faith. Hence, the urgency that he felt in promoting mainly three lines of action: to organize charities, groups of lay Christians dedicated to serving the poor; to carry out popular missions that would awaken the humble people of the countryside and educate them in faith; and to dynamize the cultural and pastoral formation of the clergy by means of conferences and the organization of seminaries.

From the vast work of charity of this founder of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity, let us recall here two important lessons. The War of the Fronde with its tentacles of violence had devastated several regions of France, leaving hunger, disease, and all sorts of miseries in its wake. It produced great numbers of displaced people who, fleeing from the fields of battle, were arriving in the cities. Instead of improving the situation, this made it even more serious. With imagination and determination, Vincent immediately went about putting into action a project aimed at curbing the dehumanization of these migrations. He began to send food and other necessities on various roads, thus preventing the poor from having to take long journeys and making life less difficult for them.

Early on, Vincent discovered the importance of mobilizing material and human resources in a well-organized and, therefore, a more effective manner. Once, while preparing to celebrate a Sunday Mass, he was informed of the existence in a distant place of a family whose members were seriously ill. From the pulpit, he exhorted the hearts of the hearers to help in such a painful situation. The response was generous and quick.

But then, how to ensure continuity for this temporary gesture of charity? Vincent realized from experience that charity without organization could end up in a lack of charity. Therefore, he became a master in the art of organizing and directing charities, never forgetting that the charity of Christ should always encourage dedication and service to the poor. Social action, evangelization, formation of the clergy are the three fundamental fields where Saint Vincent worked and where the charism that marked the works that he founded remains alive. That is why, in truth and justice, John Paul II called Vincent de Paul “a man of action and prayer, administration and imagination, of leadership and humility, a man of yesterday and of today” (Address to the General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission in 1986).

## **2. Presence in Portugal**

The Sons of Saint Vincent entered Portugal in the early years of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Supported by a Brief of Pope Clement XI authorizing the Congregation’s establishment in the Kingdom of Portugal, Father José Gomes da Costa (1667-1725), a native of Torre de Moncorvo, and superior of the house of Monte Célio in Rome, where he had entered the Congregation, arrived in Lisbon in November 1716, to start the foundation. The Procurator of the Supreme Court of Justice of the Kingdom granted legal existence to the Congregation of the Mission in a document dated 20 May 1717. The Province of Rome, from which the founder came, quickly sent four priests and one brother to form the first community. In 1720, the first house of the Mission was founded, in the farm area of Rilhafoles, in Lisbon, as the central house from which would spread intense and fruitful activity destined to the formation of the clergy and the popular missions.

Until 1834, the life of the Congregation developed around three great centers: Lisbon (house of Rilhafoles), Braga (house of La Cruz), and Evora (the seminary). In addition to this missionary action in the country, there was also intense apostolic activity in

the Far East (seminaries in Goa and Macao, missions in Beijing, Nanking, and Malacca), and also in Brazil, with the missionary activity of Father Antonio Ferreira Viçoso, who would later become the seventh bishop of Mariana.

After its suppression in 1834, the Congregation began to be reestablished after 1857. During this second period, which continued until the establishment of the Republic in 1910, the Congregation's main activities were popular missions, youth formation in schools, the founding and accompaniment of Vincentian Conferences and religious associations, especially in the church of San Luis de los Franceses, in Lisbon, in the residence of Santa Quiteria, Felgueiras, and in Funchal, Madeira, where, along with the chaplaincy of the Hospicio Princesa Dona Amelia, the Congregation assumed the direction of the diocesan Major Seminary.

This admirable growth was abruptly interrupted in 1910, when two virtuous missionaries were assassinated, the priests Alfredo Fragues, Visitor; and Bernardino Barros Gomes, a well-known scientist. Then, reborn from the ashes in 1927, the efforts of the provincial leaders concentrated on the organization of communities and their respective works as well as on the formation of new missionaries. With this purpose in mind, they developed several seminaries: Pombeiro and Oleiros (Felgueiras), and later, Mafra and Braga. New conditions and requirements for academic and pedagogical training forced the establishment of Student Housing in Ameal, Porto, and in La Luz, Lisbon. A new phase of the Mission *Ad Gentes* began in 1940 with the founding of missionary communities in Mozambique. In the 1960s, half of the province's members, almost always the youngest, headed for Mozambique. This required the institution of a more agile and well-organized legal structure in the Mozambican land. There, in 1965, the Vice-Province was born. In addition to their presence side-by-side with the native populations, the missionaries took on the work of the seminaries – in line with the charism of the Founder, and under conditions of great ecclesial responsibility. They directed the formation of the Mozambican clergy in three seminaries. Most of the local clergy, as well as many of the bishops of that country, have passed through these seminaries.

After the independence of Mozambique, the return of some missionaries allowed new works to be undertaken, especially parishes in the dioceses of Santarém, Beja, and Portalegre-Castelo Branco, in addition to the works of the missionary apostolate, already existing in Portugal. The Congregation returned to the traditional work of the popular missions with renewed dedication and evangelizing dynamics. From north to south, teams made up of confreres, Daughters of Charity, and laity studied how to announce the Gospel message in new social and cultural contexts, touring innumerable parishes, invited by the respective bishops and parish priests.

Among these renewed initiatives of evangelization are the Family Communities of Charity, small groups of pastoral agents available to assure the continuity of the evangelization carried out in the popular missions.

### **3. Challenges of the Vincentian Charism for our time**

The heart of the Vincentian Charism is the exercise of charity, modeled by the Divine Teacher. Saint Vincent summed up in two the virtues of the Son of God: union with the Father and charity towards men and women. The updating of this charism today passes on commitment to the poorest that demands concrete actions from all Christians, so that, in the spirit of mission and service to the Church, they are translated into works, rather than into words.

Before anything else and evermore urgent is the return to the Congregation's origins and the spread of the thought and work of the Saint of Charity; this is an imperative of pastoral programs. This new wine of the charism will certainly have consequences for pastoral activity and for the quality of service to the wider Church.

It is also important to see how the institutions are called to be the embodied expression of the charism. But institutions are immersed in the history of rapidly changing societies. That is why it is necessary to be attentive to the signs of the times and discern, in situations that are difficult and so often inhumane, how the Vincentian Charism has to respond with works of mercy to the cry of the poor.

One has to have the courage to readjust the structures from other times, just as clothes have to be refitted for a body that grows and is transforming. In this process of listening and discerning in order to decide how best to participate in ecclesial structures, the prophetic vision of *aggiornamento* of Saint John XXIII continues to be potent to the present day. Opening new horizons, reviving the missionary spirit, being available to go to far-off places, this is characteristic of men who are called by God to continue the salvific work of his Son. Without being naïve or overly optimistic, we do live in times of openness to new projects, recognizing that it is always possible to look ahead and participate in ecclesial initiatives that look beyond our geographical reality. In today's globalized world, borders are mainly the limited horizons where we have locked away our minds and which prevent us from going further.

The Vincentian Charism carries a genetic code of spiritual content transmitted from generation to generation to all branches of the Family. That nucleus of grace that the Spirit animates makes it live in a healthy and continuous "nonconformity with the things of the present world" (Romans 12:2) in a process of a unending search. Really, a gift from heaven, this nucleus of grace is timeless and invites ongoing renewal. Only with the courage of prophets, the vision of mystics, the zeal of missionaries, the simplicity of pure-hearted men and women, and inspired by charity can the spiritual children of Saint Vincent continue doing what the Children of God did in the world.

Those called to evangelize the poor have, as their mission, to announce to them the peace and justice that come as the fruit of the Kingdom of God. To those people who, in this world of crisis and helplessness, are still marked by misfortune, such as the unemployed, refugees, and victims of ever more refined forms of poverty, (Vincentians) must provide reasons to hope for a more just and fraternal world.

In Christ, the Episcopal Conference encourages the heirs of the Vincentian Charism in Portugal to feel committed to all situations that degrade the dignity of man.



In light of the message of mercy witnessed during the Pontificate of Pope Francis, both believers and non-believers are now more attentive to the dehumanization found at the human and existential margins of society. The Vincentian Charism goes forth to share this message of merciful love, which must place the world of the poor at the center of attention of all Christians and men of good will.

Translated from Spanish by Dan Paul Borlik, CM



## Holy Father's Message to AIC

From the Vatican on February 22, 2017.

In this year 2017, you celebrate the 400th anniversary of the first Confraternities of Charity, founded by Saint Vincent de Paul in Châtillon. It is with joy that I join spiritually with you in celebrating this anniversary, and I convey my best wishes that this beautiful initiative continue its mission of bringing authentic witness of God's mercy to the poorest. May this anniversary be an occasion for you to give thanks to God for His gifts and to open yourselves to His surprises, to discern, through the breath of the Holy Spirit, new ways to render the service of charity ever more fruitful.

The Charities were born of the tenderness and compassion in the heart of Monsieur Vincent for the poor, often marginalised or abandoned in the countryside and in the towns. Vincent's work for them and with them was intended to reflect God's goodness towards His creatures. He saw the poor as representatives of Jesus Christ, as members of His suffering body; he grasped that the poor, too, were called to build up the Church and in turn to convert us.

In the wake of Vincent de Paul, who entrusted the care of these poor people to the laity, and especially to women, your Association aims to promote the development of the most disadvantaged, and to alleviate the physical, moral, material and spiritual suffering. And it is in God's Providence that the basis of this commitment is found. What is Providence, if not the love of God Who acts in the world and asks for our cooperation? Today too I would like to encourage you to accompany the person fully, paying special attention to the precarious living conditions of many women and children. The life of faith, the life united with Christ, enables us to see the person's reality, his incomparable dignity, not as something limited to

material goods, to social, economic and political issues, but rather as a being created in the image and semblance of God, like a brother or sister, our neighbour for whom we are responsible. In order to “see” poverty and to approach it, it is not enough to follow great ideas but rather to live from the mystery of the Incarnation, this mystery so dear to Saint Vincent de Paul, the mystery of this God Who lowered Himself by becoming man, Who lived among us and died to elevate man and to save him. These are not simply fine words, but rather the very being and action of God. It is to this reality that we are called to live as a Church. This is why human development, the authentic liberation of man, does not exist without the proclamation of the Gospel “for the most sublime aspect of human dignity lies in this vocation of man to communicate with God.”

In the Bull for the opening of the Jubilee Year, I expressed my hope that “the year to come will be steeped in mercy, so that we can go out to every man and woman, bringing the goodness and tenderness of God!” (5). I invite you to follow this path. The credibility of the Church pursues the way of merciful love and compassion that is open to hope. This credibility also depends upon your personal witness: it is not merely a question of encountering Christ in the poor, but also of the poor perceiving Christ in you and in your action. By being rooted in Christ’s personal experience you can contribute to a “culture of mercy” that profoundly renews hearts and opens them up to a new reality.

Finally, I would like to invite you to contemplate the charism of Saint Louise de Marillac, to whom Monsieur Vincent entrusted the inspiration and coordination of the Charities, and to find in her the finesse and gentleness of mercy that never hurts or humiliates anyone, but instead raises up, restoring courage and hope.

By entrusting you to the intercession of the Virgin Mary and to the protection of Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac, I impart to you my Apostolic Blessing and ask you to pray for me.

Francis

## Mass for the 400th Anniversary of the Teams of Saint Vincent « AIC-France »

Bertrand Ponsard, CM

It was on 8th March 2017, International Women's Day, that the teams of Saint Vincent, AIC France, gathered at Notre-Dame de Paris in order to celebrate 400 years of the Confraternities of Charity. It was an exceptional day and the AIC filled the nave of the immense cathedral. And how could one not make a link with all those generations who, for more than 800 years, prayed and continue to pray under that vault, built with such genius!

We had more than 30 priests and brothers come to join us in thanksgiving for the work undertaken by Saint Vincent with a handful of energetic and committed women. Welcomed by the Vicar General of the diocese, Msgr. Benoist de Sinety, we entered in procession, following the heart of Saint Vincent de Paul.

During the Mass, we were to hear the story of the *inhabitants of Niniveh who converted in response to Jonah's proclamation*. Then followed the Gospel in which Christ shows that he is even greater than Jonah, the Christ who indicates the urgency of conversion. Now the sign offered to humanity is no longer the preaching of Jonah but the Resurrection of Christ on the third day after his death! It is a sign of hope given in faith by the mercy of God. When the King of Niniveh asks him: who knows if God will not rethink himself, if he does not return to the fire of his anger? God responds in his charity, renouncing all chastisement, through Christ, and reveals that his is the God of tenderness and mercy. A God who desires only our Good, a God who is close to every human being, in order to save humanity.

The sign of the Cross, sign of Charity, becomes, therefore, the unique sign of conversion which allows humanity to escape the judgement which is to come. How? By entering into the Charity of Christ, who has come to save that which was lost. To love the neighbor as He has loved us is to preach, to this wicked generation, like our own, the means of conversion. The saints have shown one and the same Charity which finds its source in God. In the same way that Christ allowed his heart to be pierced, the saints practiced love for their sisters and brothers, right to the end. Saint Vincent and Saint Louise are privileged witnesses of this love.

It is now already 400 years since, having discovered the works of spiritual mercy, at Folleville, Monsieur Vincent, deeply moved, changed his life. He left for Châtillon-des-Dombes (today called Châtillon-sur-Chalaronne). One Sunday, someone alerted him to the needs of a family, all of whose members were ill. He preached and touched hearts, to encourage the parishioners to come to their aid. It was a success and a veritable procession set off. But what would they do in the following days? It was vital to organize. And with women who volunteered and were moved by compassion, women of faith who desired to act, he created the first Confraternity of Charity. On the 8th of December, feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, the first Charity received its rules. The Virgin Mary was proposed as model and protectrix of this women's charity! Mary is the woman who watches over suffering humanity and manifests still and always her maternal vocation.

The work had begun. Later, at each mission given in a parish by the Lazarist priests and brothers, a Charity was established. Today, the International Association of Charity (AIC) acts as it has done since that first day! Let us recall that there are almost 150,000 teams in the world. But what do numbers matter? What matters most is heart, and an effective organisation that loves the neighbour truly and facilitates the conditions for the integral development of each person met. We might say with the team-members of France; *Change the world; women are doing it!*

To sum up the sense of the celebration: while we might be a wicked generation, God gives us signs of his mercy and calls us to conversion; let us love as best we can for *mercy does not fear judgement*.

The celebration ended with a procession to place the heart of Saint Vincent in the chapel in the cathedral which is dedicated to him. Afterwards, team-members and their hosts set off on the *bateaux-mouches*! For many, this was a first in their lives. Then, everyone met up at the Maison-Mère of the Lazaristes, 95 rue de Sèvres, Paris. There, light refreshments were served by the young people from Ecole d'Application Albert de Mun. Many spoke of thanksgiving, the unveiling of the magnificent tapestry made by the hosts, the well-wishers and the team-members. Most noteworthy were those women who had participated from their jail! There was also an exhibition of photographs. In short, it was a beautiful, full day, and then everyone departed for home, but not without telling us how happy each had been to be welcomed so warmly by the community of the Lazarists.

Translated by John E. Rybolt, CM

# 5 Theme: Mission and Charity in our Vincentian Charism

## Mission and Charity in the Congregation of the Mission

By: Francisco Javier Álvarez, CM  
Vicar General

The reflection I offer you is limited to the Congregation of the Mission. The sources I have used are, above all, personal experience and direct contact with many provinces and communities of the Congregation, as well as the data provided by our *Catalogue*.

In this work, I will analyze how our Congregation lives and works at mission and charity through the principal ministries that it develops today. To do this, I begin by presenting in a detailed manner the ministries it carries out in the present day, as well as the corresponding number of missionaries.

Parish Ministry .....	870
Missionary Parishes .....	263
Popular Missions.....	111
Sanctuaries and Pilgrimages .....	70
Seminaries, formation of our own and formation of the clergy ..	303
Missions “Ad Gentes” .....	174
Daughters of Charity (Director, chaplain) .....	89
Teaching in schools and universities .....	186
Social Communications (publications, radio, television) .....	20
Special Studies .....	86
Chaplains (military, immigrants, hospitals, associations).....	120
Chaplains (Vincentian Lay Groups).....	78
Direct Service of the Poor .....	61

Manual Work.....	25
Administration .....	130
Retired, ill, convalescing.....	338
Other .....	159
Absent from the Congregation.....	186 <sup>1</sup>

Using the binomial “mission and charity,” we can group the aforementioned ministries into these three categories:

**1. Ministries that incarnate Mission and Charity most directly.**

Missionary parishes, popular missions, and missions “ad gentes,” with a total of 17% of the missionaries, can go in this category.

It has never been in doubt that the Missions “ad gentes” are a particular ministry of the Congregation. We know that in the life of our Founder, missionaries of the Congregation began to write golden pages in the book of foreign missions. Vincent, referring to himself on 17 June 1657, three years before his death, pronounced these words: “*I myself, old and infirm as I am, must, nonetheless, have this disposition, even to go to the Indies.*”<sup>2</sup> Referring to the Congregation as a whole, he said: “*Let’s ask God to give the Company this spirit, this heart, this heart that causes us to go everywhere.*”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. “2013 Annual Statistics of the Congregation of the Mission,” *Vincentiana*, April-June, 58 (2014) 126-129. These data are relative, but they serve to give a fairly close idea of the ministries of the Congregation. In these statistics, the ministry “missionary parishes” does not appear; nevertheless, it does appear in previous statistics. One can see, for example, G. Turati “2011 Annual Statistics of the Congregation of the Mission,” *Vincentiana*, January-March, 56 (2012) 95-98. I have opted to keep this ministry, adapting the percentages of the other ministries according to the statistical data of years prior to 2014.

<sup>2</sup> *Vincent de Paul, Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, translated and edited by Jacqueline Kilar, DC; and Marie Poole, DC; et al; annotated by John W. Carven, CM; New City Press, Brooklyn and Hyde Park, 1985-2014; volume XI, p. 357; future references to this work will be indicated using the initials CCD followed by the volume number, then the page number, for example, CCD:XI:357.

<sup>3</sup> CCD:XI:264.



Our Constitutions concretely mention five ministries proper to the Congregation, among which appear the missions “ad gentes” (cf., C. 16). The 1992 General Assembly gave particular emphasis to this ministry, perhaps with the purpose of counteracting a certain tendency, in more than a few places, to enclose oneself in one’s own province and to take on fixed ministries, in detriment to openness to the very universal mission of the Church and the missions, including in one’s own country.<sup>4</sup>

How do our missions “ad gentes” and our missionary parishes concretize Mission and Charity? Bearing in mind that, in the missions “ad gentes,” Jesus Christ and the gospel are not known or very little known, the missionaries make use of simple catechesis and other elements to make known the kerygma. They carry out their celebrations with a great catechetical sense in order to facilitate the understanding of the Christian signs and symbols. At the same time, they try to establish Christian communities on the bases of evangelical fraternity and solidarity with the most needy.

Almost all our foreign missions are located in areas of great poverty where the urgent need of charity is evident. The missionaries concretize charity in assistance projects (small health centers, distribution of clothes and food) and also in development projects, especially those related to education. The “systemic way,” adopted officially by the 2010 General Assembly, responds to a concrete way of charity adapted to modern times. It seeks to tackle the causes of poverty, fleeing from mere assistance, which is incapable of breaking the vicious circle of poverty. This style of charity, very much in keeping with the spirit of Saint Vincent, is becoming more and more common among our missionaries.

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. J. I. Fernández Hermoso de Mendoza, “The Present Day Missionary Extension of Both Congregations: The Congregation of the Mission and the Company of the Daughters of Charity,” in Collection, *Saint Vincent and the Mission “ad gentes,”* XXI Week of Vincentian Studies, CEME, Salamanca 1995, 258-259.

Charity, of itself, is evangelizing. Vincent spoke very frequently of evangelizing “by word and work.” He frequently insisted that what the evangelizer does is ratified and reinforced by his words, and vice versa. This unity between evangelization and human promotion is one of the basic principles of the Social Doctrine of the Church since the 1971 Synod.<sup>5</sup> Pope Francis is very much in this same line.

The popular missions have developed very different evangelizing actions: catechesis at all levels, talks, varied and pedagogic celebrations, dialogues with young people and adults, establishing communities, etc. Since popular missions are extraordinary evangelization actions, limited to a relatively short time, it is not possible to think about human promotion projects. Moreover, in the places and countries where popular missions are held, the poverty, generally speaking, is not as drastic as in the so-called “ad gentes” mission countries. However, one does seek, in the different evangelizing activities, to sensitize people so that they understand that charity is an essential part of the faith and that one cannot live the faith without solidarity with the neediest.

## **2. Ministries which connect Mission and Charity indirectly**

***(Formation, attention to the Daughters of Charity and the Vincentian Family, teaching in high schools and universities and administration)***

About 30% of the missionaries work in these ministries with the common objective of forming or encouraging others so they might assimilate the Vincentian charism or work in the line of Mission and Charity. All these ministries are necessary for the proper functioning of the Congregation. For example, all the offices related to administration: Visitor, Provincial Treasurer, Secretary, etc.

Others, for example, teaching, are recognized by our Constitutions as proper ministries as long as they welcome the poor and are for their promotion, impart an education based on Christian values,

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. 1971 Synod of Bishops, *Justice in the World*, AAS LXIII (1971), 924. See also, *Centesimus Annus*, 5.

and inculcate a sense of the poor and the spirit of the Founder (cf., S. 11, § 3). Furthermore, we are advised that this ministry should only be taken on “*where it is needed to achieve the purpose of the Congregation*” (S. 11, § 1) and it will be carried out “*not only in schools of various kinds, but also within the family circle, in places of work, and across the whole spectrum of society, wherever young people and adults spend their time*” (S. 11, § 2). These cautions are necessary in order that our educational centers for young people and adults do not deviate from the Vincentian line. In practice, we know it is not always easy to use these educational platforms to transmit the spirit of the Founder, and even to inculcate Christian and Vincentian values, given the educational dynamic itself, which tends to absorb the student totally in content, courses, and varied intramural and extramural activities.

Attention to the Daughters of Charity and the Vincentian Family are two typical ministries that relate Mission and Charity indirectly. The missionaries dedicated to this work should have a firm grasp of Vincentian spirituality. By means of formation and spiritual accompaniment, the missionaries seek to reinforce Vincentian convictions in the Daughters of Charity and the Vincentian laity, so that they may give themselves to the spiritual and/or material service of the poor. I wish to emphasize, as an especially important ministry, the work of the Directors of the Daughters of Charity, established in the time of our Founder. One could sustain, it seems to me, that were it not for this office, the Company of the Daughters of Charity would have been deprived of an important means for maintaining their charismatic identity in the Church.

With regard to the formation of diocesan clergy, we must say that this ministry comes from the time of our Founder in its varied forms: retreats for ordinands (about 14,000 during the life of Saint Vincent), direction of seminaries, etc. Throughout its history, the Congregation has written some wonderful chapters about this ministry which, according to our present Constitutions, forms a part of the end of the Congregation (cf., C. 1, 3°). In those dioceses where the Congregation was present, the missionaries very frequently were called to take charge of the seminary or direct retreats for priests.

Without fear of exaggeration, one can say that the Congregation has left its mark in not a few dioceses precisely for its dedication to this ministry so beloved of our Founder.

Today, this ministry is considerably diminished; in part, because the dioceses have obtained their own formators and professors, and also because the Congregation has fewer formators trained for this mission. Other forms of service to the clergy are being pursued; for example, the service of confession, spiritual accompaniment, welcome in our houses, retreats or spiritual exercises. Their only objective must be to help them to live their vocation and to carry out their ministry, without ever losing sight of the importance of evangelization and attention to the neediest, in consonance with the two great priorities of the Church.

### **3. Ministries which leave some questions relative to Mission and Charity**

Here we are referring to non-missionary parochial ministry. Basically, it has to do with conventional parishes which tend to maintain the faith and attend to those who declare themselves practicing believers. About 27% of the missionaries work in this ministry.

Vincent never felt great enthusiasm for the Congregation's commitment to parishes. He considered that this ministry did not fit well with the project of the Congregation. In practice, he made some exceptions. For example, in the case of parishes attached to seminaries. These were justified in as much as they served to aid seminarians to acquire experience in priestly ministry. On other occasions, he was practically obliged to take on a parish at the request of the queen or Cardinal Richelieu. Outside these more or less exceptional cases, Vincent was opposed to parishes because they took away from the mobility of the missionaries.<sup>6</sup>

In the 80s and 90s, there were occasions to reflect and dialogue about how to make these parishes platforms for mission and charity.

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<sup>6</sup> CCD:II:656-657.

With this same purpose, a European meeting on the Vincentian parish was held in Naples in 2009, with the evocative title: *The Parish, an opportunity or an impediment to live the Vincentian charism?* The conclusion was: “*the parish is an opportunity to live the charism but only when it overcomes two deviations which threaten present-day parish ministry: the tendency to make the parish ‘a community nest’ or a point of self-reference and the tendency to consider the parish as a ‘center for services.’*”<sup>7</sup>

Father Domínguez affirms that an effort has been made to exercise parish ministry from a missionary perspective, but not much has been achieved. Efforts have been made in rural parishes with the purpose of building self-sustaining, evangelizing communities; but, at least in Europe, this intent has ended up with teams of priests of the Congregation absorbed by the parish structure. A little more has been achieved in Latin America by means of trained catechists, capable of evangelizing wide rural areas. In parishes in the marginal areas of cities, the hoped for results have not been obtained either. Efforts have been made to be with the poor and to promote them, but we have not known how or have not been able to evangelize. In these places, the parish continues to be a “center for services.” The same can be said about the parishes in the city.

It is a shame that a *Guide for Parishes* has not been composed, as the General Assembly requested. The Superior General and his Council took the necessary steps for it in 2011, but the inadequate response from the provinces prevented drafting the document, which, without doubt, would have been very useful.

Starting from the reflections that 23 provinces made, the Superior General and his Council recalled the great variety and richness of this ministry, as well as the difficulties and deficiencies encountered. One of these was the “*risk of justifying and legitimizing all our parishes so that ultimately our Vincentian identity is weakened and becomes*

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<sup>7</sup> Cited by Pablo Domínguez, “Vincentian Parishes and the New Evangelization” in *Vincentiana*, January-March, 57 (2013) 105.

*devoid of meaning.*”<sup>8</sup> Perhaps the most important point of the letter is 2b, which presents the characteristics parishes should have to be truly Vincentian, based on the responses of the 23 provinces. I present the most important:

- The Vincentian parish ought to be located among the poor and at their service.
- Vincentian parishes should be a “place of mission,” in the sense that they should go beyond the animation of the Christian faithful. They should be in a continual state of going out to the poorest and most abandoned.
- All the actions and pastoral activities should be inspired by the Vincentian spirit. This means that the pastoral work should be planned and carried out in community. Our five specific virtues should impregnate all the pastoral work.
- The missionary parish should prioritize Vincentian ministries and the pastoral proposals that are most in harmony with our spirit: holistic evangelization that involves service of the Word and the practice of charity, formation and participation of the laity, development of a prophetic ministry and attention to the new forms of poverty, as well as to excluded minorities.<sup>9</sup>

Certainly, all these requirements guarantee the charismatic identity of parish ministry and perfectly justify its existence. However, the reality is that there are many parishes far from what is pointed out here. Furthermore, given the parish structure, tending to the service of more-or-less practicing Christians, it becomes difficult, if not impossible that a non-missionary parish develop Mission and Charity in any marked way. We have many years of experience that back up this affirmation.

<sup>8</sup> Gregory Gay, “Letter of the Superior General on Parishes” in *Vincentiana*, October-December, 55 (2011) 404. See also Various Authors, “The Vincentian Parish: Today and Tomorrow” in *Vincentiana*, January-March, 57 (2013). The whole issue is dedicated to the theme of the parish.

<sup>9</sup> Cf., Gregory Gay, *ibid*, 404-405.

## CONCLUSION

In our Congregation, as in every institution, there will always be a percentage of missionaries who work in the service of administration, the retired, the sick, the absent, etc. There will also be another percentage of missionaries who work in indirect works, e.g., formation and attention to the Vincentian Family in its different branches.

Taking our ministries as a whole, our Congregation has approximately 17% of the missionaries who work, clearly and directly, in the specific pastoral line of Mission and Charity. This percentage is not very high, taking into account the median age of the Congregation, which is around 55.

This datum allows us to come to another conclusion. Given the mutual influence between *being* and *acting*, the ministries of a Congregation contribute to its identity or its dis-identity with the charism that should animate it. Everything depends on the charismatic quality and quantity of its ministries.

If we apply this reflection to the present-day reality of our ministries, we must conclude that their influence in the renovation of the Congregation today is not very strong, since the ministries that most genuinely incarnate the Vincentian charism are far from being the majority. We will have to intensify these “front-line” ministries of Mission and Charity in order for renovation to be more significant.

Translated by Joseph V. Cummins, CM

## Missionary Charism of Vincent De Paul in the Asian Context

By: Armada Riyanto, CM

The celebration of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Mission and Charity is an invitation to reflect on the historical journey of fidelity of the Congregation to the charism of Vincent de Paul. This moment of reflection on our history is, first of all, a moment for expressing ceaseless gratitude to God who has guided our confreres to walk across and soar beyond the experience of the ups and downs in the apostolate. It is also a moment for having “personal dialogue” with Vincent himself. In such a dialogue we listen attentively to his encouraging words to move forward faithfully in our missionary call.

### Gratitude for Being Sent on Mission

The words of our confreres, Fathers Charles Nacquart and Nicolas Gondrée, who were destined to be the first confreres sent to Madagascar, could represent our being grateful for our missionary vocation. About two months before his passing away, Charles Nacquart wrote a letter to Vincent narrating the actual situation of his apostolate in the remote place. The letter probably was written when he was exhausted from so many labors. Charles seemed to be thankful for the little success of missionary work despite being alone (Nicolas developed a fever and died only six months after his arrival).

*You sent me to cast the nets, but only fifty-seven fish have been caught, and they are all small except for three big ones. Yet, there are so many to be caught that I am sure you will put to sea persons who will succeed in filling the nets to the breaking point.*



(Letter of Charles Nacquart from Madagascar to Vincent de Paul, 16 February 1650).<sup>1</sup>

Eight months before, Charles witnessed the “exemplary” spirit of his confrere, Nicolas Gondrée, who faced agony bravely. What amazed him was that, in spite of his suffering, the young Nicolas would thank Vincent for sending him to that very difficult mission. Charles narrated how Nicolas offered himself to God until his last breath.

*On the last of the feast days [Paschal Season], I perceived clearly that he could no longer withstand the violence of such a malignant fever, which for two weeks had almost devoured him, while the heat and severe pain in his head and in all the members of his poor body had exhausted him. Returning from services in church, I asked him, “In the event that God chooses to release you from this exile, what would you want to say to our good father, Monsieur Vincent?” “Tell him I thank him most humbly for having admitted and tolerated me as a Missionary, and especially for sending me to this country, instead of so many others who would have done a much better job than I.”* (Letter of Charles Nacquart to Vincent de Paul, 27 May 1649).<sup>2</sup>

“Tell him I thank him for sending me to mission ...” are the very words of gratitude, coming from a dying confrere, for a beautiful missionary vocation beyond successful stories in that faraway place. Indeed, to Vincent, regardless of little success or even failure, both Charles and Nicolas remained confreres with exemplary zeal for souls. After Father Nacquart’s death, Vincent not only praised him in conferences on different occasions, but also dreamed that the

<sup>1</sup> *Vincent de Paul, Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, translated and edited by Jacqueline Kilar, DC; and Marie Poole, DC; et al; annotated by John W. Carven, CM; New City Press, Brooklyn and Hyde Park, 1985-2014; volume III, p. 597. Future references to this work will be indicated using the initials CCD, followed by the volume number, then the page number; for example: CCD:III:597.

<sup>2</sup> CCD:III:439.

Company would go and follow the same path after his missionary example. When reflecting on Nicolas Gondrée, Vincent said that he completed his “offering” to God as missionary in Madagascar at a rather young age, 29 years old! God was satisfied with his good, strong will and called him to himself. Vincent read Charles’ letter with tear-filled eyes. He then replied to the letter saying that he was crying while reading the story of Father Gondrée’s extreme suffering. Vincent esteemed highly the virtue of Nicolas Gondrée and considered him “one of the best subjects in the Company.”<sup>3</sup>

Vincent regards missionary zeal in the Company as nothing other than humble virtue in response to the “Divine Call.” Undertaking mission is all about rendering “special and divine service” to God in such a way that we need virtue. It is so special that only the saints and the chosen ones could respond to this call, he says to the confreres. *“For behold, by authority of the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith, of which the Holy Father the Pope is head, the Nuncio [Nicolò di Bagno] has chosen the Company to go and serve God on Saint-Laurent Island, also called Madagascar”* (Letter of Vincent to Charles Nacquart, 22 March 1648).<sup>4</sup> Vincent contends that the call to Madagascar does not only mean a “new type” of mission (its spirit flows and differs from “Folleville”), but also the “greatness” of this call. How great is this call? It is the work of “our Sovereign Creator.” It comes from the highest authority of the Universal Church; consequently, what Charles Nacquart and Nicolas Gondrée would do in Madagascar is to be done in the name of the Universal Church.

*O my more than dearest Father, what does your heart say to this news? Does it have the shame and confusion suitable for receiving such a grace from heaven, a vocation as lofty and adorable as that of the greatest Apostles and Saints of the Church of God, and the fulfillment in you, in time, of eternal plans? Humility alone, Monsieur, is capable of bearing this grace, and perfect*

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Notices*, vol. III, 43-56.

<sup>4</sup> CCD:III:278.

*abandonment of all that you are and can be, in exuberant trust in your Sovereign Creator, must follow. You will need generosity and sublime courage. You also need faith as great as Abraham's and the charity of Saint Paul. Zeal, patience, deference, poverty, solicitude, discretion, moral integrity, and an ardent desire to be entirely consumed for God are as appropriate for you as for the great Saint Francis Xavier."* (Letter of Vincent to Charles Nacquart, 22 March 1648).<sup>5</sup>

### **In the Asian Context**

Saint Francis Xavier was the great missionary of Asia. He travelled to India, Indonesia, Japan, and was about to enter China. By mentioning Francis Xavier in his letter to Charles Nacquart, who was sent to Madagascar, Vincent perhaps was dreaming that he could also send confreres to Asia someday. He never did it. Yet, 39 years after his death, Luigi Appiani and John Muellener travelled to China for first time.<sup>6</sup> Their coming was the very beginning of the journey of Vincentian missionaries in the land of Asia. The missionary charism of Vincent de Paul began to flourish on the continent of Asia.

The history of the Vincentians in Asia, as the late Paul Henzmann, former Secretary General, was convinced, is still one of the hidden treasures of the Congregation of the Mission to explore. It is true that not only the "ancient" but also the "modern" journey of the Vincentians in Asia is still to be delved into historically. By modern, I mean the period after World War II. They are best known as those apostles rendering services in various fields, particularly in priestly formation, lay education, hospitals or clinics, orphanages, parishes, social-cultural ministries, and other apostolates.

During World War II, Vincentians in China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Vietnam suffered a lot, because some

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<sup>5</sup> CCD:III:279..

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Hugh O'Donnell CM, "The China Mission," in *Vincentiana* (1998), Volume 42, No 6; Robert Maloney CM, "Our Vincentian Mission in China: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow," in *Vincentiana* (2001), Volume 45, No. 1.

parts of East Asia were epicenters of the battlefield. In Indonesia, for instance, it happened that all missionaries were detained in the so-called Japanese “Internir”; some of them were even tortured by the Japanese military; a confrere, Father Gerard van Ravesteyn, died at sea after his naval ship was caught by a Japanese torpedo. Surabaya, a city that became the mission center of the Vincentians in Indonesia, was completely destroyed, including some historic churches. However, in difficult times, confreres showed examples of bravery and courageous perseverance. Their perseverance was indeed heroic witness based on faith in God’s providence.<sup>7</sup>

China has its own moving stories. In the aftermath of the so-called “Red Revolution” in China (1949), Vincentians underwent one of the hardest times of mission in the history of the Congregation. When giving his annual report, the late Superior General, James Richardson, wrote that we cannot write about how many of confreres still remained in China. In the statistics of 1980, explaining about “members definitively incorporated” on 1 January of each year (from 1968 to 1980), he mentioned “Since 1978, the Confreres residing in Continental China have not been included in this statistic (are they all still living, despite their advanced age, etc.?). The fact that they are not included in the number of priests is a partial explanation of the difference in the number of priests in 1977 and 1978.”<sup>8</sup> With that brief note on China from the Superior General in 1980, we can imagine that the Vincentians (in China) were identified as the unknown or the unknowingly dispersed. What we know surely is that they were persecuted and living suffering itself. But Divine Providence worked in a surprising way. Fourteen years after the note of Father Richardson, there was a glimpse of hope in China.

Father Robert Maloney, former Superior General, made a promising trip to China in 1994 and shared about his travels in a letter

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Armada Riyanto CM, “Sejarah Gereja Indonesia: Periode Jepang dan Pemulihannya” (History of the Church in Indonesia: Japanese Period and the Restoration), a paper presented at the seminar held in Widya Sasana School of Philosophy and Theology, Malang, Indonesia, 30 October 2015.

<sup>8</sup> James Richardson, CM, “The State of the Congregation,” *Vincentiana*, No. 3 (1980), 104.

of 28 April 1994. Whereas even God himself might have “difficulty” communicating with Vincentians in China, as Father Maloney said, Sister Emma Lee, DC, could have communication with them. This is the work of Divine Providence. “She knows where almost all the sisters and confreres live. As a result, we were able to speak with more than 100 people during the visit, including 46 Daughters of Charity, 44 of whom renewed their vows in very moving ceremonies. We have now, moreover, identified 15 Vincentians on the Mainland.”<sup>9</sup> Telling moving stories, Father Maloney mentioned a name of Sister M. “M is 91 years old and joined the Company in 1924! She went to Paris for the seminary and then returned and became the assistant to the novice directress. She was a sister 25 years before the liberation! She then spent 24 years in prison and in labor camps. Afterwards she was put on the probation and had to sweep the streets.”<sup>10</sup>

Besides China there are also stories coming from different countries. “It is not only in China,” said Father Maloney, “that I have met heroic men and women [Vincentians] ... In my trip to Vietnam, I spoke with confreres who were in prison for nearly a decade. All of the priests and sisters worked at forced labor in the countryside after the fall of Saigon. For 15 years our confreres were, by and large, restricted to the house. We talked at length about the difficulties of this ‘monastic period,’ when they could perform no public ministries. Yet many confreres and the Daughters have a wonderful way of interpreting these events. They see them as God’s way of placing them side by side with the poor, when perhaps previously they had occupied too prestigious a place in society.”<sup>11</sup>

After having visited China (2007), Father Gregory Gay wrote, “Our history in China has been long with more than 1000 members in the Congregation of the Mission, 400 of them of Chinese origin. There have been about that many Daughters of Charity, Chinese and foreign, as well. And although it has been interrupted any number of times because of the political situations, the Vincentian presence in

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<sup>9</sup> *Vincentiana*, Volume 38, No. 3, May-June 1994, 105.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

the Church continues to be desired. I hope and pray that many in the Congregation and the entire Vincentian Family nurture the desire to be part of this new and exciting work of evangelization in a fuller way when Divine Providence permits us to do so.”<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, Father Hugh O'Donnell, former Visitor of China Province, remarked, “It has been said that China was never more open to the Gospel than it is today. Many agree that there is a widespread search for meaning going on in the personal lives of many in China. There is disenchantment with the ancient and modern world views available to the people. There is a hunger for the Gospel or for gospel values, which has been demonstrated by the appeal the Gospel has to many university students ... In many ways it is the lay people who are best situated to respond to this hunger. This calls for a formation all its own. Can we prepare ourselves for these challenges?”<sup>13</sup>

### **Internationality and Interculturality**

Two key words proposed in the document of the 2016 General Assembly are “internationality and interculturality.” They are not just terminology, but also and especially “spirit” that has been, is, and will be lived out in the Congregation in modern history. To Vincentians in Asia, internationality and interculturality are character as well as challenge at the same time. Socio-cultural, socio-religious, socio-political, or socio-economical contexts of everyday life in Asia are so vast and diverse that both internationality and interculturality are, thus, matching the Asian atmosphere.

Vincentians have been seeking to pursue and realize international collaboration in missions of different countries such as Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, as well as China and Taiwan. International missions are not only beautiful fruits of generous collaboration, but also and especially the very characteristics of the presence of the Vincentians. By realizing international collaboration, they have been living out intercultural community. Interculturality becomes a “way of life” for Vincentians.

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<sup>12</sup> *Vincentiana*, Volume 51, No. 6, November-December 2007, 406.

<sup>13</sup> *Vincentiana*, Volume 42, No. 6, November-December 1998.

The experience of the Province of China could be an example of the Divine Providence that guides the Congregation to live out internationality and interculturality. In the last two decades, the China Province has welcomed generous missionaries from different provinces, such as the USA, Ireland, Indonesia, the Philippines, Poland, India, Vietnam, and Australia. Hugh O'Donnell, as Visitor, initiated it. Due to a decline of vocations and increasing numbers of elderly confreres, those missionaries from different cultural backgrounds have been working together beautifully to keep the Vincentian charism of mission and charity alive and flourishing in the province. Recently, they have been helping diocesan priests from China to experience international ongoing formation in collaboration with the provinces of the USA, Indonesia, and the Philippines. They also look for vocations on mainland China and Taiwan. In this context, internationality and interculturality are not only characteristic, but also sort of a “driving force” that defines the identity of being Vincentian in Asia and the Company’s journey to the future.

Love is inventive and creative and so are the fruits of collaboration in the international missions. Vincentians are working hand-in-hand with other missionaries for the love of the charism in priestly formation, as well as in rendering service to poor people. Similarly, this is what is happening in the international missions in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. “Even if God might have forgotten people in the Solomon Islands, Vincentians should not forget to proclaim the good news to them,” the late missionary, Victor Bieler, once challenged us.

The challenges of the Provinces of India, Indonesia, Vietnam, and the Philippines are typical and plural; and yet, to them formation of candidates and ongoing formation seem to remain the most challenging tasks to accomplish. Formation for mission that includes Vincentian virtues, mastering foreign languages, as well as openness to intercultural or interreligious dialogue is a very delicate duty. The international collaboration of these provinces to pursuing this formation could contribute to guaranteeing a brighter future on the continuous journey of the Congregation.



To Saint Vincent, however, future means Divine Providence. Future belongs to God's generous and loving Providence and not to our human efforts. Divine Providence is his loving plan in accompanying us to realize our humble efforts through history. What we need is unconditional love to accomplish the duties of our missionary call. We are only humble servants, who seek to be faithfully good ones.

### **Be Like a "Fine Army"**

Vincent's missionary charism flows from his own person. He was indeed a simple missionary who rendered faithful service to no other than the Will of God. He called the mission of Madagascar a "*true vocation*" of the little Company. He also hoped that the Company would be like a "fine army," which would never surrender and abandon the battlefield despite the suffering or death of confreres.

To end this reflection on his missionary charism, it would be well to recall Vincent's encouraging words regarding this "true vocation" of a fine army, the Little Company, in the Repetition of Prayer on 30 August 1657:

*Someone in the Company may say perhaps that Madagascar should be abandoned; flesh and blood will use that language and say that no more men should be sent there, but I'm certain that the Spirit says otherwise ... dear confreres ... could we possibly be so base and unmanly (cowardly) as to abandon this vineyard of the Lord to which His Divine Majesty has called us merely because four, five, or six men have died? And tell me what a fine army it would be if, because it lost two or three, four, or five thousand men – as they say happened at the latest siege of Normandy – it would abandon everything! What a nice sight an army of runaways and poltroons like that would be! Let's say the same of the Mission; it would be a fine Company of the Mission if, because five or six had died, it were to abandon the Lord's work! What a cowardly Company, attached to flesh and blood! Oh, no! I don't think there's a single member of the Company who has such little courage, or who isn't ready to go to take the place of those who have died. I don't doubt that nature may tremble a little at first, but the spirit, which has the upper hand, says, 'I'm willing; God has given me the desire to go....'<sup>14</sup>*

<sup>14</sup> CCD:XI:372-374; Conference no. 172.



## God's Providence Has Inspired the Company with This Holy, Ingenious Means

By: Corpus Delgado, CM

On 4 October 1647, Vincent de Paul wrote to Monsieur Portail who had been entrusted with the task of convincing Rome that in order to dedicate itself *to the heavy labors of our state*, the members of the Congregation of the Mission must remain among the clergy: *God in His Providence has finally inspired the Company with this holy, ingenious means of placing us in a state in which we have the happiness of the religious state through simple vows, and of remaining, nevertheless, among the clergy and obeying the prelates, with regard to our works, ... for who could reasonably attack something that is not contrary to the Councils, the Canons, or papal decrees, but is, rather, in conformity with the Church's custom before solemn vows.*<sup>1</sup>

Then, after recalling the prohibition of instituting new religious orders, Vincent stated: *the Holy Father has not erected us in the religious state, but rather as secular priests. It follows that we do not belong to the religious state, since we declare that even though we make those simple vows, we do not intend to be religious, but to remain always in the ranks of the clergy* (CCD:III:248).

That *holy, ingenious means* that Vincent explained as *a work of Divine Providence* is bound up with the purpose of the Congregation of the Mission, namely, in order to dedicate ourselves *to the heavy labors of our state* (CCD:III:247).

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<sup>1</sup> CCD refers to *Vincent de Paul, Correspondence, Conférences, Documents*, translated and edited by Jacqueline Kilar, DC; and Marie Poole, DC; et al; annotated by John W. Carven, CM; New City Press, Brooklyn and Hyde Park, 1985-2014; volume III, pp. 247-248; future references to this work will be inserted into the text using the initials [CCD] followed by the volume number, then the page number, for example, CCD:III:247-248.

We will reflect on the nature of *those heavy labors of our state* and why, in order to accomplish those works, Vincent felt it necessary to make it clear *that we do not intend to be religious, but to remain always in the ranks of the clergy.*<sup>2</sup>

### ***1. The heavy labors of our state***

Vincent had not planned to dedicate himself to the ministry of popular missions nor did he intend to establish a Congregation that would be dedicated to that ministry. Rather it was the work of God: *If there is something in which human persons have no part, then God is the one who is acting* (CCD:XI:162).

The ministry of popular missions is rooted in the decisive experience that occurred in January 1617 in Gannes-Folleville. After having ministered on the de Gondi estate for several years, Madame de Gondi had the idea of maintaining *some priests to continue these missions, and, for this purpose, obtained for us the College des Bons-Enfants, where M. Portail and myself went to live, taking with us a good priest to whom we paid fifty écus a year. The three of us used to go off to preach missions from village to village* (CCD:XII:7-8). The foundation contract of the Congregation of the Mission (17 April 1625) which was signed by Vincent de Paul and the de Gondi's in the presence of a notary, refers to

*a pious association of some priests recognized for their knowledge, piety, and ability, who would be willing to renounce the conveniences of the said towns as well as all benefices, offices, and dignities of the Church, so that, in accord with the wishes of the Prelates, each within the limits of his own diocese, they could devote themselves entirely and exclusively to the salvation of the*

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<sup>2</sup> This reality is made very clear in the Brief of Alexander VII, *Ex Commissa Nobis*, which approved the vows of the Congregation of the Mission: *We establish also that the Congregation should not therefore be considered of the number of religious Orders, but that it is of the body of the secular clergy* (CCD:XIIIa:418).

*poor common people. They would go from village to village, at the expense of their common purse, to preach, instruct, exhort, and catechize those poor people and encourage all of them to make a good general confession of their whole past life, without accepting for this a remuneration of any kind or manner whatsoever, so as to distribute freely the gifts they have freely received from the generous hand of God (CCD:XIIIa:215-216).*

Popular missions did not simply involve preaching, catechesis, and the renewal of the practice of the sacraments. Divine Providence had led Vincent to discover that *the poor are dying of hunger and are being damned* (CCD:I:112, IV:45). Therefore, the fact that the missionaries *devoted themselves entirely and exclusively to the salvation of the poor common people* (CCD:XIIIa:214) implied that they would also establish a Confraternity of Charity<sup>3</sup> and would also respond to specific needs of each parish or village where they conducted a mission.

J. Ferté affirms the activity of the Confraternities of Charity in the parishes where a mission had been preached by Vincent or his followers. Such activity was continued until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and this Vincentian practice was adopted by other religious congregations who recognized the benefits that resulted from the ministry of the members of the Confraternities.<sup>4</sup>

The fact that the missionaries *devoted themselves entirely and exclusively to the salvation of the poor common people* (CCD:XIIIa:214) also implied that they would become involved in

<sup>3</sup> Cf. I Zedde, "La evangelización del pobre según San Vicente de Paúl" ["The Evangelization of the Poor According to Saint Vincent de Paul"] in collection, *Vicente de Paúl evangelizador de los pobres [Vincent de Paul, Evangelizer of the Poor]*, CEME, Salamanca, 1973, pp. 148-150.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. J. Ferté, *La vie religieuse dans les campagnes parisiennes (1622-1695)* [*Religious Life in the Paris Countrysides (1622-1695)*], Vrin, Paris, 1962, pp. 216-218.

restoring a calm and peaceful environment in the parishes where they preached. In other words, they would attempt to resolve those situations in which people viewed one another as enemies, situations that destroyed the bonds of unity. At the same time the missionaries would legalize marriages, restore to their rightful owner goods that had been stolen from them, and reconcile public sinners. The Bull, *Salvatoris Nostri*,<sup>5</sup> that approved the Congregation of the Mission and the various elements that characterized the popular missions, give witness to all of these various ministries.<sup>6</sup>

This Bull also refers to a request that was presented by Vincent de Paul and describes another work, namely, the formation of the clergy (formation with regard to moral theology and the celebration of the sacraments). We find in the same document another reference to the missionaries receiving priests in their houses and offering them retreats as well as providing retreats for the ordinands. Like the other works that the Missionaries would undertake, these works would also be done freely.

The seminary for ecclesiastics was established at the Bons Enfants in February 1642 at almost the same time that Olier received the first three seminarians at the Vaugirard.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> CCD:XIIIa:296-305; this *pious association* was established on 17 April 1625; the priests of the Mission in 1627 and this group ultimately became the Congregation of the Mission. The Bull, which was signed by the Pope, was sent to the Promotor of the Curia on 30 October 1633. The Archbishop was named the executor of the Bull. Therefore, in light of said execution, the Bull was published on 14 March 1634 and, on 27 November of the same year, the Bull took effect. The king did not approve the Bull until 16 May 1642.

<sup>6</sup> CCD:I:47-53, 248-257, 552-557; III:170; X:296-304; XII:214-215.

<sup>7</sup> It appears to me to be useless to enter into a discussion about whether Vincent was the first person to establish this new type of seminary or should this fact be attributed to Olier: *These discussions are always useless; they should have no place among us and in fact such discussions reveal a lack of respect for the memory of the individuals that are intended to be honored. Neither Vincent nor Olier were concerned about such a matter. Vincent referred to Olier as "a man of God" and Olier called Vincent "our father." Both men ministered*

The Council of Trent proposed the creation of an institution that, from the time of adolescence, would endeavor to cultivate in possible candidates for the priesthood a human and clerical formation. Without neglecting that aspect, Vincent opted for a different direction. He focused on those who were approaching ordination (first offering those individuals the possibility of a ten-day retreat and then later, extending the length of those retreats). That concern for adult candidates, clerics, and even ordained priests led to a new form of seminary which quickly spread throughout France, as well as to other countries.

Three months before his death, Vincent confessed: *We have only the consolation of seeing that our modest works have appeared so beautiful and useful to others that they have been inspired to devote themselves to them as we have done, and with greater blessing from God – not only in missionary work, but also in seminaries, which are rapidly multiplying in France* (CCD:VIII:368).

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*for the greater glory of God and inspired by the same divine grace (a grace that they both felt they were unworthy to receive) they arrived at a similar goal. Therefore we do not enter in such a discussion that would only dim the extraordinary glory and the Christian fraternity that these individuals shared. E. de Broglie in F. Contassot, La Congrégation de la Mission et les Séminaires au XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles [The Congregation of the Mission and the Seminaries in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries], Paris, 1968, p. 17. M. Icard, in Traditions de la Compagnie des Prêtres de Saint-Sulpice [Traditions of the Company of the Priests of Saint Sulpice] writes in a similar way when he states: We had no true Major Seminaries in France until the time of M. Vincent and M. Olier ... men who were called by God to engage in this ministry and who, in reality, gave a solid foundation to said ministry. These two venerable priests were animated by the same spirit and were filled with zeal for the glory of God and for the sanctification of the clergy. They wanted to put into practice the teachings of the Council of Trent and therefore, sought to establish seminaries after the manner of the former episcopal schools. That was done, however, with certain modifications that were demanded by the reality of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In order to achieve their objective, they established a common life for the clerics during the time of their formation and did that in accord with the rules that they judged to be most appropriate for the sanctification of the clergy.*

What was once referred to as *the heavy labors of our state* were later called *our modest works*. When viewed from God's perspective, the heavy labors became modest works that now demanded the dedication of the missionaries:

*In the beginning, the Company was concerned only with itself and the poor; at certain times it withdrew in private; at others it went out to teach the country people. God allowed that this was all we seemed to be doing, but, in the fullness of time, he called us to assist in the formation of good priests, in providing good pastors to parishes and teaching them what they should know and practice. Oh, what a lofty, sublime ministry! Oh, how far above us! Who had ever thought about retreats for ordinands and about seminaries? This undertaking had never entered our minds until God indicated to us that it was his pleasure for us to be engaged in it (CCD:XII:74).*

In order to carry forward those modest works, the little Company of the Mission had to rely on God's Providence:

*God didn't turn for that either to theologians or to so many Communities and religious Orders full of learning and holiness but to this weak, poor, wretched Company, the last and most unworthy of all. What did God find in us for such a great work? Where are our fine exploits? Where are the brilliant, renowned deeds we've accomplished? Where is our great ability? None of all that; it's to poor, wretched imbeciles that God, by his pure will, has turned to try once again to repair the breaches in the kingdom of his Son and the ecclesiastical state. O Messieurs, let us preserve carefully this grace God has given us in preference to so many holy, learned persons who would merit it more than we do (CCD:XI:280).*

The modest works that God's Providence entrusted to Vincent de Paul and his followers gave form to the little company of the Mission.

## 2. *There isn't a single Company in the Church of God that has for its portion, persons who are poor*

For centuries, **the monastic ideal** prevailed in the Church. Consecration to God, expressed through a life of chastity, poverty, and obedience, introduced faithful Christians to *the state of perfection*. This ideal flourished as a result of the various and numerous expressions of consecrated life that gave and continue to give the Church impressive witnesses of holiness while at the same time making significant contributions to the development of Christian culture.<sup>8</sup>

The appearance and the flourishing of the Mendicant Orders in the 13<sup>th</sup> century provided consecrated life with a new face, namely, a greater presence in the cities (which became filled with convents) and an impressive creativity with regard to new ways of establishing relationships with people.<sup>9</sup>

When the Protestant Reformation caused the reconfiguration of Christian Europe, we began to see the emergence of a desire to return to gospel sources of consecrated life, a reality that produced fruit in the reform of the classical Orders<sup>10</sup> and in the appearance of new Congregations during the era of the **Catholic Reform**. This reform was the result of the Council of Trent.

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<sup>8</sup> A. Bellella Cardiel, *Siempre Antigua y siempre nueva: la vida consagrada del siglo XV a nuestros días* [Always Old and Always New: Consecrated Life from the 15<sup>th</sup> Century to the Present Day], Sal Terrae, February 2015, 159-161.

<sup>9</sup> A. López Amat, *El seguimiento radical de Cristo: esbozo histórico de la Vida Consagrada*, [The Radical Following of Christ: An Historical Outline of Consecrated Life], Ediciones Encuentro, Madrid, 1987, 2 vols. II:380.

<sup>10</sup> Among the monastic orders, we mention here the Benedictines, the Cistercians. Among the mendicant orders, we mention the Capuchins and the various orders of observance. We also mention here the Teresian reform.



In this context of reform, there arose at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century the **Clerics Regular**,<sup>11</sup> who, in light of the decadence of the clergy, presented a clear alternative. First, there were the Theatines<sup>12</sup> and the Barnabites<sup>13</sup> and the Somascan Fathers,<sup>14</sup> who some years later were joined by the Society of Jesus that was founded by Ignatius of Loyola. The development and rapid spread of the Society of Jesus provided an inspiration for the majority of Congregations that were established during the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, in 1574 in Italy, John Leonardi founded the *Clerics Regular of the Mother of God*, whose members dedicated themselves to the education of children and ministry among the poor. Also in Italy in 1586, Camillus de Lellis founded the *Company of the Ministers of the Infirm* and, in 1617, Joseph Calasanz founded the *Poor Clerics Regular of the Mother of God of Pious Schools* whose members provided free education to poor children.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup> The members of these groups took solemn vows, lived a common life, and were engaged in an active apostolate. They dressed like the secular clergy and not like monks; they were not subject to the cloister or to choral prayer, though they did participate in liturgical prayer. They resided in houses, not in monasteries or convents.

<sup>12</sup> This group was founded in 1524 by Gian Petro Carafa (their first Superior General and later Pope Paul IV) and by Saint Cajetan; cf. A. López, *op.cit.* II:368.

<sup>13</sup> Known also as the Clerics Regular of Saint Paul, they were founded in 1540 by Saint Anthony Mary Zaccaria.

<sup>14</sup> Known also as the Company of the Servants of the Poor or simply, the Fathers of the Poor, they were founded in 1532 by the layman, Saint Jerome Emiliani; cf. A. López Amat, *op.cit.*, II:393.

<sup>15</sup> The Council of Trent referred to the Company of Jesus as “the clerical state.” In addition to the vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience, the Jesuits take a fourth vow of obedience to the Holy Father in which they vow to go wherever the Holy Father might command them. The government of the Society is vertical and the office of the Superior General is vital, since he is the one who chooses the provincial superiors and, in turn, the provincial superiors choose the local superiors. Paul III approved the Society in 1540 and, by the time of the death of their Founder in July 1556, there were more than 1000 members. Retreats, education, the struggle against heresy, and missions are their primary works and they have been excused from the choral recitation of the Office.

<sup>16</sup> A. López Amat, *op.cit.*, II:471.



During this same era, another form of consecrated life began to appear: **the Oratory**. Philip Neri (1515-1595) in Rome and Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle (1575-1629) in France, founded communities that were characterized by a common life, the cultivation of holiness without solemn vows, concern for the reform of the clergy, involvement in an active apostolate. These groups inspired the establishment of the Seminaries of Saint Sulpice of Jean-Jacques Olier (1608-1657) and Saint John Eudes (1601-1680).<sup>17</sup>

The first male religious congregations with simple vows arose at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and multiplied during the following centuries. Among the more significant of those congregations we mention here the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools founded by Saint Jean-Baptiste de la Salle (1651-1719), the Missionaries of the Company of Mary founded by Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort (1673-1716), the Passionists founded by Saint Paul of the Cross (1694-1775) and the Redemptorists founded by Saint Alphonsus Maria de' Liguori (1696-1787).<sup>18</sup>

Parallel to the development of these various forms of consecrated life, the monastic ideal led to the development of Third Orders that allowed the laity to participate in the spirituality and the various religious practices of the monks and the friars. Saint Francis de Sales wrote *The Introduction to a Devout Life* with the intention of making the ideal of perfection available to those individuals who were not able to live a cloistered life.

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<sup>17</sup> J. Álvarez Gómez, *Historia de la Vida Religiosa* [History of Religious Life], Publicaciones Claretianas, Madrid 1990, 3 vol, III 350-363. For a more complete vision, see, M. VENARD, « Les séminaires en France avant Saint Vincent de Paul » [“The Seminaries in France Before Saint Vincent de Paul”]: *Actes du Colloque International d'études vincentiennes* [Proceedings of the International Symposium on Vincentian Studies], Paris, September 1981. Rome, CLV, 1983; F. Contassot *op. cit.*; G. CARROLL, *Un portrait du prêtre: Les retraites de 10 jours pour les ordinands* [A Portrait of the Priest: The Ten-Day Retreats for the Ordinands], Paris, Pierre Tequi éditeur, 2004.

<sup>18</sup> J. Álvarez Gómez, *op. cit.*, III:387-432.

Vincent de Paul adopted as his own the missionary endeavor of Jesus Christ: *he sent me to bring Good News to the poor* (Luke 4:18). Vincent never tired of saying that the Son of God, the Missionary of the Father, came into the world in order to evangelize the poor. The vocation of the Missionaries is a continuation of Jesus' mission on earth:

*In this vocation, we are very much in conformity with Our Lord Jesus Christ, who seems to have made his principal aim, in coming into the world, to assist poor people and to take care of them. Misit me evangelizare pauperibus ... So, are we not very fortunate to belong to the Mission for the same purpose that caused God to become man? And if someone were to question a Missioner, wouldn't it be a great honor for him to be able to say with Our Lord, Misit me evangelizare pauperibus? I'm here to catechize, instruct, hear confessions, and assist persons who are poor (CCD:XI:98-99) ... Aren't we blessed, my dear confreres, to live authentically the vocation of Jesus Christ (CCD:XI:121).*

Vincent de Paul not only viewed the ministry of his companions as a prolongation of the mission of Jesus Christ, but he unequivocally affirmed that the poor are their proper portion, a heritage that had been entrusted to them by the Lord:

*So then, my dear confreres, poor persons are our portion, the poor; pauperibus evangelizare misit me. What happiness, Messieurs, what happiness! To do what Our Lord came from heaven to earth to do, and by means of which we'll go from earth to heaven to continue the work of God ... That there should be a Company, and that it should be the Company of the Mission, composed of poor men, and that it should be entirely dedicated to that purpose, going here and there through hamlets and villages, leaving the towns behind – something that's never been done – and going to announce the Gospel only to persons who are poor (CCD:XII:4).*

Contemplating the possible objections of his companions, as well as the objections of future followers, Vincent stated:

*But, Monsieur, we aren't the only ones who instruct poor people; do pastors do anything else? What about preachers in towns and villages? What do they do in Advent and Lent? They preach to the poor, and they do it better than we do. True, but there isn't a single Company in the Church of God that has for its portion persons who are poor, devoting itself totally to the poor and never preaching in large towns. That's what Missioners profess to do, it is their special characteristic to be, like Jesus Christ, committed to the poor. So, our vocation is a continuation of [Jesus' vocation] (CCD:XII:71).*

Those who study the history of consecrated life have no hesitation in affirming that the various Vincentian achievements opened a path that has widened with the passing of the centuries.<sup>19</sup> The *little company* of the Mission (like the Company of the Daughters of Charity) opened the horizons that, in the following centuries, led to many other forms of “non-religious” consecrated life. In that context historians note the uniqueness of the Vincentian insight.

**3. *The state of religious life of Saint Peter (CCD:XII:306) – the apostolic life of Jesus with his disciples and its significance for the Congregation of the Mission***

Through the expressed will of Vincent de Paul, the Congregation of the Mission is positioned in the church as a group of *workers* (CCD:XI:192) who follow Jesus Christ and continue his mission on earth. That which is proper to this Little Company (and the other Associations and groups of the Vincentian Family) is that its members live as Christ did and prolong the mission that Jesus, as the Missionary of the Father, initiated on earth, a mission for which he convoked the Apostles and the women related to the Apostles (CCD:VIII:278).

<sup>19</sup> CCD:XI:393-395; Cf. CCD:XI:297, 390-392; XIIIa:213, 226-227, 297. *If priests devote themselves to the care of the poor, wasn't that what Our Lord and many great saints did, and they not only recommended poor persons to others, but they themselves consoled, comforted and healed them. Aren't those who are poor the afflicted members of Our Lord? Aren't they our brothers and sisters? And if priests abandon them, who do you think is going to help them? (CCD:XII:77).*

Workers on behalf of the gospel and who prolong the mission of Jesus Christ, are members of an apostolic group, the state of life of Saint Peter: *I ask the Company to thank God for the institution of the Company, for the vocation of each individual in it, and for our being in this state of religious life of Saint Peter – or rather of Jesus Christ* (CCD:XII:306).

Vincent de Paul, faithful to this insight, exhorted the Missionaries and all the members of the Church to strive for this apostolic idea, assuring them that the Church needed apostolic men and women.<sup>20</sup>

In that context, Vincent recommended preaching like an apostle, like Jesus himself and the apostles:

*To preach like an Apostle, Messieurs, that is. to preach well and in a helpful way, you have to approach it with simplicity, using familiar speech, so that each person will be able to understand and profit by it. That's how the disciples and Apostles preached and how Jesus Christ preached; God has bestowed a great favor on this insignificant, wretched Company in giving us the happiness of imitating Him in that* (CCD:XI:237) ... *if a man now wants to be considered a good preacher in all the churches in Paris and at the Court, he has to preach like that, with no affectation whatsoever. And people say of the man who preaches in that way and who preaches the best, "That man works wonders, he preaches like a missionary, like a missionary, like an Apostle." O Sauveur! And M. X told me that eventually we have to come to that. And in truth, to preach otherwise is the height of impertinence, it's trying to preach ourselves and not Jesus Christ* (CCD:XI:259).

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<sup>20</sup> C. J. Delgado, "Hombres Apostólicos: Ser sacerdote a partir de la experiencia de Vicente de Paul" ["Apostolic Men." A Priest from the Perspective of Vincent de Paul's Experience], *Vincentiana* (2010), 39-61.

From the beginning, the Congregation of the Mission viewed itself not as a religious community but as members of the secular clergy. Vincent himself expressly stated that the Missionaries were to be viewed as members of the secular clergy: *We establish also that the Congregation should not therefore be considered of the number of religious Orders, but that it is of the body of the secular clergy* (CCD:XIIIa:418).

### **Conclusion**

The members of this *pious association of ecclesiastics* in order to dedicate themselves to the evangelization of the poor and to the works that had been entrusted to them by Divine Providence, wanted to remain as part of the body of the secular clergy (CCD:I:141 – *a congregation of secular priests called Missionaries*).

Saint Vincent de Paul, filled with gratitude to God, did not hesitate to call this intuition a *holy means* and stated that it was the Providence of God that inspired the establishment of the Congregation of the Mission.

Translated: Charles T. Plock, CM

## Vincent de Paul's Experience of the Charitable Mission<sup>1</sup>

By: Andrés R. M. Motto, CM

### Summary:

The celebration of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the Vincentian charism provides us with an opportunity to reexamine the place of missionary charity in the life of Vincent de Paul. That was one of Vincent's insights and to think anew about this reality means that we briefly enter into a dialogue about his theology of mission and analyze the concrete form in which the mission was developed, that is, the popular mission. We discover that our Founder has given us various insights that continue to strengthen our missionary vocation. Leaving aside for the moment the mission *ad gentes*, it is nevertheless clear that the Vincentian mission expresses a preference for those persons who are poor. Thus, the mission still involves organized charitable activity. The establishment of the Confraternity of Charity was one way to institutionalize such activity. Understood in that manner we see that such a manner of acting was in accord with Jesus' command. Therefore, the Vincentian Family ought to constantly appropriate for themselves this option on behalf of the poor.

*Key words:* popular mission, Confraternity of Charity, poor, evangelization.

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<sup>1</sup> Translator's Note: in this article it is often difficult to understand if the author is referring to "popular mission" or the mission of the church and the mission of the Congregation... I have tried to make this clear in my translation but will admit I might actually have given the wrong interpretation in certain instances.

In this article, we will come to see that the mission on behalf of the poor is our congregational seal. In the first section, we will reflect on Vincent's theology of mission. Then we will analyze the concept of the popular mission (which includes the establishment of the Confraternity). I am aware of the fact that these are well-known themes and so I will attempt to give a "fresh interpretation" to the various Vincentian texts. Furthermore, my interpretation will be done from the perspective of moral theology and also from the perspective of Latin American thinking.

### Theology of the Mission<sup>2</sup>

As a result of his pastoral experience, Vincent stated that the poor often lacked basic knowledge with regard to the fundamental truths of Christianity and therefore, did not give witness to the faith nor did they act in accord with Christian principles. The popular missions attempted to address those two great evils. Furthermore, since the faith is concretized in love, Vincent was concerned about the fact that people lacked basic material goods and were often not respected.

*Biblical Foundation:* Vincent understood that the evangelization of the poor is the sign, par excellence, that the Kingdom of God had been made present. To be a missionary is to make effective the exhortation to follow Jesus Christ. In other words, it is to live one's life in a manner that is similar to the way Jesus lived his life: going from place to place, proclaiming the Kingdom of God, thus highlighting the fact that Jesus had no place where he could rest his head (cf. Matthew 8:18-20). *Who lives better the way of life*

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Ibañez, José M., "Misión e identidad de la Congregación de la Misión" in Collection *Misiones vicencianas y evangelización del hombre de hoy*. Salamanca. CEME. 1987. 131-180; Collection *Cuadernos Vicencianos. En tiempos de San Vicente de Paúl... y hoy*. Tomo I. Salamanca. CEME. 1997. 9-14, 83-103.

*Jesus lived on earth than missionaries?*<sup>3</sup> Sacred Scripture revealed to Vincent the urgency of following Jesus, the missionary, and the urgency of living life in accord with the gospel maxims.

To engage in the mission is to continue the activity of Jesus Christ who came to evangelize the poor. It is to prolong Jesus' preferential activity on behalf of the poor. The passage from Luke 4:18 is a pivotal text for those who seek to understand the Congregation of the Mission.

Our vocation means that we live in a manner that is accord with the life of our Lord, Jesus Christ, who entered into our world and made his primary task that of assisting and caring for the poor. *He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. And if we ask Our Lord, "What did you come to do on earth?" "To assist the poor." "Anything else?" "To assist the poor," etc. Now, he had only poor persons in his company and he devoted himself very little to cities, almost always conversing with and instructing village people. So are we not very fortunate to belong to the Mission for the same purpose that caused God to become man* (CCD:XI:98).

*Attitudes of the Missionary:* Individuals never cease to evangelize unless, of course, they fail to commit themselves to that undertaking. Therefore, during the popular missions they ought to practice the five traditional virtues as well as unconditional love; a love that reveals a coherency in their affectiveness and their effectiveness. Generally, Vincent expressed his missionary labor and his integral service toward the poor as an activity that had to be exercised through the cultivation of virtue. Thus his missionary services implied the development of numerous virtues, charity being the primary virtue.

<sup>3</sup> *Vincent de Paul, Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, translated and edited by Jacqueline Kilar, DC; and Marie Poole, DC; et al; annotated by John W. Carven, CM; New City Press, Brooklyn and Hyde Park, 1985-2014; volume XI, p. 121; future references to this work will be indicated using the initials CCD followed by the volume number, then the page number, for example, CCD:XI:121.



If the Missionaries practiced these virtues then they would be able to [1] draw closer to God and to the neighbor, [2] better their personal and their community activity, [3] minister more effectively with the poor [4] distance themselves from temptations and certain vices which could arise as a result of their ministry.

Vincent frequently pointed out the importance of being mortified during the popular missions (cf. CCD:I:176-180) and mortified in everything.<sup>4</sup> Mortified and humble Missionaries are a blessing. They are needed and they maintain others in their evangelical life. Missionaries, therefore, should avoid those realities that distance them from the Christian life and from the process of evangelization (CCD:I:178-179). Again, the Missionaries are to be careful with regard to seeking comfort or luxury; vices that can lead the confreres to intemperance, to a desire to have everything “just right” at every moment and to reject the mortifications that the process of evangelization demands. The practice of mortification will enable the Missionaries to avoid an excessive love of self, a love that often leads to vanity in preaching. Vincent also exhorted the Missionaries to use moderation when explaining sexual matters.

*Mission and the poor:* Vincent viewed the mission and ministry on behalf of the poor as inseparable. The poor are the beneficiaries of the mission. Furthermore, the missionary element is intimately connected to the social charitable element. Those themes are very characteristic in the writings of Vincent.

What type of popular mission did Vincent propose? It is true that there were Congregations that gave missions in the cities, missions that were directed toward people of a higher social class. That was necessary but such is not the Vincentian charism. The Vincentian charism implies being among the poor. As a result, the members of the Congregation (and hopefully, the members of all the other

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<sup>4</sup> For example, Vincent praises the Missionaries who were giving a mission in the Diocese of Evreux; those confreres slept on straw without complaining (cf. CCD:XI:1)

branches of the Vincentian Family), evangelize in areas that are poor and attempt to have a permanent impact on those areas through organized charitable activity. Mission and charity form a dialectical, mystical, and intimate bond. The mission is extended toward those who are poor in order to proclaim good news to those who have not heard the news as well as those who are not fully aware of that good news. The poor are catechized and the sacraments are administered to them and wherever possible a Confraternity of Charity is established.

Vincent also teaches us how to be evangelized by those persons who are poor. As has occurred so often in the history of the church, so in the 17<sup>th</sup> century the poor made people aware of that which is essential. If our faith is a lively faith, then we are able to see the poor through the eyes of Jesus. The poor are the vicars of Christ and those who are able to view the poor as such, are converted. Vincent was clear about the fact that the primary purpose of the Missionaries was to dedicate themselves to the poor country people. In the seventeenth century, the poor generally lived in the rural areas and those people were poor in every sense of the word (spiritually and materially). Therefore the members of the Congregation of the Mission make a vow in which they dedicate themselves to the salvation of the poor country people.

Let us deepen our understanding of what we have stated. When one is engaged in the mission, one is also evangelizing and promoting those persons who are poor. Therefore, popular missions cannot be used as an excuse to neglect providing assistance to those who are poor and promoting their cause.<sup>5</sup> In fact, the Congregation of the Mission has been praised for the manner in which it integrated both of those elements—praised for instructing the poor and administering the sacraments to them as well as for attending to some of their more urgent needs. One of Vincent's greatest joys was to know that the confreres of a particular house were engaged in the ministry of

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<sup>5</sup> A priest stated that those who are ordained carry out their greatest task when they serve the poor (cf. CCD:I:33).

preaching popular missions as well as providing for the needs of the people of that area.<sup>6</sup> Thus the Missionaries cared for those persons who were sickest, poorest, and sinful.

Generally, the manner in which one is able to touch the lives of the poor country people is through the popular missions. It was for this reason that Vincent preferred to preach popular missions rather than to engage in parish ministry (CCD:I:538-539). I am encouraged to know that Vincent understood that parish ministry was not the only manner in which one was able to evangelize. The popular missions allowed the confreres to accompany the poor. Thus, they did not feel the need to return to "their" parish in order to engage in some other activity there.

*Mission and reconciliation:* Another element that was sought during the time of the popular mission was restitution and reconciliation – reconciliation between individuals who viewed themselves as enemies. There is a saying: small town, large hell and that is somewhat universal. In the various villages if one looks behind the smiles of the country people and beyond the flowers and the livestock, one will often find tension, hatred, suspicion, the desire for revenge. There are so many different realities that separate and divide neighbors and families and which ultimately cause great harm to the life of the community. The Vincentian popular mission seeks to reestablish charity in the community. The mission attempts to eliminate those customs and behaviors that are not in accord with Christian virtue. The Missionaries brought to the people a Christian ethics and the norms of Canon Law. Personal conversion, expressed in confession and the reception of Communion, was not enough. Community conversion was sought, that is, a conversion in which friendship and unity were restored. Such renewal was one of the surprising results of the popular missions.

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<sup>6</sup> Vincent wrote to a superior: *Messieurs du Coudray and Boucher have forty poor people, some sick, some others who are healthy, to whom they minister in their house, although it is small, because they have no hospital. They also attend one hundred fifty outside the city, all of whom they feed and assist with a charity that brings tears to the eyes of those who hear of it* (CCD:I:528).

## Popular Missions

I remember the first time I participated in a popular mission. I was sixteen years old and a student in the Minor Seminary. It involved a long train ride from Buenos Aires to Bariloche and then another journey to Bolsdón. We were collaborating with a parish in that area that was administered by the Franciscans. We, some fifteen seminarians, went to a small village in the midst of the Andes forest. My task was to teach the catechism to the children and to visit the homes of the people who were scattered throughout this area. These persons were very isolated from one another and they lacked many things that would enable them to live their life in a dignified manner. I was surprised by the desire of these people to learn more about the truths of the Christian faith. I also rejoiced when people shared their lives with me during my visits to their homes. I always learned something and was given much material for meditation and reflection. Do you remember the first time you participated in a popular mission? Where was it? How was the mission developed? Such events connect us with Vincent who from 1617 dedicated himself to service on behalf of the poor through the preaching of popular missions. It was through these missions that Vincent attempted to renew the life of the rural parishes. While Vincent engaged in other forms of service on behalf of the poor, he never neglected the popular missions.

The popular mission is an *ad intra* task of the Congregation in as much as it seeks to make the gospel effective in the midst of a Christian community where people have become “indifferent or cold” with regard to God’s plan for them. Vincent greatly valued the work of the popular mission and asked the confreres to send him reports about their ministry in this regard.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> These *mission registries* detail the number of missions that were given, the situation in which such missions were developed, the results of the mission as well as the areas where there was failure. Most of these registries have been lost. Abelly, in his *Life of Vincent de Paul*, presents some interesting facts about these missions, facts that were extracted from those registries.

*The objective of the popular mission:* The time of the popular mission is a time of grace (CCD:XI:1). God bestows his graces upon people during such a special time in their life. The people experienced themselves as being so very blessed during the time of the popular mission that they caused Vincent to blush when they praised him about the manner in which that ministry was developed. The mission had a holistic approach:<sup>8</sup> to support people in the practice of their faith, to educate people with regard to Christian truths, to provide people with the tools that would enable them to live as children of God and people of prayer. The popular mission attempted to encourage people to practice charity and justice and to sensitize them to the needs of their brothers and sisters.

As already pointed out, the popular mission was a charitable activity that was intended to open people to reconciliation. It was a time to unite people and this implied: [1] reconciling people to God and to the Church; [2] reconciling people with one another and even reconciling the pastor with his parishioners.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> In a letter that Vincent wrote to Pope Urban VIII he summarized the activity that was developed during the time of the popular mission. The Missionaries *go from village to village, preaching sermons and exhortations to the people. They teach everyone, catechizing them both publicly and privately, about the mysteries of faith necessary for salvation, of which most of the people are completely ignorant. They prepare them for general confessions of their whole life and hear them. They convert heretics, bring lawsuits to an end, appease hatreds, reconcile quarrels and enmities and establish the Confraternity of charity where it is necessary for the corporal and spiritual relief of the sick poor* (CCD:I:49).

<sup>9</sup> We are told of a mission in which *the inhabitants had a strong aversion to their pastor. On his part, the pastor had good reason to resent being treated badly by his parishioners, and he took them to court over it. He even had three or four of the instigators imprisoned because they had gone so far as to manhandle him in the church, or some of his people. Most of them were unwilling even to hear Mass, and would leave the church when they saw him go to the altar ... they swore they would never go to confession to him and that that they'd rather let Easter go by without receiving Communion* (CCD:XI:4-5). For those who want to know how this story ended, I can tell you that, thanks to God's grace and the Missionaries, it came to a happy ending. The pastor and the parishioners were reconciled and began to interact with one another with cordiality and joy and peace.

*The anatomy of popular missions:* Let us address some specific questions. During what time of the year were they given? Usually the missions were given during autumn. During that season people had more time and the weather was more favorable, and as a result it was easier for people to leave their homes (in other words, during September, October, November and December). Missions, however, were also given at other times during the year. Choosing the right time was very important, and to a certain degree the success of the mission depended on that decision. It was important to take into consideration the timing of the mission as well as activities that people were engaged in: the mission should not interfere with some other important activity and/or celebration. It was also important to avoid scheduling the mission during some extraordinary event that might lessen the impact of the mission, for example, during some military movement or royal visit.

How long did the mission last? This depended on the place and the situation. Vincent wanted the mission to have an impact on the life of the people and he wanted the Missionaries to evangelize in an effective manner. Usually the missions continued for three weeks (CCD:I:404), never less than fifteen days and never more than five or six weeks. In extraordinary situations, such as some serious problem or a very large area populated with many people, the mission might continue for several months. An exact schedule was kept during the missions (CCD:I:246-247) and Vincent was very insistent on this matter. Vincent viewed fidelity to the schedule as a way to honor the faithfulness of Our Lord and was therefore, the source of divine blessings. To act otherwise was to invite problems. During the time of the mission, there was normally one free day, usually Thursday. This day of rest was introduced at the request of Cardinal Richelieu and became a permanent part of every mission.

Who gave the mission? The missions were given by members of the Congregation. At times when there was a lack of personnel or when the area was very extensive or when some ecclesiastical authority requested it, the diocesan clergy (parish priests, vicars, university professors) assisted and helped during the time of the mission (CCD:I:404).

Did the Missionaries charge a fee? This is a question that is often asked. We should remember however, that Vincent was very careful in this regard and wanted the missions to be given free of charge. The people were not to pay anything for the mission. In order for such a plan to be viable, he sought financial support from the royalty, the nobility and the landlords (such help was also sought from other well-positioned individuals).

*The mission, a time to transmit the faith:* Much of the day was spent teaching people through preaching and through catechetics. The concern for those most abandoned implied, among other things, resolving their lack of knowledge. The Missionaries attempted to evangelize the people through means of the Word of God. They attempted to united that which was clear with that which was profound and pleasant. The reflections and teaching of the Missionaries were intended to resolve people's lack of knowledge and bring about a change in people's moral and material situation. Vincent was convinced that the Christian life of the poor country people had to be clarified, purified and renewed and so he attempted to join experience with the understanding of faith; devotion to God with fraternity. All of that required a powerful transmission of the faith.<sup>10</sup>

There have always been people who were remiss in forming themselves. For some twenty-five years I have been teaching at the university and I have had first-hand experience in that regard. During the years 1615-1616 Vincent preached about the importance of learning the catechism: *People will object to me, "What does your catechism have to do with us? We are Christians, for we go*

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<sup>10</sup> In Miguel de Unamuno's novel, *San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, Lazarus speaks to the new pastor and says: *little theology, eh? Little theology; religion, religion*. Even though the meaning of that phrase is complex, we point out that Vincent did not want to fill the people with devotions. Rather he wanted to educate them in the practice of virtue and social charity. Here in Latin America, Cardinal Piroño stated that *this is a continent of baptized people who need to be evangelized*. This ought to be a challenge for all the members of the Vincentian Family, a challenge that leads all of us to organize ourselves in the best possible manner so that we can ultimately communicate the faith.



*to church, hear Mass and Vespers, go to confession at Easter; what else is needed?» Nowhere in all of Holy Scripture have I found that it is sufficient for a Christian to hear Mass and Vespers and go to confession, but I have found in it that anyone who does not believe in all that comes within the scope of faith is not saved. Then, too, what profit is drawn from the Mass by someone who does not know what it is, or from confession by someone who does not know what it involves?» (CCD:XIIIa:35).*

We must distinguish between catechetics and preaching. Catechetics is a methodology that is used to explain the truths of the faith (CCD:I:128). The themes might vary, but generally those themes were focused on the Creed, the Commandments, the Hail Mary, and the Our Father, eschatology, etc. Vincent valued the role of the catechist and wanted them to be well-prepared: *everybody invariably agrees that the fruit of a mission stems from the catechism lesson* (CCD:I:419). Two catechism lessons were given: one for adults and the other for children (usually around 2:00 pm and included games). The catechetical instruction for adolescents and adults was usually given at 6:00 pm and often included edifying stories that made the lesson more interesting. Vincent wanted this instruction to be given in a humble and familiar manner. People were prepared to receive communion and those who had already received the sacraments, were able to deepen their understanding of the faith (today this is referred to as the RCIA or adult formation).

Vincent was convinced about the effectiveness of the catechetical method. It was for that reason that he did not want the time allotted for adult catechetics to be replaced by preaching. He felt that catechetics was the best method for educating people in their faith, for purifying the faith and for helping people persevere in the practice of their faith. Catechetics and preaching were important elements for transmitting the faith, and were important in the preaching of the popular mission (both of which were to be given their proper time and place).

What were the themes that were developed by the preacher? First, all the faithful of the parish and of the neighboring parishes were present for the preaching that took place after the celebration of Mass. The preaching took place very early in the morning, usually at



5:00 am or 6:00 am. We know that the people were very happy to be present for those sermons. People cried, applauded and responded with shouts of joy and praise. At times, the preacher had to pause as people responded to the preaching in various manners. Even though conversion was the objective of the preaching, it is also clear that the preacher often touched the hearts of the people.

The themes of the preaching often focused on truths of the faith (the preaching was often focused on the same theme as the catechetical instruction, but was viewed from a different perspective) as well as devotional and moral themes: the virtues, sin, intemperance, the good use of suffering and poverty, charity, good example, perseverance in the faith, eschatology, charity, the good use of time, prayer, the sacraments. The preaching always involved an exhortation to imitate our Lord and also promoted devotion to the Blessed Mother.

Some “missionary sermons”<sup>11</sup> denounced situations of injustice, for example, the barns of some individuals would be filled with grains at the same time that others were dying of hunger. Sermon #40 dealt with theft and robbery and was very descriptive. No one could remain indifferent to what was being said.

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<sup>11</sup> Another source for obtaining information about the themes of the sermons is *Los Sermones de Saint Vincent de Paul, de ses cooperateurs et successeurs pour los missions des campagnes* [*The Sermons of Saint Vincent de Paul, his collaborators, and successors for the missions in the countrysides*]. M. Codoing had put together these sermons. He would take advantage of the summer to write and to copy them. He had intended to have this book printed, but it is most probable that he simply copied these sermons by hand. It seems, however, that the book was stolen. Be that as it may, some members of the Congregation of the Mission, the Bishops of Boulogne and Alet, and Abbe Olier, as well as Vincent de Paul, utilized the text of those sermons. Together they continued to write a series of sermons. The subjects were varied. For example, each one wrote about the motives and the reasons for putting aside some particular vice or for embracing some virtue. Definitions were given and various means were provided so that certain goals could be attained. The final editor of this material was Father Portail. These texts were often utilized in preaching and in catechizing. They served as a guide that enhanced one's creativity. We know that this compilation of sermons for the mission, in its current version, has been greatly modified. Even so, it would be interesting to reprint this volume.

How did the Missionaries preach? They preached in accord with the little method. Vincent de Paul continually highlighted the fact that the Missionaries were to preach in a clear and simple manner, a manner that would draw them closer to their listeners. Thus, they would be able to convince people through the power of their arguments and through the goodness that they radiated. In other words, the sacred realities were best revealed through simplicity rather than through ostentation. Therefore, the Missionaries were to use familiar language, colloquial language, revealing in that manner their concern for the people and their desire to touch people's hearts.

Some might object and state that Vincent and the other members of the Congregation produced very little written material. That is true, but it must be understood that in the seventeenth century the vast majority of people were illiterate. Thus, pastoral ministry was focused on the spoken word even though there were some written texts (when the Missionaries visited the homes of the people, they gave the family a book of prayers).

*Popular Missions and the Confraternities of Charity:* It was hoped that the popular mission would reverse the trend of a lack of doctrinal knowledge. Indeed, it was hoped that people would become more knowledgeable about their faith and about the Word of God, that people would frequent the sacraments, and become active participants in the liturgy of the Church. The preaching was done in such a manner so as encourage people in the practice of virtue and in living a moral and Christian life. A mission was viewed as successful if the people agreed to work together so that the poor might have their dignity restored. Thus there was an emphasis on reconciliation and restitution and the settling of law suits. Also, each mission concluded with the establishment of a Confraternity of Charity.

During the mission, and after having obtained the permission of the bishop and the pastor, a Confraternity of Charity was to be established. The ministry of the members of that Confraternity was

to be reviewed and strengthened at the time of the next popular mission.<sup>12</sup>

Using Vincentian vocabulary, the popular mission evangelized the life of the poor through means of the truth (which enlightens people) and charity (which involves people in the Church's very mission). The evangelizing process was initiated by reaching out to the sick poor. Little by little the process was extended to those persons who found themselves in other situations of poverty. Usually, the coordinator of the mission would submit a report about the possibility of establishing a Confraternity of Charity in the parish where the popular mission was being conducted. Before presenting the report, the coordinator would dialogue with individuals known for their charity. Such individuals were invited to visit the infirm. Different possibilities were explored and at the conclusion of the mission, the coordinator preached a sermon on charity and soon thereafter a Confraternity of Charity was established.

It should be noted that after the establishment of the Congregation of the Mission, the Confraternities of Charity multiplied very rapidly. When Vincent de Paul died the Confraternities had been established in many parts of France.<sup>13</sup> Confraternities were also established in other countries where the Congregation was ministering, especially in Italy (in the region of Turin and Genoa).

What were the keys to the success of the missions? Above all else, the grace of God must be highlighted. It was for this reason that Vincent requested prayers for the people in those places where a

<sup>12</sup> For example, the Confraternity in Quinz-Vingt had a curious name due to the fact that it was established in a hospital founded by King Saint Louis, a hospital for 300 blind poor people. This confraternity was established in 1633 after a mission that was given by the members of the Tuesday Conference.

<sup>13</sup> The Confraternity had been established in fifteen parishes in Paris. Outside of Paris, there were Confraternities in Villejuif, Vanves, Issy, Gentilly, Vincennes, Montreuil, Champigny, La Chapelle, Clichy, Asnières, Auteuil, Saint-Cloud, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, Argenteuil, Sannois, Amiens, Arras, Beauvais, Etampes, Fontainebleau, Joigny, Muret, Neufchâtel-en-Bray, Rethel, Macon, Sedan, etc.

popular mission was being preached and requested prayers for those who were preaching the mission (Cf. CCD:I:23-24). Furthermore, Vincent had developed a mission that seemed to be in harmony with the life of the country poor who willingly participated in such missions and whose faith was deepened as a result of that participation.

**Conclusion:** Before concluding this article, I gazed out the windows of the Pouget Room and I saw that here in Paris we were in the midst of an unusually cold autumn day. Since I did not bring any mate,<sup>14</sup> I drank my third cup of tea. I returned to the keyboard and connected back to the present moment and reviewed the articles that the other members of SIEV will publish in this edition of our journal. Now I must highlight the fact that the gospels and our courageous Pope Francis have placed the mission at the center of the ecclesial scene. Furthermore, the Pope points out that the mission is related to the transformation of the Church. In other words, the mission is the path of conversion that the Church must travel along. Mission involves not only proclaiming the gospel to those persons who do not know it or who have little knowledge of it, but mission also involves a recognition of the fact that now there is an opportunity to engage in ecclesial renewal. The Pope states: *I dream of a “missionary option”, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation* (EG, #27). The Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, which I have just referenced, is not, per se, a missionary document; but, nevertheless, is oriented by a missionary spirit. I believe that, as we celebrate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of our charism, all the members of the Vincentian Family ought to

<sup>14</sup> Mate is a nation drink in the River Plate region. It is an infusion made using dry mate leaves. The drink is made and served in a small hollow gourd and is drunk through a metal tube called a bombilla.

feel challenged as they listen to Pope Francis extend an invitation to the Church *to go forth from [its] own comfort zone in order to reach all the “peripheries” in need of the light of the gospel* (EG, #20). The Pope wants the church to be more missionary, to reach out to others, to be more of a “street church.” Pope Francis’ call reminds us of the following words of Vincent de Paul: *What reason we have to tremble if we’re stay-at-home people or; if, because of our age or under pretext of some infirmity, we slow down and let our fervor diminish* (CCD:XI:122).

Translated: Charles T. Plock, CM

## Saint Vincent as a Mystic of Charity

By: Robert Maloney, CM

First words are important. They set the tone for what comes next. Frequently, we identify poems by their opening line: Virgil's "I sing of arms and of the man,"<sup>1</sup> Dante's "Halfway through life's journey,"<sup>2</sup> Shakespeare's "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?," Whitman's "O Captain, my Captain," Longfellow's "This is the forest primeval," Dickinson's "Because I could not stop for death," Hopkin's "Glory be to God for dappled things," ....

In a similar vein, a recent New Testament study shows how significant inaugural discourses are.<sup>3</sup> They offer a preview of what will follow. In his gospel and in the Acts, Luke carefully constructed three of them. The first of these, Jesus' opening words at the synagogue in Nazareth, is the inspiration for our Vincentian tradition: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; therefore he has anointed me. To preach good news to the poor, he has sent me ...."

In that light, it is noteworthy that, in his initial homily after being elected Superior General, Father Tomaž Mavrič chose to speak of Saint Vincent as a "Mystic of Charity." Shortly afterwards, on 27 September 2016, in his first circular letter to the Vincentian Family, he developed the theme further. Clearly, the topic lies close to his heart and is a harbinger of things to come.

<sup>1</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid*, opening line: "Arma virumque cano."

<sup>2</sup> Dante, *Inferno*, opening line: "Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita."

<sup>3</sup> Joseph WenXi Zhang, *Paul among Jews: A Study of the Meaning and Significance of Paul's Inaugural Sermon in the Synagogue of Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:16-41) for His Missionary Work among the Jews* (Catholic University of America, 2010). He examines three inaugural discourses in Luke/Acts: that of Jesus (Luke 4:16-30), that of Peter (Acts 2:14-40), and that of Paul (Acts 13:16-41).

In this article, I propose to examine at greater length what it means to refer to Vincent as a “Mystic of Charity,” offering some thoughts under five headings:

1. The contemporary relevance of the theme
2. Some hermeneutical difficulties
3. The history of calling Saint Vincent a “Mystic of Charity”
4. Vincent’s brand of mysticism
5. Ten implications for Vincentian Spirituality today.

These thoughts are simply seeds. Much more might be said on the matter. I would welcome whatever additions and corrections others might make.

### **1. The contemporary relevance of the theme for the various branches of the Vincentian Family**

Karl Rahner, one of the great 20<sup>th</sup>-century theologians, has had an enormous influence on the theology of the Church and the sacraments, on Christology, on the relationship of nature and grace, on the sacrament of penance, on pastoral theology, and many other topics. He also wrote extensively about spirituality. One of his most frequently cited statements pertains directly to our topic. He said, *the devout Christian of the future will either be a “mystic,” one who has experienced “something,” or he will cease to be anything at all.*<sup>4</sup> Rahner, of course, was not alone in saying this. Thomas Merton, in the conclusion to his book on contemplative prayer, stated forcefully:

*Without contemplation and interior prayer, the Church cannot fulfill her mission to transform and save humankind. Without contemplation, she will be reduced to being the servant of cynical and worldly powers, no matter how hard her faithful may protest that they are fighting for the Kingdom of God. Without true, deep contemplative aspirations, without a total love for God and an uncompromising thirst for God’s truth, religion tends in the end to become an opiate.*<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations* 7 (1971) 15.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Merton, *Contemplative Prayer* (New York: Doubleday, 1969) 116.

Most recently, Pope Francis has accented a similar theme: "... a religion without mystics is a philosophy."<sup>6</sup>

Rahner speaks of a "mysticism of daily life." He states that, since grace is nothing less than the offer of God's very own self to each of us, the human person can be described as *homo mysticus*; in other words, being human inevitably means being bound up in the mystery of God's love.

In many essays, Rahner stresses the intrinsic unity between love of God and love of neighbor, frequently citing Jesus' teaching that love for the least of our brothers and sisters is love for him, even when we do not recognize him. So, the most profound form of mysticism, in Rahner's view, is unreserved love for others in everyday life.<sup>7</sup>

Instinctively, the contemporary documents of many of the branches of the Vincentian Family have expressed the same point, using other language.

Borrowing a phrase from the Jesuit tradition,<sup>8</sup> the Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission call each member to be "a contemplative in action and an apostle in prayer."<sup>9</sup>

The Constitutions of the Daughters of Charity state: *the Sisters find Christ and contemplate Him in the heart and life of those who are poor....*<sup>10</sup> They add: *the apostolic action of the Daughters of Charity draws its strength from contemplation, following the example of the Son of God who, while remaining intimately united with His Father, often went aside to pray.*<sup>11</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Pope Francis, interview in *La Repubblica*, 1 October 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Harvey Egan, "The Mystical Theology of Karl Rahner," *The Way*, 52/2 (April 2013), 43–62.

<sup>8</sup> The phrase seems to have been used first by Jerome Nadal (1507-1580), one of the closest collaborators of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, to describe the Jesuit founder's way of proceeding.

<sup>9</sup> Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission, article 42.

<sup>10</sup> Constitutions of the Daughters of Charity, article 10a.

<sup>11</sup> Constitutions of the Daughters of Charity, article 21a; cf. also, 13.



The new Rule of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul speaks frequently of “prayer and action,”<sup>12</sup> “deep prayer and reflection,”<sup>13</sup> “union with Christ,”<sup>14</sup> and “a profound spiritual life.”<sup>15</sup>

Clearly, then, the theme “Saint Vincent as a Mystic of Charity” is very relevant for the worldwide Vincentian Family today.

## 2. Some hermeneutical difficulties

Before addressing the topic directly, it may be useful to note two difficulties.

First, we can apply the usual meaning of the word “mystic” to Vincent only with careful nuancing. When we speak of mystics, we usually think of people who have extraordinary religious experiences.<sup>16</sup> Their quest for God moves from active search to passive presence. They pray, as Saint Paul says to the Church in Rome (8:26), “with sighs and groans too deep for human words.” Mystics have ecstatic moments when they are completely lost in God, “whether in the body or out of the body, I do not know,” as Saint Paul recounts his experience in 2 Corinthians 12:3. At times, they have visions and receive private revelations. They attempt, with difficulty, to describe for others their moments of intense light and painful darkness. Saint Vincent knew the writings of mystics like Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, but he is known much more for his prodigious works than for his mystical experiences. He was generally cautious about unusual spiritual phenomena, though he admired Madame Acarie, one of the renowned mystics of his day, who lived in Paris during his early years there.

Vincent’s brand of mysticism was strikingly different from what we usually think of when we speak of mystics. That is precisely the point of this article, as I will explain in parts 4 and 5. His mysticism is largely hidden, but sometimes reveals itself in spontaneous ecstatic language.

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<sup>12</sup> Rule, 3.3.

<sup>13</sup> Rule, 1.7 commentary; also, 2.2.

<sup>14</sup> Rule, 2.3.

<sup>15</sup> Rule, 3.13.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Harvey Egan, *op. cit.*, p. 56, for classical examples of “mystical prayer.”

The second difficulty affects English-speaking readers especially. The French word *mystique* and parallel words in other languages, like the Italian *mistica* and the Spanish *mística*, are often difficult to translate into English. Sometimes English words like “mystical,” “mystic,” and “mystique” make complete sense as translations, but at other times they sound quite strange. Readers of English may find it bewildering when they see the title of Giuseppe Toscani’s important book, to which I will refer later, translated as *The Mystique of the Poor*. Such readers may quickly object: “What! There is no mystique about being poor!”

Still, in spite of these two difficulties, an exploration of the theme “Saint Vincent as a Mystic of Charity” opens up multiple horizons.

### **The history of calling Vincent a “Mystic of Charity”**

I suspect that Vincent would not have been happy to hear people describing him as a “Mystic of Charity,” though he might gladly have applied that phrase to others whom he knew and admired.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> For example, in a conference given after her death, Vincent says of Louise de Marillac (CCD:X:575): *You can imagine what a deep, interior foundation your mother had in order to regulate her memory in such a way that she used it only for God, and her will only to love Him. Sisters, an interior Sister is one who devotes herself only to God. For what does interior mean if not to be occupied with God? That’s obvious. On the contrary, go over in your mind and consider what a Sister is like who has no interior life. You have seen this in those who have left. Alas! What were they like? They had no interior peace and were troublesome to everyone. So, dear Sisters, let’s strive to develop solidly within ourselves a deep interior life.*” Cf. also CCD:X:584. Speaking about Louise’s virtues, he rejoiced at a sister’s description of Louise: *She was no sooner alone, than she was always recollected.* CCD refers to the English translation of *Vincent de Paul, Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, translated and edited by Jacqueline Kilar, DC; and Marie Poole, DC; et al; annotated by John W. Carven, CM; New City Press, Brooklyn and Hyde Park, 1985-2014. On occasion, to fit the context, I have changed the translation slightly, in light of the original text.

Still, it is important to note that, even in his own lifetime, people recognized Vincent not just as a man of action, but also as someone deeply united with God.<sup>18</sup>

The description of Vincent as a “Mystic of Charity” came into prominence in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Below, I offer a brief account of the principal 20<sup>th</sup>-century promoters of the theme. In the limited space of this article, I can offer only a “taste” of the rich materials that exist. I encourage interested readers to “feast” fully on the writings of these authors. References to their works can be found in the footnotes.

It may seem strange to Vincentian Family readers that two Jesuits, Henri Brémond<sup>19</sup> and Pierre Deffrennes, appear at the top of the list and that they wrote such influential works on our founder. At times, I suppose, those outside see things with greater “in-sight” than those inside.

### ***Henri Brémond***

While writers today criticize Brémond for some of his judgments, his work is extraordinary in its scope and its eloquence.<sup>20</sup> It was Brémond who popularized the phrase “the French School of Spirituality” which is so much in vogue today. His insight into

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<sup>18</sup> Louis Abelly, *The Life of the Venerable Servant of God Vincent de Paul: Founder and First Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission*, 3 vol., edited by John E. Rybolt, CM, translated by William Quinn, FSC, notes by Edward R. Udovic, CM, and John E. Rybolt, CM, introduction by Stafford Poole, CM, New City Press, New Rochelle, New York, 1993, Book III, Chap. VI, 56.

<sup>19</sup> Brémond left the Society of Jesus in 1904, but remained a priest.

<sup>20</sup> Henri Brémond, *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France*, III « *La Conquête Mystique* » (Paris, 1921). Readers can find this work online at: <https://archive.org/stream/histoirelitt03brem#page/256/mode/2up>.

personalities like Benedict of Canfield,<sup>21</sup> Madame Acarie,<sup>22</sup> and Pierre de Bérulle<sup>23</sup> is penetrating and, at times, quite original. He considered Vincent as the outstanding figure of an era that produced a whole line of saints.

Brémond wrote just as the complete works of Saint Vincent were becoming available to scholars and others through the patient work of Pierre Coste. He emphasizes that Vincent's letters and conferences make it clear that the popular image of Vincent as the inventive organizer of countless social works is one-sided, and therefore distorted. He states the Vincent was, first of all, a saint. "It was not love of men that led him to holiness; it was holiness that made him truly and effectively charitable."<sup>24</sup>

His groundbreaking eleven-volume work, mentioned above, described Vincent's era as the time of "The Mystical Conquest." Brémond presented Bérulle as the "founder" of the French School. Perhaps for that reason, he depicts a very "Bérullian" Vincent. Many authors, both before Brémond and after him, have identified Bérulle as the predominant influence upon Vincent's spirituality. While Bérulle's influence was significant, it has perhaps been overemphasized. Vincent made a clear break with Bérulle by around 1618. Many others, particularly Francis de Sales and André Duval, helped shape his spirituality.

<sup>21</sup> He calls Benedict the "the master of masters."

<sup>22</sup> Of Madame Acarie he writes, "It is not too much to say that, of all the spiritual hearths kindled in the reign of Henry IV, none burned more brightly or equally in intensity than that of the Hôtel Acarie."

<sup>23</sup> He says of Bérulle, "It is impossible to doubt the exceptional eminence of someone who was the master of so many saints, the teacher of so many teachers."

<sup>24</sup> Brémond, *op. cit.*, 246. From a rhetorical point of view, Brémond's statement underlines the importance of Vincent's deep relationship with God. From a theological point of view, one can readily debate statements like this, which juxtapose and/or prioritize interacting aspects of love. What is clear, however, is that, in Vincent's spirituality, love of God and love of the poor are inextricably intertwined.

Bérulle's focus is sharply Christocentric. He accents the importance of immersion in Christ's "mysteries" (in the events of his life, death, and resurrection), a theme that Vincent too takes up and that was central to the French School. For its members, "For me, to live is Christ"<sup>25</sup> was the heart of contemplation.

But, in the end, it is hard to "fit" Vincent into the French School.<sup>26</sup> He was quite independent, even eclectic, choosing aspects of spirituality that best served his vision of Christ as Evangelizer and Servant of the Poor.

In any event, Brémond places strong emphasis not just on Vincent's remarkable works, but also on his profound union with God. He concludes an eloquent chapter about Vincent by stating: *It was mysticism that gave us the greatest of our men of works.*<sup>27</sup>

### **Pierre Deffrennes**

In 1932, Deffrennes published four fascinating articles<sup>28</sup> about Vincent. He cites numerous statements from Vincent's conferences and letters to show how "at ease" the saint was in combining prodigious activity and union with God. He highlights a saying of Vincent found in Abelly, Vincent's first biographer:

<sup>25</sup> Philippians 1:21.

<sup>26</sup> It is noteworthy that Raymond Deville, in his excellent work on the French School, while extolling Vincent, does not include him in the members of the School. Cf. Raymond Deville, *L'Ecole française de spiritualité*, (Bibliothèque d'Histoire du Christianisme, n° 11, Desclée, Paris, 1987). Deville states, "Although a contemporary, a good friend of the foregoing, and recognized as a spiritual leader in the French church – perhaps the premier leader – Vincent de Paul does not belong to the Bérullians in the strict sense."

<sup>27</sup> Henri Brémond, *op.cit.*, p. 257.

<sup>28</sup> Pierre Deffrennes, S.J., « La vocation de saint Vincent de Paul, Etude de psychologie surnaturelle, » *Revue d'Ascétique et de Mystique* (1932) 60-86; 164-183; 294-321; 389-411.

*Our Lord unites himself continually to those virtuous souls who remain faithfully and constantly united to his holy will, to those who choose or do not choose according to his wishes.<sup>29</sup>*

Deffrennes focuses on the importance of the Spirit of God in impelling Vincent to service and in moving him to seek God's will in everything. He describes Vincent's psychology as completely dominated "by the needs of faith" and as "strikingly similar to the psychology of the mystics."

*He concludes:*

*Only the mystics have known this kind of pure and prodigious activity. Saint Vincent, we know, was not a mystic of contemplation. We have repeatedly found in him the gifts of the experienced practitioner. If we have, however, succeeded in analyzing the role of faith in his experience, the way his fidelity to faith conditioned his experience, and the way the assurance of faith crowned it, might we perhaps be authorized to find there certain characteristics proper to the mystical experience: passivity, purification of nature, thirst for God, and the certitude of having found it? ... a mystic, perhaps not of contemplation, but of action and of events?<sup>30</sup>*

As the reader will quickly note, Deffrennes contrasts "mystic of contemplation" and "mystic of action and events." If we understand contemplation as a normal development in prayer rather than a rare phenomenon reserved for the privileged, then "mystic of contemplation" and "mystic of action and events" can be combined rather than contrasted.

<sup>29</sup> Abelly, *Vie*. Livre III, ch. II, p. 33.

<sup>30</sup> Pierre Deffrennes, S.J., « La vocation de saint Vincent de Paul, Etude de psychologie surnaturelle, » *Revue d'Ascétique et de Mystique* (1932) 410.

### Giuseppe Toscani

Toscani's influential book, *The Mystique of the Poor*, focuses specifically on our theme.<sup>31</sup> He affirms that *among the spiritually-minded of his day, Vincent was the great contemplative of Charity, marked out by an extraordinary mystical experience of divine Love, unique of its kind. He is not only "the great saint of the great century" (as the sub-title of Coste's Life put it), but in a century of great mystics he is distinguished as the greatest mystic of the Love of God in Christ. After him came "the twilight of the mystics," which was a natural consequence of the eclipse of active charity, driven by the Holy Spirit.*<sup>32</sup>

Almost lyrically, Toscani states: *Even in his most engrossing activities, Saint Vincent remains a man of prayer, prostrate before the mystery of the Incarnation, a mystic of justice, tormented by the pathos of divine Love.*<sup>33</sup>

He notes how Vincent emphasized the French word *demeurer*, to dwell in God, to rest in God, to abide in God.

Toscani cites some of Vincent's most eloquent statements:

*But what is the Spirit of Our Lord? It is a spirit of perfect charity, filled with a marvelous esteem of the Divinity and an infinite desire to honor it in a worthy manner; together with a knowledge of the greatness of His Father, in order to admire and extol them unceasingly. He has such a high esteem of this that He paid homage to Him for all the things that were in His Sacred Person and that passed out from it. He attributed everything to Him. He was unwilling to say that His teaching was His own, but referred it to His Father: Doctrina mea non est mea, sed ejus qui misit me Patris [sic]. Is there any greater esteem than that of the Son, who*

<sup>31</sup> Giuseppe Toscani, *La mistica dei poveri* (Torino, 1986). The book was translated by Myles Rearden, CM, and published informally by the Commission of Charism and Culture in the Asia Pacific in 2011.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

*is equal to the Father, and yet who acknowledges the Father as the author and sole principle of all the good that is in Him? And what was His love? Oh, what love! O my Savior, what love did You not show for Your Father! Could there have been any greater love, my dear confreres, than to annihilate himself for Him? For when Saint Paul speaks of the birth of the Son of God on earth, he says that He annihilated himself. Could He show any greater love in that than by dying through love in the way He died? O love of my Savior! O love! You were incomparably greater than the angels were able to understand and will never understand!*<sup>34</sup>

Toscani identifies Vincent as not only *a contemplative, but also a great orator, endowed with powerful eloquence ... As his eloquence progresses, expands, and becomes more inspiring and expressive, it reflects more clearly the action that the Spirit of Christ, precisely as Love, exercises in him.*<sup>35</sup>

For Vincent the mystic, charity is everything, in everything: in God, in Christ, in the Church, in religion, in life, on earth and in heaven.<sup>36</sup> Toscani adds: *Charity gives to every human being, as it does to Jesus, the facial expression of God's love. In the very last of human beings, the poorest, in all those in whom the need for goodness is greatest, Love presents itself at its most active, because committed to making itself loved ever more intensely and demandingly.*<sup>37</sup>

### **André Dodin**

Dodin, whose writings were so influential in 20<sup>th</sup>-century Vincentian studies, presents a more Salesian Vincent than many of his predecessors.<sup>38</sup> He emphasizes Vincent's break with Bérulle and the influence that Francis de Sales and André Duval had on him. He

<sup>34</sup> CCD:XII:93-94.

<sup>35</sup> Toscani, *op. cit.*, 67-68.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>38</sup> André Dodin, *François de Sales, Vincent de Paul: Les deux amis* (O.E.I.L., 1984).



describes Vincent as a “mystic of religious action.”<sup>39</sup> He affirms: “Vincent was a mystic who didn’t know he was one.” He was not a visionary. Nor was he an activist. He simply pushed people to “see.” And the only way in practice to “see” people as they are is to represent them as they are in reality, “that is to say, in God.”<sup>40</sup>

### **José-María Ibañez**

Ibañez carried this line of thought further and condensed his thinking in a work of great originality.<sup>41</sup> He investigated the origins, dynamism, and orientation of Vincent’s prodigious activity. He states that Vincent, though he had the temperament and flair of a man of state, was essentially a *mystic of action*. It was his profound faith – alive, dynamic, and strong – that was open to life and its events, and that opened him to “reality.” In prayer, he encountered not only God but also God’s love. But this love, he understood, was open to humanity, and from there he discovered that the will of God is “a will of service to human persons.”

### **Luigi Mezzadri**

In his introduction to Vincentian studies, *La Sete e La Sorgente*, Luigi Mezzadri provides a very useful summary and critique of the views of the authors above and of many others.<sup>42</sup> In his Vincentian

<sup>39</sup> A. Dodin, « Spiritualité de Vincent de Paul », *Mission et Charité* 1 (1961) 54-75; cf. also, « Vincent de Paul mystique de l’action religieuse », *Mission et Charité* 8 (1968) 26-47.

<sup>40</sup> A. Dodin, « Vincent de Paul, mystique de l’action religieuse », *Mission et Charité*, 8 (1968) 46.

<sup>41</sup> José-María Ibañez, *Vicente de Paúl y los pobres de su tiempo* (Salamanca, 1977); cf. also, Ibañez, “Educar en la sociedad de hoy, según el espíritu de Vicente de Paúl,” *Mensaje Vicenciano y Juventud Actual* (XIII Semana de Estudios Vicencianos; CEME, Salamanca, 1987), 41-96.

<sup>42</sup> Luigi Mezzadri, *La Sete e La Sorgente* (CLV – Edizioni Vincenziane; Roma 1992), 111 ff. One might translate the title into English as *Thirst and the Source*.

dictionary,<sup>43</sup> under the word “mystic,” he situates Vincent’s mysticism, as does Toscani, in his contemplation of divine Love, which, as revealed in Christ, is for the least of our brothers and sisters.<sup>44</sup>

Mezzadri’s analysis of the major biographies of Vincent and his review of many 20<sup>th</sup>-century studies on Vincentian spirituality is clear and penetrating. He too, like several of the authors mentioned above, moves away from the “Bérullian” interpretation of Vincent and accents the role of Francis de Sales and André Duval.

### ***Hugh O’Donnell***

In recent years, a number of other authors have treated this topic. Important among them are Hugh O’Donnell and Thomas McKenna, both of whom contributed to Father Mavrič’s inaugural letter.

In an insightful introduction to a volume on Saint Vincent and Saint Louise in the series *The Classics of Western Spirituality*, Hugh O’Donnell describes “Vincent 1” (the journey to freedom) and “Vincent 2” (the Apostle of Charity), who were remarkably different from one another and worked from very distinct sets of motivations.<sup>45</sup> Following Dodin, he speaks of Vincent’s experience, faith and practical wisdom and describes him as a “mystic of action.” He notes how Vincent contemplated his experience and reacted to it creatively.

<sup>43</sup> Luigi Mezzadri, *Dizionario Storico Spirituale Vincenziano* (CLV - Edizioni Vincenziane; Roma 2003).

<sup>44</sup> Using the French version of Vincent’s writings, he cites: I, 86; XI, 221; XI, 112-114; XII, 485-486; XI, 3; XI, 24; XI, 145-146; XI, 246; XI, 146-147; XII, 270; XI, 392-393; XII, 390; X, 138-139; IX, 336; XI, 42; IX, 252; V, 203-204.

<sup>45</sup> Hugh O’Donnell, “Vincent de Paul: His Life and Way,” *Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac: The Classics of Western Spirituality*, John E. Rybolt and Frances Ryan, eds. (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 13-38. For some related reflections, cf. O’Donnell, Hugh, CM (1995) “Apostolic Reflection,” *Vincentian Heritage Journal* (Vol. 16 # 2, article 2).

He writes, in an article on “Vincentian Discernment”:

*Another pattern is also evident in the journey: it is from action to presence. This pattern has special importance in an apostolic community, because at some point there comes a diminishment of our energies. If our total identity as apostolic persons is linked up with our activity and our achievements, when our energies diminish, we begin to think we are running out of love for God. Actually, what is happening is that our way of loving God is being transformed from activity to presence. The greatest of all the gifts of the Holy Spirit is presence. Father Richard McCullen, the former superior general of the Vincentians and Daughters of Charity, has said, “A saint is someone who has time.” That is true, isn’t it? If someone has time for us, if I have time for you or you have time for me, that is a great gift. Someone who has time is someone who is able to be present. This shift to presence is accompanied by intensified apostolic prayer. The heart of the apostle grows in us and we come to carry the world of our brothers and sisters – their joys, their sorrows, their brokenness, their hope – in hearts full of God’s compassion.<sup>46</sup>*

### **Thomas McKenna**

In an article focusing on motivation, Thomas McKenna refers to Hugh O’Donnell’s “Vincent 1” and “Vincent 2” and expands on it. He states that writers like Deffrennes and Toscani describe Vincent’s interior experience as “the slippery one of mysticism,” and he clarifies the meaning of mysticism, stating: *While the word has many (mystifying) meanings, here it means simply the lived contact a person has with God. It can bring in such things as visions and ecstasies, but these writers pass over such phenomena and look simply to Vincent’s inner experience of the divine.<sup>47</sup>*

<sup>46</sup> Hugh O’Donnell, “Vincentian Discernment,” *Vincentian Heritage Journal* (Vol. 15 # 1, article 2).

<sup>47</sup> Thomas McKenna, “Vincent de Paul: What Moved Him? And What Moved Him Toward Those Who Are Poor?” *Vincentian Heritage*, 32 # 2 (2015).

Near the beginning of another article, on apostolic reflection, he uses a catchy image to describe Vincent's approach to life and to prayer: *Over a lifetime, (Vincent) developed what might be called a bi-spectacled spirituality, an outlook that recognized the presence of God through the two lenses of quiet prayer and active service, both at much the same time. He could see the face of Christ in his time in the chapel and at work, in his contemplation and in his interactions with poor people who walked up to him on the street.*<sup>48</sup> The article ends with a lovely story from Anthony De Melo highlighting the role of detachment in spirituality.

#### 4. Vincent's brand of mysticism

Vincent's brand of mysticism is very much his own. He found God in the people and events around him. His "visions" were Christological.<sup>49</sup> He saw Christ in the face of the poor. Christ led him to the poor and the poor led him to Christ. When he spoke of the poor and when he spoke of Christ, his words were often ecstatic. He told his priests and brothers:

*If we ask Our Lord, 'What did you come to do on earth?' he answers, 'To assist the poor.' 'Anything else?' 'To assist the poor.' So, are we not very fortunate to belong to the (Congregation of the) Mission for the same purpose that caused God to become man? And if someone were to question a Missioner, wouldn't it be a great honor for him to be able to say with Our Lord, 'He sent me to preach the good news to the poor.'*<sup>50</sup>

When he spoke about Christ, he could be rapturous. In 1655, he cried out,

<sup>48</sup> Thomas McKenna, "Uncover the meaning in service," *Horizons* (Summer 2016), 26.

<sup>49</sup> Vincent does speak, without using his own name, of a vision that he had upon the death of Madame de Chantal, with whom he had a close relationship during his many years as superior and spiritual director of the houses of the Visitation religious in Paris. Cf. Abelly, *op. cit.*, 283.

<sup>50</sup> CCD:XI:98.

*Let us ask God to give the Company this spirit, this heart, this heart that causes us to go everywhere, this heart of the Son of God, the heart of Our Lord, the heart of Our Lord, the heart of Our Lord, that disposes us to go as He went ... He sends us, like the apostles, to bring fire everywhere, to bring this divine fire, this fire of love ....*<sup>51</sup>

For Vincent, the horizontal and the vertical dimensions of spirituality were meshed inseparably; love of Christ and love of the poor were one. Again and again, he urged his followers not just to act but also to pray, and not just to pray but also to act. He heard an objection from his followers:

*But there are so many things to do, so many house duties, so many ministries in town and country; there's work everywhere; must we, then, leave all that to think only of God? And he responded forcefully: No, but we have to sanctify those activities by seeking God in them, and do them in order to find Him in them rather than to see that they get done. Our Lord wills that we seek above all His glory, His kingdom, and His justice, and, to do this, we make our primary concern the interior life, faith, trust, love, our spiritual exercises, meditation, shame, humiliations, our work and troubles, in the sight of God our Sovereign Lord. Once we're grounded in seeking God's glory in this way, we can be assured that the rest will follow.*<sup>52</sup>

Vincent is at times so caught up in the mystery of God's love, as revealed in Christ, that his words spontaneously reveal how closely united with God he is:

*Let us look at the Son of God; what a heart of charity He had; what a fire of love! Please tell us, Jesus – Who pulled You away from heaven to come to endure the curse of earth and the many persecutions and torments You suffered? O Savior! Source of love humbled even to our level and to a vile agony – Who showed, in that, greater love for the neighbor than You yourself*

<sup>51</sup> CCD:XI:264.

<sup>52</sup> CCD:XII:111.

*did? You came to lay yourself open to all our misfortunes, to take the form of a sinner; to lead a life of suffering and to undergo a shameful death for us; is there any love like that? But who else could love in such an outstanding way? Only Our Lord, who was so enamored with the love of creatures as to leave the throne of His Father to come to take a body subject to weaknesses. And why? To establish among us, by His word and example, love of the neighbor. This is the love that crucified Him and brought about that admirable work of our redemption. O, if we had only a little of that love, would we stand around with our arms folded? Would we let those we could assist perish? Oh, no! Charity cannot remain idle; it impels us to work for the salvation and consolation of others.<sup>53</sup>*

In 1659, just a year and a half before his death, he tells his community of priests and brothers:

*How many people never lose sight of God! We see some among us always walking and acting in His presence. How many people in the world do this!<sup>54</sup>*

## **5. Ten implications for Vincentian spirituality today**

Vincent's being a "Mystic of Charity" is not merely an interesting theoretical consideration; it has practical implications for the members of the Vincentian Family today. In this final section, I will use a series of phrases to describe those implications. Readers will recognize many of these phrases as very important aspects of Vincent's teaching.

1. Integrating prayer and action
2. Praying contemplatively
3. Serving contemplatively
4. Seeing Christ in the face of the poor
5. Praying from events and experience

<sup>53</sup> CCD:XII:216.

<sup>54</sup> CCD:XII:136.

6. Praying with the bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other
7. Praying always
8. Leaving God for God
9. Handing on the fruits of contemplation
10. Learning to be detached in order to be free

### 1. *Integrating prayer and action*

For Vincent, Jesus' habitual way of integrating prayer and action was a model for all to follow. Writing to a priest of the Congregation of the Mission in 1657, Vincent described what he regarded as the two great virtues of Jesus, *his filial relationship with the Father and his charity toward the neighbor*.<sup>55</sup>

Bérulle, Olier, and other members of the French School speak of *religion* as the basic response of the human person before God, an attitude of adoration and of total consecration of oneself to whatever God asks.<sup>56</sup> Saint Vincent tells the Daughters of Charity that, as an expression of this religious attitude, ... *Our Lord himself was a man of the greatest prayer... His chief and constant exercise was prayer*.<sup>57</sup>

As is evident, few saints have been as active as Vincent de Paul, but his contemporaries also regarded him as a contemplative. Abelly, his first biographer, writes that *his spirit was continually attentive to the presence of God*.<sup>58</sup> He adds that a priest who knew Vincent well recalled seeing him contemplating a crucifix for hours on end. The naturalness with which Vincent speaks about contemplation, especially to the Daughters of Charity, is an indication that he himself was at ease in this world.

<sup>55</sup> The French text (SV VI, 393) reads: « les deux grandes vertus de Jésus-Christ, c'est à savoir la religion vers son Père et la charité vers les hommes. »

<sup>56</sup> Raymond Deville, *op. cit.*, 103-104.

<sup>57</sup> CCD:IX:326.

<sup>58</sup> Louis Abelly, *op.cit.*, Book III, Chapter VI, 56.

Speaking to the members of the Congregation of the Mission on 13 December 1658, he muses:

*Oh, if we only had a vision incisive enough to penetrate a little into the infinity of His excellence, O my God, what lofty sentiments we would take away from it, brothers! Like Saint Paul, we would say that eyes have never seen, nor ears heard, nor the mind understood anything like it. God is an abyss of gentleness, a sovereign, eternally glorious being, an infinite good that embraces all good. Everything in Him is incomprehensible.*<sup>59</sup>

I suggest that the integration of prayer and action, so evident in Saint Vincent's person, is one of the most important elements in the spirituality of our Vincentian Family.<sup>60</sup> Vincent was utterly convinced that prayer and action go hand in hand. Divorced from action, prayer can easily turn into fantasy and can create illusions of holiness. Conversely, service divorced from prayer can have a "driven" quality to it and become an addiction. Vincentian spirituality is at its best when it holds prayer and action in creative tension with one another.

Concretely, Vincent emphasized the need for daily meditative prayer. In fact, he accented few things more strongly. Speaking about meditative prayer, he said to his priests and brothers:

*Give me a man of prayer, and he'll be able to do anything; he can say with the holy Apostle, 'I can do all things in Him who sustains and comforts me.' The Congregation of the Mission will survive as long as it is faithful to the practice of meditation because meditation is like an impregnable rampart, which will protect the Missioners against all sorts of attacks; it is a mystical arsenal, or is like the Tower of David, which will supply them with all sorts of weapons, not only to defend themselves but also to attack and rout all the enemies of God's glory and the salvation of souls.*<sup>61</sup>

<sup>59</sup> CCD:XII:94-95.

<sup>60</sup> For a longer treatment of this topic, cf. R. Maloney, "On Uniting Action and Contemplation: A Key to Understanding Vincent de Paul," *Vincentiana* 44 # 2.

<sup>61</sup> CCD:XI:76.



In other words, Vincent regarded daily meditative prayer as utterly essential for those engaged in active service to the poor. That was how they were to nourish their “filial relationship with the Father” and their “charity toward the neighbor.”

## 2. *Praying contemplatively*

Vincent did not regard contemplation as an extraordinary phenomenon; rather, he saw it as an ordinary occurrence. In speaking about prayer to the Daughters of Charity, he states:

*The other type of prayer is called contemplation. In this, the soul, in the presence of God, does nothing but receive what He gives. It doesn't act and, with no effort on the part of the soul, God himself inspires it with everything it may be seeking, and much more. Haven't you ever experienced this sort of prayer, dear Sisters? I'm sure you've done so very often in your retreats, when you've been amazed that, with no contribution on your part, God himself filled your mind and imprinted on it knowledge that you never had.*

*(In prayer, God) inflames the will; lastly, it is in prayer that He takes total possession of hearts and souls. Now, you must know, dear Sisters, that, even though educated people may have a greater disposition for making meditation, and many succeed in it and may have, of themselves, minds open to many inspirations, God's conversations with humble souls are quite different. 'I thank you, Father, that You have hidden these things from the wise of this world, and have revealed them to the little and the humble.'*<sup>62</sup>

But Vincent, while considering contemplation a common occurrence, wanted no posturing or posing among his followers.<sup>63</sup> He wanted us to pray simply, without being self-conscious about

<sup>62</sup> CCD:IX:330-331.

<sup>63</sup> CCD:XI:77-78. Cf. CCD:XI:175, where Vincent corrects a seminarian for an expression he used in talking about his prayer.

how we are praying, without “trying” to be a contemplative. Nor did he want us to be overly conscious of our own needs. Otherwise, our prayer would become artificial or distorted.<sup>64</sup>

### 3. *Serving contemplatively*

In speaking with the members of the Congregation of the Mission, without using the word *contemplation*, he says how important it is for a missionary to be filled with the Spirit of God:

*O Savior, O my good Savior, may it please Your Divine Goodness to keep the Mission free of that spirit of laziness and of seeking its own comforts, and give it an ardent zeal for Your glory, which will make it accept everything joyfully and never refuse an opportunity to serve You! We are made for that; and a Missioner – a true Missioner, a man of God, a man who has the Spirit of God – must find everything good and indifferent; he accepts everything, he can do anything; for even greater reason, a Company or a Congregation, animated and led by the Spirit of God can do anything.*<sup>65</sup>

It is interesting to note here that both Hugh O'Donnell and Thomas McKenna allude to Vincent's mysticism when writing about apostolic reflection. They pinpoint the importance of reflecting on what we do, or of serving *contemplatively*.

One might contrast the phrase “serving contemplatively” with “serving frenetically.”

### 4. *Seeing Christ in the face of the poor*

Is there anything more fundamental to the spirituality of our Family than Vincent's concrete Christological vision? He urges his followers repeatedly to see Christ in the poor and the poor in Christ.

<sup>64</sup> One is reminded of Pope Francis' criticism of a Church that is “auto-referential” or closed in on its own concerns; he describes this as a sickness.

<sup>65</sup> CCD:XI:191.

*See, Sisters, I'm only repeating what you've said: in serving persons who are poor, we serve Jesus Christ. How true, Sisters! You are serving Jesus Christ in the person of the poor. And that is as true as that we are here. A Sister will go ten times a day to visit the sick, and ten times a day she will find God there. As Saint Augustine says, what we see with our eyes is not so certain because our senses sometimes deceive us, but the truths of God never deceive. Go to visit a chain gang, you will find God there. Look after those little children, you will find God there. How delightful, Sisters! You go into poor homes, but you find God there. Again, Sisters, how delightful! He accepts the services you do for those sick persons and, as you have said, considers them as done to himself ... our hearts must magnify and amplify God, and may God amplify our souls for that, may He give us a broad understanding in order to be truly aware of the greatness and extent of the goodness and power of God; to know how far our obligation to serve and glorify Him in every possible manner extends; a fullness of will to embrace every opportunity to procure the glory of God. If we can do nothing of ourselves, we can do everything with God. Yes, the Mission can do anything because we have in us the seeds of the omnipotence of Jesus Christ. That is why no one can excuse himself on the grounds of his powerlessness; we will always have greater strength than is needed, especially when the occasion arises; for when it does, a man feels like a completely new man.<sup>66</sup>*

Deffrennes makes a distinction here. He says that Vincent does not “find” Christ in the poor; rather, it is Christ who “reveals” himself to Vincent in the poor. In other words, the grace of seeing God in the poor is really *grace*; it is God’s gift.

Pope Francis has often spoken of the poor as God’s gift to us. For that reason, he emphasizes the need for a culture of encounter and dialogue, where we meet the poor gratefully as a gift from God, where we listen, and where we reverence God in them.

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<sup>66</sup> CCD:IX:199.

Over the centuries, writers have often spoken of contemplation as seeing and gazing. Etymologically, *contemplate* comes from a Latin verb meaning “to gaze attentively” or “to observe.” Its root meaning derives from *con* (an intensive prefix) and *templum* (= temple or sacred space); that is, being present within a sacred space in a concentrated way. A recent Vatican document on contemplative life states:

*Contemplation thus involves having, in Christ Jesus whose face is constantly turned to the Father, a gaze transfigured by the working of the Holy Spirit, a gaze full of awe at God and His wonders. Contemplation involves having a pure mind, in which the echoes of the Word and the voice of the Spirit are felt as a soft wind. It is not by chance that contemplation is born of faith; indeed, faith is both the door and the fruit of contemplation. It is only by saying with utter trust, “Here I am!” that one can enter into the mystery.*<sup>67</sup>

##### 5. *Praying from events and experience*

Dodin puts great emphasis on this point. Vincent believed that God’s will was revealed in the events occurring around him and in the people he met, especially the marginalized. He cites the beautiful words that Vincent addressed to the Daughters of Charity:

*Yes, Sisters ... we can say that God’s great pleasure is to reveal himself to the humble. What beautiful words of Jesus Christ, which show clearly that it is not in palaces like the Louvre<sup>68</sup> nor in the residences of Princes that God takes His delight! He says so in Scripture, “O Father, I praise and thank you that you have hidden your mysteries from the great ones of the world and revealed them to the humble.”*<sup>69</sup>

<sup>67</sup> *Vultum Dei quaerere*, 22 July 2016, 11.

<sup>68</sup> At that time, the Louvre was not the present-day museum, but the royal palace.

<sup>69</sup> CCD:I:315.

This is precisely the point that Karl Rahner was emphasizing in speaking of “the mysticism of daily life.” One of the principal commentators on Rahner’s writings states:

*Rahner offers common human experiences to help us ‘dig ... out from under the rubbish of everyday experience’ real life occurrences of grace, such as accepting with hope the experience of utter loneliness; forgiving with no expectation of the other’s gratitude or even of feeling good about one’s selflessness; being utterly faithful to the depths of one’s conscience, even when taken as a fool; praying, even when it feels useless; maintaining faith, hope and love, even when there are no apparent reasons for so doing; experiencing bitterly the great gulf between what we desire from life and what it actually gives us; and silently hoping in the face of death. God is experienced, in Rahner’s view, most clearly and intensely, “... where the graspable contours of our everyday realities break and dissolve; where failures of such realities are experienced; when lights which illuminate the tiny islands of our everyday life go out.”<sup>70</sup>*

This relationship between experience and union with God is beautifully described by the British Carmelite nun Ruth Burrows, in her book *Guidelines for Mystical Prayer*:

*When all is said and done, the long line of saints and spiritual writers who insist on ‘experience,’ who speak of sanctity in terms of ever deepening ‘experience,’ who maintain that to have none of it is to be spiritually dead, are absolutely right provided we understand ‘experience’ in the proper sense, not as a transient emotional impact but as living wisdom, loving involvement.<sup>71</sup>*

That Vatican document on contemplative life,<sup>72</sup> taking up the same point, describes Mary as the “summa contemplatrix” (the

<sup>70</sup> Harvey Egan, *op. cit.*, 47.

<sup>71</sup> Ruth Burrows, *Guidelines for Mystical Prayer* (Burns & Oates, 2007) 55.

<sup>72</sup> *Vultum Dei quaerere*, paragraph 10.

highest contemplator), since she turned events over in her heart and pondered them.<sup>73</sup> In his Marian devotion, Vincent highlighted a similar theme.<sup>74</sup>

6. *Praying with the bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other*

Countless writers have attributed to Karl Barth<sup>75</sup> the statement, *we must hold the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other*. Actually, The Center for Barth Studies at Princeton Theological Seminary has been unable to pin down exactly from where that quote came. But it is clear that Barth made the Bible/newspaper connection frequently throughout his career.

Perhaps the source that is most consistent with the alleged quotation comes from a *Time* magazine article published on Friday, 31 May 1963, which stated that Barth recalled that 40 years earlier *he advised young theologians “to take your Bible and take your newspaper, and read both. But interpret newspapers from your Bible.”* In an interview given in 1966, Barth stated, *The Pastor and the Faithful should not deceive themselves into thinking that they are a religious society, which has to do with certain (religious) themes; they live in the world. We still need – according to my old formulation – the Bible and the Newspaper.*

Few people have put the scriptures into practice more concretely than Vincent did. Abelly, his first biographer, says of him: *“He seemed to be nourished by the passages of Scripture like a child sucking his mother’s milk. He drew such nourishment for his soul that in all his words and actions he seemed filled with the spirit of Jesus Christ.”*<sup>76</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Luke 2:19.

<sup>74</sup> CCD:XII:110.

<sup>75</sup> The statement sometimes is attributed to Reinhold Niebuhr also.

<sup>76</sup> Abelly, *op.cit.*, III, 72-73.

### 7. *Praying always*

For Vincent, Christ was the absolute center: Christ revealing himself in daily prayer and Christ revealing himself every day in those around him, especially in the suffering poor.

Basically, Vincent is saying to us, as did so many saints, that the word which God most wants to speak to us is the Word Made Flesh. Saint Teresa of Avila tells us that her only subject of meditation was the humanity of Jesus, because, in Jesus, God is revealed in the flesh. The scriptures and the saints state clearly: do you want to know God? Look to Jesus, “the self-giving one” (Galatians 1:4). He is the “way and the truth and the life” (John 14:6).

Precisely because Vincent found Christ both when he meditated and when he served actively, he was “praying always.”

Similarly, one of the sisters who lived with Blessed Rosalie Rendu wrote: “If we had to leave God for God and accompany her on a charitable visit, she said to us: ‘Sisters, let’s begin our meditation!’ She suggested the outline in a few simple, clear words” and entered into prayer. A close friend of Rosalie quotes her as saying: “I never pray so well as I do in the street.”<sup>77</sup>

### 8. *Leaving God for God*

Vincent makes an important observation that is closely related to our topic: *Perfection does not consist in ecstasies but rather in doing the will of God.*<sup>78</sup>

So, in helping the Daughters of Charity discern where the will of God might lie, Vincent often used the phrase “leaving God for

<sup>77</sup> Positio, « Sommaire du Procès Ordinaire de Paris », p. 199.

<sup>78</sup> CCD:XI:285. Cf. also CCD:IX:26: “You shouldn’t make (your prayer) in order to have exalted ideas, ecstasies, and raptures – which are more harmful than useful – but only to perfect yourselves and make you truly good Daughters of Charity.”

God.”<sup>79</sup> He tells them: *If you have to leave prayer to go to a patient, go ahead, and in that way you’ll leave God in prayer and find Him with that sick person.*<sup>80</sup>

Charmingly, he says to the sisters:

*Just think, Sisters, of the pleasure God takes in regarding a soul that is intent on pleasing Him, careful to offer Him all it plans to do? It is beyond imagining, Sisters, and the Sister was so right in saying that it gives joy to God. Yes, it’s a joy to Him, His good pleasure, His delight. He is like a father is with a son who takes care to bring him everything people give him; if someone gives him something he has no rest until he has found his father and says, ‘Look, Dad! Look what I have; this was given to me; I did that myself!’*

*And the father takes indescribable pleasure at seeing the docility of that child and those little tokens of his love and dependence. The same holds true of God, dear Sisters, and in a far higher degree....*<sup>81</sup>

He attributed the phrase “leaving God for God” to Thomas Aquinas,<sup>82</sup> but there seems to be no evidence for this. Rather, as Bernard Koch points out,<sup>83</sup> the phrase was used earlier by Saint Philip Neri, Saint Camillus de Lellis and others, and most likely came to Vincent through Benedict of Canfield, Madame Acarie, and Bérulle.

The key here is to blend discipline with inner freedom, structure with spontaneity. In applying Vincent’s instruction about “leaving God for God,” it is important to have a rhythm of daily prayer in

<sup>79</sup> CCD:IX:252; X:3.

<sup>80</sup> CCD:X:445.

<sup>81</sup> CCD:IX:287.

<sup>82</sup> CCD:X:556.

<sup>83</sup> A huge number of Bernard Koch’s unpublished documents can be found at: [http://famvin.fr/Congreg\\_Mission/ARCH\\_Invent\\_PDF%2026\\_08\\_09/Table-Koch.html](http://famvin.fr/Congreg_Mission/ARCH_Invent_PDF%2026_08_09/Table-Koch.html).



our lives. Yet, when emergencies arise and call us to respond to the urgent needs of others, we should not hesitate to interrupt that rhythm and see, listen to, and serve the Lord in the needy who cry out to us.

### 9. *Handing on the fruits of contemplation*

Even if Aquinas did not explicitly speak of “leaving God for God,” he emphasized another theme that profoundly influenced Vincent’s thinking; namely, that we are to share with those we serve the fruits of our prayer, offering them not just material assistance, but words of encouragement, of good news, of faith. Aquinas’ phrase is “*contemplata tradere*” (to hand on what we have contemplated).

In his great work, the *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas assigns the highest place not to a purely contemplative life, but to a life in which someone contemplates and then shares with others the fruits of his or her contemplation:

*The contemplative life is, absolutely speaking, more perfect than the active life, because the latter is taken up with bodily actions: yet that form of active life in which someone, by preaching and teaching, delivers to others the fruits of his contemplation, is more perfect than the life that stops at contemplation, because such a life is built on an abundance of contemplation, and consequently such was the life chosen by Christ.*<sup>84</sup>

The service that our Family offers to the poor is, in Vincent’s vision, integral. He organized the Confraternities of Charity to serve the poor “spiritually and corporally,” through “word and work.” He sends the Daughters of Charity to minister to the poor “spiritually

<sup>84</sup> *Summa Theologica*, III, q. 40, a. 1, ad 2: “Vita contemplativa simpliciter est melior quam activa quae occupatur circa corporales actus, sed vita activa secundum quam aliquis praedicando et docendo contemplata aliis tradit, est perfectior quam vita quae solum contemplatur, quia talis vita praesupponit abundantiam contemplationis. Et ideo Christus talem vitam elegit.” Cf. also II-II, q. 188, a.6, c.

and corporally.”<sup>85</sup> He warns the members of the Congregation of the Mission, moreover, that they should not think of their mission in exclusively spiritual terms. Rather, they too should care for the sick, the foundlings, the insane, the most abandoned.<sup>86</sup> In this way, they will preach by both “word and work.” In this way too, their love will be both “affective and effective.”<sup>87</sup>

#### *10. Learning to be detached in order to be free*

For Vincent, freedom and detachment (or what he called “indifference”) are intimately linked and are essential for those who want to do God’s will. The title of five of his conferences to the Daughters of Charity includes the word “indifference.”<sup>88</sup> On perhaps no other theme is his imagery so varied.<sup>89</sup> For Vincent, detachment is the pre-condition for the inner freedom to go anywhere that God calls and to do anything that God asks in the service of the poor.

Using an appealing image, Vincent says to the Daughters of Charity:<sup>90</sup>

<sup>85</sup> CCD:V:61; VI:461; VII:600; IX:467; X:94; XI:395; XIIIb:39.

<sup>86</sup> CCD:XII:77: “*If there are any among us who think they’re in the Mission to evangelize poor people but not to alleviate their sufferings, to take care of their spiritual needs but not their temporal ones, I reply that we have to help them and have them assisted in every way, by us and by others, if we want to hear those pleasing words of the Sovereign Judge of the living and the dead, ‘Come, beloved of my Father; possess the kingdom that has been prepared for you, because I was hungry and you gave me to eat; I was naked and you clothed me; sick and you assisted me.’ To do that is to preach the Gospel by words and by works.*”

<sup>87</sup> CCD:IX:467.

<sup>88</sup> The word “indifferent” has a very different meaning in many modern languages. It can mean “mediocre.” It can also describe the attitude of a person who “couldn’t care less.”

<sup>89</sup> For a description of Vincent’s imagery in addressing this topic, cf. R. Maloney, “The Freedom of the Children of God - the Fruit of Indifference - Vincent de Paul’s Image-Filled Teaching,” *Vincentiana* 60 (April-June 2016), 53-71.

<sup>90</sup> CCD:X:132.

*To understand better what is meant by an attachment, dear Sisters, picture a man tied to a tree by a rope, his hands and feet bound in chains, with the ropes well knotted and the chains well riveted; what can he do? There he is, enslaved.*

The key question for each person to answer is: what holds me back from giving myself completely to the Lord and from doing what he asks of me? With the scriptures in one hand and the newspaper in the other, we can identify many things that allure us: power, money, popularity, sexual pleasure, food, drink, drugs, the list is long. All these things, given the right circumstances, can be healthy. But when they impede us from giving ourselves to God, Vincent urges us to cut the bonds that tie us down.

The recent Vatican document on the contemplative life lists, among the obstacles that can tie us down, the “noonday devil,” mentioned so often by the early Christian writers.<sup>91</sup> It is a “temptation to listlessness, mere routine, lack of enthusiasm and paralyzing lethargy.” Today, we might call it “the blahs,” or the tedium or discouragement that can sap the energy and zeal of good people.<sup>92</sup> In his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis states, little by little this leads to “*A tomb psychology ... develops and slowly transforms Christians into mummies in a museum. Disillusioned with reality, with the Church and with themselves, they experience a constant temptation to cling to a faint melancholy, lacking in hope, which seizes the heart like ‘the most precious of the devil’s potions.’*”<sup>93</sup>

Vincent becomes eloquent when he describes those who become truly free: they fly!

*On the contrary, those detached from a love for worldly possessions, from the greedy desire for pleasures, and from their own will become the children of God and enjoy perfect freedom;*

<sup>91</sup> *Vultum Dei quaerere*, 11.

<sup>92</sup> For an interesting treatment of this topic, cf. Kathleen Norris, *Acedia & me: A Marriage, Monks, and a Writer’s Life* (Riverhead Books, 2008).

<sup>93</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, 83.

*for that is to be found in the love of God alone. Those are persons who are free, who have no laws, who fly, who go to the right and to the left; once again, who fly, who cannot be stopped, and who are never slaves of the devil or of their passions. Oh, blessed freedom of the children of God!*<sup>94</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In a poem that focuses on light and darkness, William Blake (1757-1827), famed also for his etchings and paintings, wrote, ... *we are put on earth for a little space that we might learn to bear the beams of love.*<sup>95</sup>

After his conversion, Vincent<sup>96</sup> bore the beams of love perseveringly and creatively as a “Mystic of Charity.” His mysticism flowed from being consumed by love of God and love of neighbor, which he regarded as inseparable. He spoke ecstatically about both. His “visions” as a mystic consisted in gazing into the eyes of the poor person and seeing the suffering humanity of Jesus. The “revelations” he received as a mystic came from the cries of the poor. With “exuberant confidence”<sup>97</sup> in God’s love, he could repeat aloud ecstatically “the heart of Our Lord, the heart of Our Lord, the heart of Our Lord ... this divine fire, this fire of love.”<sup>98</sup> Knowing the mission that Jesus received from his Father and intensively aware that he and his Family shared in it, Vincent could describe it animatedly, with Jesus, as “the poor, the poor, the poor.”<sup>99</sup> Speaking about members of his family who had recently died, he exclaimed, “How happy will those be who, at the hour of death, can say these beautiful words of Our Lord, ‘The Lord sent me to bring Good News to the poor!’”<sup>100</sup>

<sup>94</sup> CCD:XII:245.

<sup>95</sup> William Blake, “The Little Black Boy.”

<sup>96</sup> Or, as Hugh O’Donnell might say, Vincent 2.

<sup>97</sup> CCD:III:279.

<sup>98</sup> CCD:XI:264.

<sup>99</sup> CCD:XI:98.

<sup>100</sup> CCD:XI:122.

More and more in his final years, Vincent uttered ecstatic words about God's love. On 13 December 1658, he cried out, *O love of my Savior! O love! You were incomparably greater than the angels were able to understand and will ever understand!*<sup>101</sup>

On 21 February 1659, he prayed aloud in a conference to his priests and brothers:

*O my Savior Jesus Christ, who became holy so that we also might become holy, and who spurned earthly kingdoms with their wealth and glory, having only at heart the reign of Your Father in souls ... what should we not do to imitate You, who have raised us from dust and called us to observe Your counsels and to aspire to holiness!*<sup>102</sup>

On 30 May 1659, he told his followers:

*Let us look at the Son of God; what a heart of charity He had; what a fire of love! Please tell us, Jesus, who pulled You away from heaven to come to endure the curse of earth and the many persecutions and torments You suffered? O Savior! Source of love humbled even to our level and to a vile agony, who showed, in that, greater love for the neighbor than You yourself did?*<sup>103</sup>

On 7 June 1660, less than four months before his death, Saint Vincent de Paul said to a group of friends gathered around him: *To wear oneself out for God, to have happiness and strength only to consume them for God, is to do what Our Lord Himself did, who exhausted Himself for love of His Father.*<sup>104</sup> So too was Vincent consumed by love of God and love of neighbor.

Vincent's nourishment as a "Mystic of Charity" came from two primary sources: daily meditation on God's word and live contact with the poor. Each infused the other. Few saints, if any, have mixed a better blend.

<sup>101</sup> CCD:XII:94.

<sup>102</sup> CCD:XII:124.

<sup>103</sup> CCD:XII:216.

<sup>104</sup> CCD:XIII:195.



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**In our next  
issue...**

**Sense of  
Belonging  
to the  
Vincetian  
Family**



Explanation of the logo 400 years of the Vincentian charism:

It is built from a basic figure: the circle ... (the world, history, life, etc.). This circle is formed by different lines that constitute rays in different colors (red, yellow, blue).

These lines or rays symbolize the congregations, groups, associations founded from the Vincentian charism. They also symbolize society with its imperfections and joys, hopes and weariness.

This circle is a link between two stars that recall both "theological places" where Vincent de Paul saw the footprints of God in his life and through his words have become major events: Folleville-Gannes and Châtillon-sur-Chalaronne.

The stars: Their place reminds us of the location on the French territory. They are linked by a cross of light that recalls the Resurrection and Pentecost.

The cross reminds us that it is always a sign of a new Spirit that inhabits us and invites us to live as Vincentian Family in our world, the reason for which the face of Vincent is at the intersection of the cross.

Alexis Cerquera Trujillo, CM