

VINCENTIANA

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Nº2



Sense of Belonging and the Vincentian Charism

CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION
GENERAL CURIA

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Introduction

Editor's Note

Time continues to move forward and so we are now able to place in your hands the second number of *Vincentiana* which corresponds to April, May and June 2017. The theme of this edition is: *the sense of belonging to the Vincentian Family and the Vincentian Charism*. During this Jubilee Year there has been much reflection on this theme and it is only right that the official publication of the Congregation of the Mission should also include such reflections on this most important theme.

In the first section, *from the general curia*, we include the letter of Father Tomaž with regard to confreres in difficulty. A second document, entitled *Some clarification on the most frequent cases*, is intended to assist the Visitors as they confront specific situations in which confreres find themselves outside the Congregation. There is also an outline that summarizes different situations from the perspective of the Canon Law, the Constitutions and the Practical Guide for Visitors and this outline is also intended to help the Visitors in their decision making process. This first section concludes with a report of the June *tempo forte*, reflections and decisions of the General Council affecting the life of the Congregation and the confreres.

The second section, *from the superior general*, includes four letters addressed to the members of the Congregation, letters related to formation programs, the international Vincentian network, the beatification of the new martyrs in Spain and an invitation to participate in the symposium which will be held in October.

The outstanding *person of the Congregation of the Mission* is Bishop Ferdinando Taddei, CM (1867-1940). This reflection was written by Professor Lucio Meglio, a professor at the University of Casino and Lazio. Bishop Taddei, an Italian confrere, was formed in France and as a young missionary went to Brazil, where he was ordained a bishop in 1927. He distinguished himself as both an intellectual and a missionary bishop.

The section, *of current interest*, includes two reflections. The first refers to the status of the Congregation with regard to the Economic and Social Council, an organism of the United Nations. The second refers to

an icon entitled *divided throughout history, united by charity* ... an icon made by the Polish artist, Mariola Zajgezowska Bicho. This icon can be seen at the General Curia where it was presented as a remembrance of the 400th anniversary of the birth of the Vincentian charism.

The development of the theme of this edition (*the sense of belonging to the Vincentian Family and the Vincentian Charism*) is enriched by the contribution of six confreres. Guillermo Campuzano entitles his reflection, *our journey to the heart of humanity and the earth* and speaks about the importance of our identity and our sense of belonging especially during times of crisis. Luigi Mezzadri writes a reflection, *identity and sense of Vincentian belonging*, in which he refers to Vincent's experiences in Folleville and Châtillon and asks the same question that Vincent often posed: *and you, why are you in the mission?* In this article, the author makes it clear that our identity is found in the process of clothing ourselves in the spirit of Jesus Christ and thus, our identity is constituted by Jesus Christ and by the poor. Vincent Teixeira writes, *mission and charity: an identity in relationship*. The author states that the mission and charity express the richness of our charism, its mysticism and its prophetic dimension. In fact mission and charity provide a structure for our identity and all of this is analyzed from the perspective of Latin America and the Church's magisterium, especially as expressed in the Aparecida Document. Néilo Pita Pereira focuses his reflection on *mission and charity in "desert situations" and the challenges to the Congregation of the Mission*, a reflection on the search for God which gives meaning to the life of missionaries. Antonio Orcajo, in his article, *the Vincentian charism: fidelity to the charism of the Founder*, develops his reflection around the question, are we dealing with the charism of the Founder or the charism of evangelization? Father Robert Maloney, concludes this section with his article, *welcoming the stranger: Saint Vincent de Paul and the homeless*.

I express my gratitude to the confreres who make the publication of this edition of *Vincentiana* possible. The reflections of our confreres enable us to grow as members of the Congregation and in our sense of belonging and our identity. I hope you enjoy reading this issue...

Alvaro Mauricio Fernandez, CM

Translated: Charles T. Plock, CM Philadelphia Province

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From the General Curia



Confreres in difficulty

Rome, 12 June 2017

Circular letter to all Visitors and Vice-Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission

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

One of the goals the General Council has proposed to achieve during the current administration is to assist the Visitors in their task of accompanying confreres in difficulty and reducing the number of those living in an irregular juridical situation.

I have asked the Assistants General to address this situation personally together with the Visitors and their Councils during the canonical visits to the various provinces.

At this time, according to the data in the General Secretariat, there are 169 absent confreres, of which 116 are illegitimate. Attached you will find the information relative to your province. For each of them, I expect you to tell me, **by 31 October**, his exact juridical situation and what you are doing to resolve it, if it is illegitimate.

I hereby invite you to begin immediately, in person or by a confrere whom you would like to delegate to this, planning a systematic and continuous work over time to address the issue of illegitimately absent confreres and, as far as possible, reduce the number.

Obviously, as indicated in *A Practical Guide for the Visitor*, the first duty of each Visitor is to try in every way to dialog with the confrere to help him in the process of discernment and, if possible, to return to the Community. If, after doing everything possible, it should be clear that the confrere does not intend to return, it is opportune for the good of the province itself and the entire Congregation, as well as for the confrere himself, to initiate the process of dismissal from the Congregation (cf. *PGV*, Nos. 178-181).

Attached to this, you will find also two more documents prepared by the Secretary General to help you in discerning the various situations and procedures to follow on a case-by-case basis.

I invite you to contact either the Assistant responsible for your province or the Secretary General, who will be at your service for any clarifications you may need.

I take this opportunity to thank you for your service, especially in this delicate and important task.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

Tomaž Mavrič, CM
Superior General

Some Clarifications on the Most Frequent Cases

1. Who is to be considered still “inside” the CM (and, therefore, is not to be removed from the Catalog).

He who is absent with the permission of the Superior General or the Visitor for not more than one year, except for reasons of health, study, or an apostolate to be carried out in the name of the institute (cf. C. 67 § 2).

Consequences

- Maintains active and passive voice (C. 67, 1: *he enjoys rights and is held to obligations ... according to the norm of the permission granted to him*). Loses active and passive voice, if a year passes without returning S. 26, § 1, c: *those who have not followed the terms established in their permission to live outside the Community* (cf. C. 67, § 2).

He who has obtained permission to live outside the Congregation (provisional incardination), such as the permission of C. 70 (permission of the Superior General) does not have active and passive voice, according to Statute 25.1.

What should the Visitor do

- Keep in touch with the confrere, send him all the information from the Province or the General Curia.
- Simply communicate the juridical situation to the Secretary General.

He who has permission from the Superior General in view of incardination in a diocese (cf. PGV 145-154).

Consequences

- Does not have (C. 70) active and passive voice, but continues to belong juridically to the CM (cf. PGV 142).

What should the Visitor do

- Continue to take care of the confrere, send him the information of the Province and the circulars of the SG, remember to list him as a member of the Province when sending statistics to the General Curia.

He who is illegitimately absent.

Consequences

- Loses active and passive voice, if absent without permission, or for more than six months after the expiration of permission (cf. C. 72 § 2; S. 26).

What should the Visitor do

- Call him back with charity and firmness and, if he refuses to return, begin the dismissal process (cf. PGV 178-181).
- Confreres raised to the episcopal order

Consequences

- They are deprived of active and passive voice (while in office and, even after, unless they return to the community) (S 25, 2°).

What should the Visitor do

- Keep contacts and inform them about the life of the Province and the Congregation.

2. Who is to be considered “out” of the CM (and therefore should not be included in the Catalog).

He who is “ipso facto” dismissed (cf. PGV 169-171).

Consequences

- The confrere must be considered automatically dismissed (*ipso facto*) from the CM (cf. C. 73; CCL 694).

What should the Visitor do

- Issue, without delay, a declaration of fact so that the dismissal is established juridically (cf. Appendix n. 5 of the *PGV*).

He who was dismissed with a process (cf. PGV 178-181 and also 172-177)

Consequences

- The dismissal decree will be effective after confirmation by the Congregation for Consecrated Life (cf. *PGV* 176, 7°) and become final if the confrere does not appeal within ten days.
- If the confrere does appeal (against the Congregation for Consecrated Life) in the ten days following receipt of the dismissal decree, the decree remains suspended until the competent authority’s response (cf. *PGV* 180, 11°).

What should the Visitor do

- Consider and treat the “confrere” like a confrere who no longer has rights but, nevertheless, must be treated with charity. The Procurator General or the Secretary General will inform him of the outcome of the appeal.

He who requests the dispensation *ab omnibus oneribus* (AOO) from the Holy See.

Consequences

- He should no longer belong to the CM, because the request for dispensation presumes dismissal.

What should the Visitor do

- Remove the name from the list of members of his own province, and help the former confrere in the preparation of the AOO request.

3. A way to solve the situation of a missionary who still belongs to a Province, despite living outside the Congregation for a long time, would be to expel him so that his name does not appear in the Catalog.

What should the Visitor do

Simple method of proceeding:

- Put up a notice in the Provincial House for 20 days, asking if anyone has knowledge of the whereabouts of this missionary. If nobody says anything, put up another notice asking the same question for another 20 days.
- At the same time, and for the same number of days, send a letter to the confrere, who will be expelled, at the last house where he was assigned, indicating that if he does not contact the Visitor, the expulsion process will begin.
- After 20 days the Superior of the house responds with a letter to the Visitor saying that he does not know where this confrere is.
- The Visitor sends a new letter to the missionary, who is to be expelled, to the last address where he was assigned. After 20 days, the Superior answers the Visitor by mail, saying that he does not know where this confrere is.

The procedure is the same as if it were a canonical warning.

- It is important that the communications of the Visitor to the missionary, who is to be expelled, and the response of the Superior of the House to the Visitor, be sent by certified mail because those certificates are then included in the dossier sent to the Holy See. This is exactly the same as if it were a canonical warning.

If after 20 days + 20 days no information is obtained, three documents must be prepared:

- A brief biography of the missionary in question: age, when he entered the CM, studies that he has done, date of vows, ordination, assignments, ministries carried out, time he has been away, etc.
- Put in writing the actions taken to find him, notices in the Provincial House and letters. In the dossier, it is necessary to include the two notices, as well as a copy of the letters sent by the Visitor to the confrere and the answers of the Superior to the Visitor, all with their corresponding certificates.

This seems ridiculous, but these procedures count a lot to expel someone. Moreover, if the process is not carried out rigorously, the Vatican will not approve it.

- A document of the decision of Visitor and his Council to request the expulsion of the confrere from the Congregation addressed to the Superior General, as it appears in *A Practical Guide for the Visitor*, pp. 119-120. Obviously, the petition must be adapted to the reality of the missionary for whom expulsion is requested.

Diagram of the various juridical situations

Type	Juridical Reference	Competent Authority	Duration	Juridical Consequences
Absence	CCL 665 § 1	Visitor	Max. 1 year except for reasons of health, study, and an apostolate in the name of the Institute)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Must observe the obligations derived from the vows - Continues to depend on superiors - Is ascribed to a house - Maintains active and passive voice
“Exclaustration” “Live outside the Congregation”	CCL 686 §§1 and 745 C 70	Superior General	Max 3 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continues to be a member of the CM - Loses active and passive voice - If a cleric, he asks permission of the Ordinary
Permission or Dispensation from vows in view of incardination (either <i>definitive</i> or <i>ad experimentum</i>)	CCL 268, 693; 743	Superior General	Max 5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Remains a member of the CM until final incardination. - Rights (active and passive voice) and duties are suspended
Dispensation from vows	C 107 § 9	Superior General (for incorporated or coadjutor brother)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Returns to the lay state
Dispensation AOO (= loss of the clerical state)	CCL 290 and 291	Holy Father		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Returns to the lay state
Dismissal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ipso facto (from the CM) - Short process (from the CM) - Long process¹ (from the CM) - Without a process (from the house) 	CCL 703 C73 (CCL 694) C74 §1 (CCL 695) C74 §2 (CCL 696) CCL 703	Visitor SG (secret vote of a min. of 4 Councillors) SG (secret vote of a min. of 4 Councillors) SG, Visitor or Local Superior		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Remains a cleric (if deacon or priest) - The decree has force after confirmation by the Holy See (cf. CCL 700) - The decree is suspended until confirmation by the Holy See (cf. CCL 700) - If necessary, the dismissal process is begun or the case is referred to the Holy See

¹ The *Practical Guide for the Visitor* 181, 2° suggests that the most practical way forward is dismissal for disobedience.

Tempo Forte Report (5-10 June 2017)

Rome, 23 June 2017

*If there are a hundred aspects of any affair,
we should always look at the best side*

THE PRACTICE OF MUTUAL RESPECT AND GENTLENESS

19 August 1646 (CCD:IX:215)

On Sunday, 4 June, we began the *Tempo Forte* with a time for reflection, which was directed by the Secretary General of the Union of Superiors General, Father David Kinnear Glenday (a member of the Comboni Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus). After a brief presentation on the Holy Spirit, each one was then able to engage in personal prayer until 11:00 am. This time for reflection was concluded with the celebration of the Eucharist, which was presided by Father David.

INITIATIVES OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL WITH REGARD TO THE WHOLE CONGREGATION

[1] Presentation of Strategies (continued)

[1.1.] Initial Formation (continued): Father Javier Álvarez presented a proposal with regard to formation for the African Provinces, a proposal that has a twofold objective: to better the process of initial formation and to open the process of formation to the intercultural reality (thus placing formation in line with the guidelines of the 2016 General Assembly). With regard to the matter of the formation of formators, it was noted that, for the past

20 years, COVIAM has offered a formation course of six weeks during the months of July and August (thus taking advantage of the time for vacation). The General Council suggested that SIEV could collaborate with the project for the formation of formators, if the members of COVIAM desired this form of collaboration. The Conference of Visitors of Africa and Madagascar has already committed itself to continue the formation of formators. With regard to this matter of formation in Africa, the Council decided that this proposal should be studied and discussed by each of the Provincial Councils in Africa and then by the members of COVIAM, when they come together for their annual meeting.

The General Council viewed in a very positive manner the experience of the Interprovincial Seminary, which began to function two years ago in the Province of Nigeria. At the present time, there are 39 students in the theologate from the following provinces: four from the Province of the Congo, three from the Region of Rwanda-Burundi, three from the Vice-Province of Cameroon, three from the Province of Madagascar, 26 from the Province of Nigeria. Father Tewolde Hagos (Province of Saint Justin De Jacobis) is the Director of the Seminary and Father Longenus Odum (Province of Nigeria) is the Treasurer and professor at the Interreligious Center (BIGAR) where our theologians engage in their studies with some 500 other students.

This has been a very interesting experience in the area of interprovincial formation (that is, the experience in Nigeria). The students are happy and the formation takes place in the midst of a very positive and serious environment. The students appear to live together in a simple and joyful manner (such is the testimony of Fathers Zeracristos and Javier who recently visited the seminary).

Since this seminary is unable to accommodate any more theologians because of a lack of rooms (at the present time, two students occupy each room), COVIAM has presented the General Council with a plan to add an addition 45 rooms, which would be

constructed as an annex to the present seminary. This will create the possibility of accommodating 60-65 students, and each student would have his own room. The common rooms of the present building (dining room, chapel, meeting room, etc.) can accommodate the proposed number of 60-65 students. When this project is completed, all the African Provinces are willing to send their theology students to this institution, thus the majority of the African students will be formed at the Eunugu Seminary in Nigeria. This very concrete project is intended to give an international color to formation. At the same time, this project fosters interprovincial collaboration and establishes stronger bonds among the provinces.

In this regard, the Visitors, who have not yet responded to the Superior General's letter with regard to the state of formation in their provinces, are asked to do so before the next *Tempo Forte* at which time this theme will be further discussed.

[1.2.] Solidarity (continued): Father Miles Heinen presented a new draft proposal to the members of the General Council. It should be remembered that the issue of solidarity was the subject of the only postulate that was approved by the General Assembly. The objective of the proposal is to provide the Congregation with a structure for solidarity among the provinces, a structure that would promote both the mission and charity. This draft will be sent to all the Visitors and their council members and then to the various Conferences of Visitors, which will be asked to study said proposal.

[1.3.] Missions (continued): Father Matthew Kallammakal, in the name of a commission composed Fathers Zeracristos, Aarón, and himself, presented a draft proposal for the international missions. Here we are not dealing with some new plan or with a matter that is distinct from the present Statutes of the International Mission, but rather we are attempting to present a strategy that will actualize the current Statutes, especially in the area of the selection of candidates and the preparation of those candidates. It was noted that both the Statutes and the *Ratio* are two well-developed documents and yet

there is often much difficulty in complying with the demands of those documents (this happens because of the urgent demand to relieve the missionaries in different places).

Some of the objectives of the plan are as follows: entrusting the missions to certain provinces, preparation of future candidates, and formation of young confreres for the international missions. The dialogue concluded with a request that the commission develop a draft proposal that would focus on the concrete issues that were discussed. The objective of this proposal is to guide the council in their decision-making process.

[1.4.] Missionaries in difficulty (continued): the Secretary General presented a proposal to the members of the Council. This proposal attempts to involve all the Visitors in order to confront and resolve, as quickly as possible, the various irregular situations that exist in almost every province. The proposal is accompanied by a document that is intended to guide the Visitors when dealing with some of the most common situations that the missionaries will present.

[2] Other initiatives

A commission has been formed to design a new Vincentian Association that would be directed toward those deacons interested in belonging to the Vincentian Family. In this regard, we are not starting from zero. In 2003, the Provinces of France (Paris and Toulouse) developed a document entitled, Statutes for the Vincentian Association of Vincentian Deacons. This document was in force *ad experimentum* for some time. We are attempting to restart that initiative and we are convinced that the Congregation can provide assistance to those deacons who are interested in deepening their vocation of service.

The commission is composed of three members: Father Paul Golden (Western Province USA), Deacon Roger Dubois who works in conjunction with our Community in Montreal (Canada), and the Visitor of the Province of France (or an individual designated by him).

OFFICES DEPENDENT ON THE SUPERIOR GENERAL AND HIS COUNCIL

The Office of Communication: Father Jorge Rodríguez (Director) spoke to the Council about the advances made in this area. The Office is to be expanded in such a way that digital copies of our *Constitutions and Statutes* and the *Common Rules* will be available in 12 languages. At the same time, the Office is working in the area of vocational promotion. Father Jorge has suggested that 2018 could be dedicated to this theme.

CIF: Father Adam Bandura, Assistant at CIF, has submitted his resignation. At this time, we are searching for a confrere to replace him. One of the necessary requisites is that said confrere have a good knowledge of the English language.

SIEV: Negotiations have not yet been concluded between Adamson University and SIEV in the matter of granting a Master's Degree in Vincentian Studies. As soon as these negotiations are concluded, all the members of the Congregation will be offered the possibility of participating in specialized Vincentian studies. This "online" specialization (in different modalities) will be offered to all interested members, especially young members of the Congregation. On 26-30 June 2017, the members of SIEV will meet at the General Curia to concretize the details of this program, to evaluate other projects, and to share some reflections with regard to the Vincentian bibliography.

INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS

Bolivia: At the present time, there are three international missions in this country: El Alto, Cochabamba, and Beni. This year marks the 25th anniversary of the presence of the Vincentians in El Alto, while the mission in Beni is at its beginning stage. The missionaries ministering in Beni are: Fathers Julio César Villalobos (Province of Peru) and Andreas Medi Wijaya, (Province of Indonesia). They are very animated in their ministry despite the fact that they are ministering in a very isolated area where access is very difficult. Moving from one place to another is by boat.

Solomon Islands: A process of collaboration has begun between the Curia and the Provinces of Indonesia and Oceania with the objective that these provinces together will take charge of this mission. More specifically, the Province of Indonesia will take responsibility for the diocesan seminary (four confreres will minister there). The Province of Oceania will take responsibility for the formation of the Vincentian candidates and for parish ministry (three confreres will minister in these works). The Curia will support this mission financially with a contribution of \$65,000.00 annually. A written agreement will spell out all the details of this collaboration and a new agreement with the bishop will concretize the commitments of each party.

Angola: Two missionaries are involved in this mission. However, the superior of this mission, Father Marcos Gumieiro (Province of Curitiba) will be leaving this mission for reasons of health. We hope that there will be volunteers so that we might continue to serve in this mission.

Benin: As of 1 January 2018, the Province of Poland is willing to take responsibility for this international mission. We are thankful for the initiative of the Province of Poland that is the fruit of the celebration of the 400th anniversary of the origin of the Vincentian Charism.

Punta Arenas: The superior of the mission, Father Ángel Garrido, is concluding his three-year term as superior and intends to return to his province (San Vicente de Paúl, Spain). We are looking for two confreres to complement the team there.

Tefé: On Sunday, 11 June, Bishop Fernando Barbosa dos Santos, CM, presented the members of the missionary team to the faithful. The members of the team are: Fathers Rogelio Toro Isaza (Province of Colombia), Paulo Estaquio Venuto (Province of Rio de Janeiro), and Alexandre Fonseca de Paula (Province of Fortaleza). This mission will be the fruit of a collaborative effort between the Provinces of Brazil, CLAPVI, and the Curia. In order to avoid difficulties in the future it will be necessary to clarify the competencies of each entity. Father Javier Álvarez will accompany the members of this mission.

We concluded this section of our meeting by reviewing a request from Bishop George Desmond Tambala from the Diocese of Zomba (Malawi) who wants the Congregation to take up a ministry in his diocese that would be in harmony with the vocation of the Congregation. We are always pleased to receive such requests, because they reveal the esteem in which the Congregation is held. Unfortunately, we are unable to honor this request because of a lack of personnel. This request has been forwarded to the Province of South India.

CONFERENCES OF VISITORS

Father Matthew Kallammakal reported that the annual meeting of the Visitors of the Asian-Pacific area was held in Vietnam from 17-24 February. At the same time and in the same place, the members of the Commission for Charism and Culture (CCC) also met. The two groups worked together and planned the following activities: a gathering for formators in the Province of Indonesia (June 2017), a common Internal Seminary in the Philippines (beginning in 2019), a regional meeting with the confreres involved in the ministry of popular missions (2018), a regional formation session for confreres ordained five years or less.

Father Zeracristos reported that the annual meeting of COVIAM was held in Moundou (Chad) from 1-8 March 2017. The following agreements were reached: to continue and to extend the interprovincial formation experience in Eunugu (Nigeria) and to hold the annual meeting of formators in Eunugu from 1 July to 7 August 2017. COVIAM is open to collaboration with regard to the mission in Chad and this mission may be entrusted to the Province of Nigeria. During this meeting, those present reflected on the lines of action as outlined in the *Final Document* of the 2016 General Assembly.

Father Tomaž participated in the meeting of CEVIM, which was held in Fatima (Portugal) from 24-27 April. During this gathering, the Visitors spoke about having two or three major seminaries in Europe without putting aside the possibility of accepting students

from other countries. In this regard, a commission was formed to study this issue. There was also discussion about the launching of a common missionary project in the city of Melilla. The Visitors are open to this project but have been unable to find two missionaries to initiate this project.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

Tomaž Mavrič, CM
Superior General

Event at the European Parliament

28 June 2017

It is a tremendous joy and an extraordinary honor for the worldwide Vincentian Family to have the opportunity to mark this year's celebration of the 400th Anniversary of the Vincentian Charism at the European Parliament.

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the President of the European Parliament, Mr. Antonio Tajani, for the invitation, and to his office and all the other committees within the European Parliament who have worked so hard to prepare this event. I also would like to thank Mr. Alojz Peterle, member of the European Parliament, who contributed so much to make this event a reality.

I too want to extend my thanks to Father Robert Maloney, CM; to the members of the Vincentian Family Office, coordinated by Father Joseph Agostino, CM; and to all the others members of the Vincentian Family who did so much in these last months leading up to today's encounter.

I would like to thank all of you, members of the European Parliament, distinguished guests from Europe and other countries around the world, representing countries, Church and civil institutions, organizations, the different branches of Consecrated life in the Vincentian Family, as well as lay groups, who came here today to participate in this event.

Looking back with deep thankfulness on the 400 years of heroic service to the poor by millions of persons who were inspired by the Charism of Saint Vincent de Paul, we also look with great hope to the future. Those people gave themselves totally to assisting others most

in need around the world, performing wonders and miracles in the poorest areas of the world. We want to continue meeting the poorest of the poor in every corner of the world, wherever there is a sister or brother in need physically, materially, spiritually, or any other area, and do all we can to combat the different kinds of poverties in order to make this world a better place, a place according to God's plans. Some of these are also the clear values, goals, and priorities of Europe.

Four hundred years ago, Saint Vincent de Paul was touched so deeply by the material and spiritual poverty he had encountered, that he made two radical moves. Firstly, he began his own personal conversion in relation to persons on the margins of society. Secondly, he responded immediately, in a concrete and organized way, to the tremendous needs of the poor.

He involved all levels of society, all levels of government, institutions, different groups within the Church, as well as various civil groups. He build a network of charity that spread, first across France, and then to other countries of Europe and the world. This network of charity, the Vincentian Family, its collaborators and volunteers, now has spread this spirit of charity across Europe and the world, where in over 150 countries the flame that started 400 years ago keeps burning.

Because Vincent de Paul was in love with Jesus, he was in love with the poor. He made no distinction among persons, with regard to religion, color, race, background, etc. He rushed to help people in every way possible.

Vincent de Paul believed strongly in collaboration. He believed that every person could bring her or his gifts and talents together to achieve a single goal: the "Globalization of Charity."

We are here today, in the city of Brussels, in this beautiful building of the European Parliament, surrounded by many other institutions of Europe that help this miracle that is Europe move forward.

Encouraged by the presence of representatives of many governments, institutions, Church representatives, branches of the Vincentian Family, Church and civil groups, our dream becomes more and more a reality, something attainable. The “Globalization of Charity” remains our common dream. If we dream alone a dream remains a dream. If we dream together, the dream becomes a reality.

Tomaž Mavrič, CM
Superior General
Congregation of the Mission and
Company of the Daughters of Charity

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From the Superior General

The Programs of Formation

Rome, 10 April 2017

To the Visitors and Vice-Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission

Dear confreres,

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

This Jubilee Year of the 400th Anniversary of the Vincentian Charism invites us, in a special way, to give thanks to Jesus for our vocation, for the call to follow Him in the footsteps of our Founder.

Filled with inner fire, we are called in stability, chastity, poverty, obedience, simplicity, humility, meekness, mortification, and zeal to fulfill the mission entrusted to each one of us by Jesus. It comes so naturally that, as we fulfill this mission, it is our hearts' desire to have new members join us. Jesus' words, expressed more than 2000 years ago, remain so relevant today: "The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest" (Matthew 9:37-38). Jesus himself confirms the fact that the mission entrusted to us is enormous and that there are not enough missionaries to carry out the task. At the same time, however, he invites and challenges us to ask for new laborers, new missionaries, and to trust that he can deliver in the fullest sense of the word.

The *Final Document* of the 42nd General Assembly speaks of our formation and straightforwardly places before us the importance of developing a clear understanding of who we are as members of the Congregation of the Mission and of being equipped with all the

tools to fulfill our mission in the best possible way. The General Assembly, as the highest authority in the Congregation of the Mission, made a clear statement that formation in all its stages is for us a source of renewed energy. It is also a way of preparing our members holistically, so that they will grow in knowledge of who a missionary of Saint Vincent de Paul is and of our spirituality and charism, our place in the Church and in the world.

Having in mind the mandate given us by the last General Assembly and the 400th Anniversary of the Vincentian Charism, I would like, in this letter, to touch on three points:

- Initial Formation
- Formation of Formators
- Plans, Strategies, and Initiatives in Pastoral Work for New Vocations

To respond to this mandate, the General Council would like, in the coming six years, to understand better the overall situation in the areas of Initial Formation, Formation of Formators, and Pastoral Work for New Vocations on the level of the whole Congregation.

We would like to collect all the programs on the level of Initial Formation from all the different steps: Candidacy, Internal Seminary, Philosophy, Theology, and Year of Pastoral Placement that are already in place at the provincial, interprovincial, and international levels. In the same way, we would like to put together the different programs and initiatives that are in place on the provincial, interprovincial, and international levels in the area of Formation of Formators. The third point concerns the programs, initiatives, and plans taking place in the area of Pastoral Work for Vocations on the provincial, interprovincial, and international levels.

With this in mind, I ask the Visitors and Vice-Visitors to send the following programs, initiatives, and plans of your province or vice-province to the General Curia (cmcuria@cmglobal.org) no later than 15 May 2017:

- The General Plan for Initial Formation being implemented at the provincial, interprovincial, or international level of which your province or vice-province is a part.
- The General Plan for the Formation of Formators being implemented at the provincial, interprovincial, or international level of which your province or vice-province is a part.
- The General Plan for Pastoral Work for New Vocations being implemented presently at the provincial, interprovincial, or international level of which your province or vice- province is a part.

Speaking of new vocations to the Congregation of the Mission, on a few occasions, I came across the fact that in some provinces, vice-provinces, and international missions there are many potential vocations to the Congregation, but, because of a lack of financial resources, they cannot be invited and accepted to join us. I am convinced that if Jesus is calling those young men in different parts of the world to follow him in our Congregation, we must be open to Providence. Therefore, we will do all in our power to remove the financial obstacles that some are facing in the field of recruitment to the Congregation of the Mission.

I ask the Visitors, Vice-Visitors, and the Superiors of International Missions, who are experiencing financial hardships and are without the resources needed to put in place a pastoral plan for new vocations or have seminaries who cannot accept all the candidates because of lack of funds, to send us information on your present financial situation. Please include your assessment of how to go forward in order to carry out, in an optimal way, the pastoral plan for new vocations, as well as the implementation of the initial formation plan.

Let me thank each of you with all my heart for all your tremendous efforts and initiatives in the three above-mentioned fields that are in place in the Congregation. I would like to emphasize that all of us,

who serve in the General Curia, will do everything possible to keep supporting each of you in these so crucial and central ministries of the Congregation of the Mission.

As we turn to Jesus, Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, Saint Vincent, and all the Blessed and Saints of the Vincentian Family for intercession, it came mind to suggest that we also turn to our deceased confreres to intercede for us and for new vocations. Many of you probably are doing so already with regularity and so much faith. In my letter of 25 January 2017, I asked each of us, as well as all the branches of the Vincentian Family, to invite one new candidate to join us during this Jubilee Year. We definitely have thousands and thousands of confreres in heaven who have joined us already in this campaign or are eager to join us if we ask them.

May the Lenten journey keep bringing us many blessings. May we continue praying for one another.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

Tomaž Mavrič, CM
Superior General

The UN. VIN-JPIC: Vincentine International

Rome, April 19, 2017

To all the visitors of the Congregation of the Mission

Dear Brother,

May the grace of our lord Jesus Christ be with us all.

In our last council of tempo forte we welcomed father Guillermo Campuzano from our office at the United Nations to present his proposal for a Vincentian unified network that channel the collective efforts of the members of the Congregation of the Mission especially in the field of political and social advocacy. After listening to the council, I have approved the creation of the **VIN-JPIC: Vincentian International Network for Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation**. This initiative is inspired by best practices of congregations that have presence at the UN.

I have asked father Guillermo to move ahead with the implementation of the VIN-JPIC; as you may remember this was one of the issues we discussed within our 2016 General Assembly and is expressed in our final document as a call to action (Cfr. Lines of Action and Commitments, in the 3rd part). I hope that this initiative will continue to advance our work with the poor and our agenda of positive systemic change.

This will be further aided by the network's unity of our collective efforts in trying to influence social policy and the promotion of structural change at all levels. As you will read in the document attached, the main structure of the new network implies that you select a confrère to represent your province in VIN-JPIC; as soon as Fr. Guillermo has these names he will send the appropriate list to each Conference of Visitors and ask them to name a regional coordinator from among those on the list. These five coordinators will work directly with Father Guillermo in the implementation of the network. All the details of the work (collecting and sharing information, online distribution of pertinent materials, advocacy training, etc) will be directly explain to the confreres you select as the representatives of your provinces. This confrere do not need to be freed from other ministries to render this service, hopefully he is a man curious and interested for social and political issues. **Please send the name directly to Father Guillermo Campuzano (gcampuzanovelez@gmail.com) no later than July 1st 2017.**

“There is no act of charity that is not accompanied by justice or that permits us to do more than we reasonably can.” (St Vincent's letter to François du Coudray, In Toul, 17 June 1640)

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

Tomaž Mavrič, CM
Superior General

Beatification of the new Spanish Vincentian Martyrs

Rome, 18 May 2017

To the Members of the Vincentian Family

“That ... is what a Christian is made of, and that’s the courage we must have in order to suffer and to die, when necessary, for Jesus Christ (Vincent de Paul speaking about the death of Pedro Borguñy, CCD:XI:290).

My dear brothers and sisters,

We just received a letter from the Cardinal Archbishop of Madrid, Carlos Osoro Sierra, in which he communicates great news to the Vincentian Family in Spain and throughout the rest of the world. On 11 November 2017, 60 witnesses of the faith, men and women who shed their blood and who are members of our large Vincentian Family, will be beatified in Madrid.

- 40 are members of the Congregation of the Mission (24 priests and 16 brothers)
- five are diocesan priests (Diocese of Murcia) who served as spiritual advisors to the various lay Associations of the Vincentian Family
- two are Daughters of Charity
- seven are members of the Children of Mary (today known as the Vincentian Marian Youth)
- six are members of the Miraculous Medal Association.

All of these individuals were martyred during the religious persecution that took place at the time of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). Happily, the event of the beatification takes place during the 400th Anniversary of the origin of the Vincentian Charism. We all know that Vincent de Paul, as a result of his experience in Folleville and Châtillon, discovered the need for mission and charity. Those are the most significant elements that will lead the Vincentian Family to its fullness and holiness. It is in that same missionary context and with that same option for the most vulnerable members of society, that we must place the courageous witness of these new martyrs. With calmness, they professed their faith in Jesus Christ, the Risen Lord; and with courage, they defended the values that are proclaimed in the Gospel. They made the heroic act of forgiving their executioners, thus imitating Jesus himself. Our Founder once asserted, *there is no greater love than martyrdom*.

The martyrdom of these 60 Vincentians is a gift, a grace, and an example that encourages us to fidelity: *Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad for your reward will be great in heaven* (Matthew 5:11-12). In a world characterized by caprice, short-term plans, and the search for well-being at whatever cost, these martyrs become points of reference who speak to us about the beauty of a life given to God and about disinterested service on behalf of others. It is clear that the witness of the martyrs is not some form of improvisation but, rather, is the result of a life oriented towards the Gospel or, to say this in another way, martyrdom is the fruit of permanent fidelity, the heroic act of mature individuals and of convinced and principled Christians.

It is most probable that none of us will have to face a bloody martyrdom. Persecutions today are carried out in a “more civilized” manner. Nevertheless, we are all called to cultivate, strengthen, and value the gift of fidelity, which is the basis of all martyrdom. Indeed, fidelity, understood in a dynamic way, always will give new

life to our vocation as evangelizers and servants of the poor. The beatification of the new martyrs on 11 November and this Vincentian Jubilee Year can stimulate us to grow in “creative fidelity.” May we live our vocation in a creative way in the midst of this world of unbelief, in the midst of this world in which so many of our brothers and sisters experience misery as an everyday reality. This ongoing dedication is what the Church and the world expect of us as Vincentians: *Take care of your poor life. Be content with consuming it little by little for Divine Love. It is not your own; it belongs to the Author of Life, for love of whom you must preserve it until He asks it of you, unless an opportunity arises to offer it, like a good priest, eighty years of age, who was just martyred in England after cruel torture* (CCD:II:211-212).

Like Saint Vincent, we also believe that the Vincentian Family is not weakened by the cruel death of several of its sons and daughters. From the history of the Church, we know that the exact opposite is true. As Tertullian pointed out in the second century, *the blood of the martyrs is the seed of Christians*. The Church has grown and spread thanks to the silent preaching of her holy martyrs. The same can be said of our Family, *for one who will suffer martyrdom, many more will come; his blood will be like the seed that brings forth fruit, and fruit in abundance* (CCD:X:443).

Your brother in Saint Vincent

Tomaž Mavrič, CM
Superior General

Invitation, on 12-15 October, for a Vincentian Family Symposium

Rome, 23 May 2017

To the Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission

Dear Confreres,

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

In March, you received an invitation to join us in Rome, on 12-15 October 2017, for a Vincentian Family Symposium. As you know, there are many activities planned for this event, including an audience with Pope Francis. The website developed for this event, <http://famvin400.info/>, contains all the information you need to know regarding the Symposium, including a link to the Registration Form.

I am writing to check with you on how the promotion of this event is developing in your provinces. Our confreres are in so many of the locations where the leaders of the Vincentian Family in your provinces work. They are an essential link in getting information to the lay branches of the Vincentian Family and in encouraging their participation in the Symposium. In this regard, I would like to encourage you to ask our pastors to organize their parish groups to participate in the Symposium. Please encourage all the confreres of your province to participate in the Symposium in the largest number possible.

You received information a few months ago that, because of a wonderful gift from a donor, the General Curia will be covering the

flight expenses for three young confreres – brothers or priests – and one seminarian from each province that is in need of financial help. The provinces concerned already have received this information.

Where it is financially possible, please encourage the participation of all the youth groups within your province for whom we have scheduled a special gathering. Please encourage all the high school principals in your province to invite students, staff, and alumni to attend.

Along with the branches of the Vincentian Family, please encourage the participation of all those who feel close to the charism of Vincent, our Vincentian collaborators, to join us at the Symposium. Please encourage your men in different stages of formation – candidacy, internal seminary, seminary, etc. – to participate in the Symposium. We have scheduled a special gathering just for them.

Please make use of social media, websites, newspapers, radio, and TV to announce the Symposium in the areas of your province.

The registration for the Symposium started a few weeks ago. Please register as soon as possible and urge all the different groups to do likewise. This will be a tremendous help for the organizing committee, so it knows in advance the number of participants and will be able to prepare the logistics, in addition to the whole Symposium, as well as possible.

In this Jubilee Year of special grace, let us try to do all that we can to spread the word about the Symposium and encourage people to participate, trusting in Providence that all these efforts and all this work will also bring new young men to join us in our mission to evangelize the poor.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

Tomaž Mavrič, CM
Superior General



Ferdinando Taddei, CM
Bishop of Jacarezinho
(1867-1940)

Lucio Meglio

In every time, in every country, and in every social-political context, it pleases the Lord to choose from among the people those whom he joins to his redeeming mission for the salvation of the people. Some are known universally, others are unknown, more often than not in their country of origin. Bishop Ferdinando Taddei belongs to this line of chosen souls who love their neighbor, who abandon themselves to the mysterious designs of Divine Providence, who suffer and preach the Gospel in foreign lands. This was his mission done with faithfulness and generosity in his daily life as a pastor, following the path of Saint Vincent de Paul, who was for him the teacher of life. From the pages of this brief biography, emerge the character and the work of a man of God, who in his more than 50 years of professed life knew how to leave, in the hearts of those whom he encountered, an indelible seal of his goodness. To make Bishop Ferdinando known to the public, and especially to his fellow citizens, constitutes an important pedagogical example in our time, a time marked by a growing relativism, joined with an egoism based in the individual.

Up to now, no works have been published that have remembered the figure of Bishop Taddei. In order to write the present biography, two direct sources were used: the documents that are in the General

Archive of the Congregation of the Mission in Rome,¹ and a manuscript preserved in the Diocesan Archive of Sora,² signed by Father Angelo Casoni, in which the prelate presents the figure of his friend, the bishop, on the occasion of a publication, which never went to press, about the Missionaries who came from the Diocese of Sora.

Ferdinando Taddei was born in Casalattico (Frosinone) on 9 February 1867. He was the son of Sebastiano and Colomba Nota, Christians of a piety that was not common, who lived an honest and hardworking life in the small town of Valle di Cominio. The next day the newborn was taken to the parish church of Saint Barbato to receive Holy Baptism. The country pastor, Don Antonio Vitti, performed the service. Ferdinando was of a good spirit and a warm character. From his earliest years he demonstrated a particular predilection for aiding any who suffered or were in misery. Many episodes from his childhood are remembered of this early goodness toward the poorest, where he frequently deprived himself of food and clothing to help his neighbor.



His education took place first in the schools of his native country and then in those of Alvito. When he finished his basic studies, and with the permission of his parents, he decided to enter the seminary of Sora to do his secondary education. It is here that he had a professor of letters, Msgr. Domenico Fortuna, who quickly praised his genius and love of study. Little by little as the years

¹ *Dictionnaire du personnel* [Personnel Dictionary] (2nd part, 1851-1900), n. 2951. The author appreciates the availability of the archivist, Father Agus Heru, CM.

² Archivo de la Diócesis di Sora-Cassino-Aquino-Pontecorvo, Serie C, Vescovi, Sottoserie II, Vescovi extradiocesani [Archives of the Diocese of Sora-Cassino-Aquino-Pontecorvo, Series C, Bishops, Subseries II, Bishops from Outside the Diocese], f.14.1.

passed, there matured in the soul of the young Ferdinando the call to religious life. His predisposition to help the neediest led him to the Congregation of the Mission, founded by Saint Vincent de Paul, where a cousin of his, Antonio Nota, was a priest. This cousin took him to Paris, where, at the age of 18, on the first day of October in 1883, Ferdinando entered the Internal Seminary of the Congregation. Before leaving Casalattico, he went to Monattico where an old man of that place, seeing him, said to the young seminarian: "Now you go, but if you do not finish, do not come again to these parts!" The words of this good old man wrote themselves in the mind and heart of Ferdinando, so much so that they became his life's program. After a journey particularly lively, the new missionary arrived at the Paris College on the street of Saint Lazare. At first, his life was not easy due to the way his French schoolmates created an atmosphere of distrust with respect to this just arrived "Italian"; but the young Taddei did not lose heart, just the opposite, he converted the situation into a motive to demonstrate to all his qualities by dedicating his days completely to study. In only two months, he learned to perfection the French language, so much so that the superiors, in admiration, said of him that he would be another Thomas, in memory of his illustrious compatriot from Aquino. Six months after his arrival, he recited in perfect French a talk in honor of the Virgin Mary that definitively put an end to the initial contempt of his classmates. The years passed until the moment of the solemn profession, which took place on 2 October 1885, before the Superior General of the Congregation, Rev. Antoine Fiat. Having reached his dream of being a son of Saint Vincent de Paul, he continued the time of formation, specializing in the study of the *Summa Teologica* of Aquinas. He was assiduous in prayer, continually going to the Celestial Mother for help, before whose image he spent hours in intense meditation.

The time came to embrace the life of a missionary, so on 21 July 1889, Ferdinando, at the age of 22, left Paris to go to Brazil. He was initially in the house of a family in the city of Bahia, where he was ordained a priest on 1 November 1890, and named rector of

the Seminary. He carried out this work for three years before being transferred, in 1893, to the House of Mercy in Rio de Janeiro, where he remained for a couple of months. The next year he arrived in the city of Caracas, where he developed his missionary and priestly activity for 18 years. In 1913, after a brief stay in the house of Saint Vincent in Rio de Janeiro, he was named superior of the retreat house in Curitiba where he remained for more than ten years. Wherever he arrived, he demonstrated a profound and strong pity above all for the weakest and neediest. He preached missions to the people and retreats to the clergy and various monasteries of monks. Nevertheless, these ongoing works did not distract him from the profound study of the sacred disciplines that were always his passion. "Reading is my leisure," he liked to say to those who asked him if he did not spend too much time closed up in his study. He cultivated this passion until the last years of his life because he never tired of learning. Along with his activity as a preacher, he joined that of an author, producing a number of small works of a spiritual character. He spoke fluently three languages: Spanish, French, and Latin. His love for culture motivated him to come to know, and frequently visit, many known persons in the intellectual world of Brazil who gave him profound love and esteem. In Italy, he was a very good friend of the monk of Monte Casino, Luigi Tosti, and when, in 1903, he returned to his homeland, he went immediately to visit him in Monte Casino, where the erudite Benedictine wanted to give him a copy of all of his works.

He kept himself informed of all the political and social events that took part in all parts of the world, especially in Italy. He constantly read the newspapers of Brazil and, when he encountered in them attacks on the Catholic religion, he immediately took pen and paper to respond in defense of her who was for him the mother of all virtues. His was a lively spirit and his speech was eloquent and sure, always ready to confront his rivals. His confreres began to call him the electronic bell because at just the suggestion of an argument he responded immediately. His great erudition and his missionary

zeal gave him notoriety in the eyes of illustrious persons of his time, among whom was the Bishop of Curitiba, Msgr. José de Camargo Barros, who held him in grand esteem from the beginning, to such a degree that the bishop wanted Father Ferdinando to be rector of the episcopal seminary. This image of the learned, erudite, and zealous Father Ferdinando is described in the magazine, *São Vicente*, where an animated writer gives us the image of this Italian missionary, from whose recounting we take other details of his life. "I saw him for the first time in 1894 in the College of Caracas; he came from the House of the Mercy of Rio, where he was a chaplain, to teach in the celebrated College. Some years later, I saw him again in Petropolis, where he spend some days of vacation. In 1915, I went to find him in Curitiba where he directed that seminary, replacing the superior who had left for the war. Three years later, losing hope that the superior would return, they gave the direction of the institute definitively to him.

The house in Curitiba, because it had few resources, lived in poverty. The procurator had to go to the Episcopal Palace at the end of each month to beg for the subsidy for the seminary, because almost none of the students paid the tuition and those that could pay used excuses to exempt themselves from doing so. A very poor house where most of the few students present did not pay. The result? No comfort. Just the opposite, many inconveniences. The new superior did not admit that this was the case. He spoke making light of the happy years he passed in Caracas and the missions that he had made in the company of the great missionary Father Lacoste. He had felt immensely the separation from Rio, where, for a time, he had been in charge of the Chaplaincy of the Immaculate Conception."

The dynamic character of Father Ferdinando did not remain passive before this problematic situation and so he made the resolution to talk with the Bishop of Paraná, Giovanni Braga, to propose to him the foundation of a diocesan center for secondary education (gymnasium), an idea the bishop enthusiastically approved. In 1925, the president of the State of Paraná, Caetano Munhoz da Rocha, decided to promote an educational reform for the institutes of secondary education, putting the work in the hands

of the Missionaries of Saint Vincent de Paul. Because he knew the fame of Father Ferdinando, the president wanted to meet him and, after a beneficial dialogue in the presence of Bishop Braga, which convinced the president of his capacities in the field of education, the president put Father Ferdinando in charge of the project. At the same time, with the permission of the Apostolic Vicar and the Ministry of Instruction, a presidential decree was promulgated, which made effective the naming of professors and the regulations of the soon to be secondary school institution. Taddei was radiant. The new scholastic institution contributed to the transformation of the religious physiognomy of the capital of Paraná, all thanks to the meritorious work of the missionary who came from Valle di Comino. For 30 years, Father Taddei taught in this institute, dedicating himself without rest to the education of the youth who so needed Christian formation. His students did not forget the lessons of their teacher to whom they gave the nickname of our intelligent and wise father. These long years of teaching are more than sufficient to sketch out the image of an enlightened missionary, of an expert educator who instructed so many students, who, in the course of time, occupied the highest and most desired assignments of the Brazilian State. The



sweat and fatigue connected to the field of education made him one of the meritorious figures of the Catholic religion in Brazil and the pride of his adopted country.

At the peak of his full scientific and literary maturity, the opportunity of a new work experience opened without warning for Father Taddei. When he was absent, the secretary of the Apostolic Nunciatura visited the house of the missionaries of Saint Vincent de Paul and examined with attention the private library of

Father Ferdinando. As he left, he affirmed in admiration: “the artist is appreciated for his equipment”. Father Taddei has a familiarity with the greatest saints and doctors of the Church, for this reason it is without doubt that he is also a saint and a learned religious. The motive of that visit was revealed in the beginning of 1927 when, at the door of the Seminary of Paraná, a diplomatic courier appeared to present a letter to Father Taddei. The content left the priest breathless and he communicated to his confreres with eyes inflamed in tears that he had been named the first Bishop of the Diocese of Jacarezinho. The diocese was erected on 10 May 1926, by means of the bull **Quum in dies numerus** of Pope Pius XI, taking the territory from the Diocese of Curitiba, which was contemporaneously elevated to the status of Metropolitan Archdiocese.



Curitiba (Brazil). Bishop José de Camargo Barros poses with a group of missionaries from Italy. To his right with a book in hand is Father Ferdinando Taddei.

Father Ferdinando accepted with profound humility the mandate, on condition that he did not have to renounce his Italian citizenship, something he held in high esteem. The ordination was an exceptional event when, on 29 June 1927, in the Cathedral of Rio de Janeiro, in the presence of senators, deputies, friends, and priests from all parts of Brazil, in the same church where many times his voice resounded, Father Ferdinando Taddei was elevated to the dignity of bishop. The solemn ceremony impressed itself in the mind of the new bishop who made his own the words of the Apostle Paul: the bishop must be blameless, sober, prudent, chaste, hospitable, modest, disinterested, and, moreover, be the example to his flock in words, conduct, charity,

faith, and chastity. Filled with these sentiments, he made his entrance into the Diocese of Jacarezinho. It was a true and proper triumph, preceded by the fame he earned during long years of missionary and educational activity as prefect and zealous missionary son of Saint Vincent de Paul. No elegant episcopal residence awaited him. There was not yet a curial seat or an episcopal house, but this did not bother him; his only preoccupation was to work, as he knew how to do, in a diocese that was poor and new, to organize it wisely at the cost of completing the most humble tasks himself. To begin with, he confronted the deepest wounds that existed in the vast diocese that had been given to him, examining the causes and finding the precise remedies with the publication of wise pastoral letters, particularly those that opposed Protestantism and Spiritism, which were still very present in those regions. He founded a college for women, which he entrusted to the Daughters of Charity. Always up to date with the latest events, he suppressed vigorously, both in speech and in writings in periodicals, every tentative attack against the Catholic religion, especially when Brazil was attacked by the Communist currents that seemed bound to tear the country apart. He became a promoter of devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Carmelite know as the Little Flower. His intense apostolic activity did not go unnoticed in the Roman atmosphere of the Holy See. The Apostolic Nuncio in Brazil, Cardinal Benedetto Aloisi Masella, had great esteem for him. Speaking of him in Pontecorvo, he defined him as the most learned and untiring of Brazil's bishops.

In 1936, Bishop Taddei left for Italy. He had departed from there 53 years previously, as a simple novice and returned as a bishop. He arrived in Sora where he was



welcomed in the house of Father Angelo Cassoni. The bishop of the city, Msgr. Agostino Mancinelli, who held him in great esteem, warmly welcomed him. After a brief rest in the river city, he went to Rome where he developed an intimate friendship with the Carmelite Father Edmondo Maria Fuscuardi, a valued archaeologist, to whom he poured forth his soul presenting many projects of theological and pastoral studies that he wanted to accomplish. With him, he went first to Turin, to the Institute of Cotelengo, and then to France, where he returned to the International Institute of Formation Saint Vincent de Paul of Paris. To travel with him, Father Edmondo said, was most instructive and a lot of fun. He was interested in everything and, in everything, he always encountered the way to inspire feelings of piety and faith. When he arrived in Paris, he was given a very warm welcome by his confreres. Here he loved to take part in the acts of the community, delighting to see regular observance in action, and every day he invited two poor people in the refectory to sit next to him. He went to visit Lisieux where he was fortunate enough to be able to speak with the sister of Saint Theresa of the Child Jesus, to whom he exhibited, in perfect French, the devotion to the Carmelite Little Flower that he had built up in Brazil.

Returning to Rome, he was received in private audience by the Holy Father Pius XII, who gave him a special apostolic blessing. The bishop was so deeply impressed with this moment that he said, "Even if I die right now, I am happy!" Finishing the rest and trip to Europe in November 1936, Msgr. Taddei returned to Brazil, triumphantly received by his flock, who impatiently awaited him. However, he was advancing in age, and, with it, the first symptoms of that sickness appeared, which, from day to day, took away the strength of this tireless missionary, who slowly reduced his public commitments. After four years of sickness, on February 9, 1940, Bishop Ferdinando Taddei flew to heaven toward the open arms of the Father. He was 73 years old and 55 years of vocation. All mourned his death. At the announcement of his death, the President Munhoz da Rocha publicly stated that Brazil, and especially the State of Paraná, lost a great man and an untiring bishop.

Humble, a lover of regular observance, always close to the neediest, no matter how surly that person appeared, he was excited about every beautiful and holy occasion. Though he was an introvert, the result of his passion for study and letters, he had a huge heart always open to helping his neighbor.

An enlightened priest, zealous missionary, expert educator, shepherd solicitous for the material and spiritual needs of his sheep, he was alive with the spirit of his holy Founder, who saw God in creatures and Jesus in the poor he met. He carved in his soul the words: *tibi derelictus est pauper* [to you the helpless can entrust their cause] and deep in his heart thanked the Lord who had placed on his lips the divine Word and had taken possession of his life, torn it from his beloved native country, Casalattico, in order to make him the defender of those scattered around the world who had gone astray.

We end his biography with the account of what happened on the day of his death as told by Sister Catherine of Jacarezinho's College in a letter sent to the Mother General of the order: *"You asked me to write about the death and funeral of our so good and holy bishop. In addition to not knowing how to do it, I find myself without ideas. I feel a great dejection, a vacuum within me that I do not understand. In the morning, after an injection, he asked who was cooking. Knowing that it was Sister Philomena, he said, 'Well, today I can go to Mass.' He went and came back feeling well, talking to us about his plans; he asked for the car to go visit the workers of the palace. At 5:30 in the afternoon, he asked for a small snack, during which his doctor entered, accompanied by the secretary, and they found him bathed in sweat. He asked for a priest and spoke no more. He had entered the throes of death. Without having talked to each other, there were various priests present. Filling the room were 14 priests and 13 Daughters of Charity, who prayed without interruption while the priest gave him absolution. The agony of death lasted a half hour and he remained conscious up to the last minute. He breathed his last peacefully without a contraction, like a candle being blown*

out. His physiognomy remained calm and serene, as if he had fallen asleep. I spent the night in vigil, preparing the injections that would preserve the body.

The body was taken to our chapel and remained exposed until the 11th. During those two days, there was a veritable pilgrimage; rich and poor, men, women, and children took their turns to grieve next to the body. The parade was continuous because the whole city wanted to pay last respects to the deceased Bishop. The radio was silent, business stopped, the cinemas remained closed in mourning. Among the visitors were the confreres, Msgr. Santos, Bishop of Osis, and Msgr. Mazzaroto, Bishop of Punta Grossa, who had been students of Msgr. Taddei. The Mass and the funeral ceremony took place according to the liturgical rites; there were many priests who sang the Mass beautifully. All of this together, though painful, had the appearance of a triumph, of an apotheosis. The signing book, placed at the entrance of the Chapel, recorded 1700 names, besides those who did not sign, and the large number of poor and illiterate. Bishop Belchiorre of Cambara pronounced a beautiful funeral prayer, exalting in words filled with gratitude and admiration, all that Paraná owed to the late Bishop. Before placing the body in the tomb, the people asked that it be taken in procession through the streets of the city. It was a moving event. Before returning to the Chapel, the prefect gave a beautiful speech as an expression of the people's gratitude. The Prefect and other authorities addressed the President of the Republic in order to be able finally to bury him in the Chapel, in the sepulcher he himself had ordered built over the last two years. Bishop Taddei, on 1 November, would have completed 50 years as a priest and now celebrated the event in heaven. A few days before he died, I went to visit the family of a pupil of our free school and the father told me: Sister, Bishop Taddei will have a beautiful place in heaven when he dies, because he is a bishop who has removed misery from this land. Before he came here, no one took care of the poor. Today we have the hospital for when we are sick, the dispensary

that we need, visits to our homes, schools for our children, and all free. This poor man had tears in his eyes as he spoke these words. Another poor man, as the funeral procession passed through the city streets, said: 'For three years the Bishop helped me with money and other things. He is the best man I have known in all my life!' In the same way, there are many who remember the good things they have received!"

Translated from the Spanish by Miles J. Heinen, CM

The Congregation of the Mission Granted ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council of the UN) Status at the United Nations

Guillermo Campuzano, CM

After 20 years at the UN under the Department of Public Information (DPI), the Congregation of the Mission decided to apply for accreditation under the UN ECOSOC organization, which gives us the opportunity to be more influential in the development of social policy globally. Therefore, with the approval of the Superior General and his Council, we submitted the application in June 2016 to get ECOSOC status. Our application was reviewed in February 2017 and we recently received this good news from Marc-André Dorel, Officer-in-Charge of the NGO Branch for ECOSOC Support and Coordination, Department of Economic and Social Affairs at the United Nations:

“I am pleased to inform you that the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), at its Coordination and Management meeting of **April 2017**, adopted the recommendation of the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) **to grant special consultative status to your organization, the Congregation of the Mission**. On behalf of all staff of the Non-Governmental Organizations Branch/OESC/DESA, please accept our heartfelt congratulations. Consultative status for an organization enables it to engage actively with ECOSOC and its subsidiary bodies, as well as with the United Nations Secretariat, programmes, funds, and agencies in a number of ways. In order to better understand this relationship, we take this

opportunity to provide some critical information about the privileges that consultative status with ECOSOC confers on your organization, as well as the obligations that your organization will be required to meet under this relationship.”

The Economic and Social Council “is at the heart of the United Nations system to advance the **three dimensions of sustainable development – economic, social, and environmental**. It is the central platform for fostering debate and innovative thinking, forging consensus on ways forward, and coordinating efforts to achieve internationally agreed goals. It is also responsible for the follow-up to major UN conferences and summits.” The UN Charter established ECOSOC in 1945 as one of the six main organs of the United Nations.

ECOSOC links a diverse family of UN entities dedicated to sustainable development, providing overall guidance and coordination. The entities include regional economic and social commissions, functional commissions facilitating intergovernmental discussions of major global issues, and specialized agencies, programs, and funds at work around the world to translate development commitments into real changes in people’s lives.

To be a part of this global family on behalf of civil society gives us more responsibility to rethink and strategize our global advocacy in a way that favors the lives of those “most abandoned” in our society. This new commitment with international advocacy is a good way to celebrate the 400th Anniversary of our Charism.

ECOSOC has a leading role in identifying emerging challenges, promoting innovation, and achieving a balanced integration of the three pillars of sustainable development – economic, social, and environmental. With the acceptance of our application, we are invited officially to be actively involved in this process. ECOSOC is a gateway for UN partnership and participation by the rest of the world. We need to find creative ways to involve ourselves at all levels, locally and nationally too. ECOSOC offers a unique

global meeting point for productive dialogues among policymakers, parliamentarians, academics, foundations, businesses, youth and 3,200+ registered non-governmental organizations. Each year, ECOSOC structures its work around an annual theme of global importance to sustainable development. This ensures focused attention among ECOSOC's array of partners and throughout the UN development system.

As many of you already know, the CM decided to create the VIN-JPIC our own **Vincentian International Network for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation**. This network will directly benefit from the ECOSOC status that was granted to us. As soon as all the delegates from the provinces are named, we will inform the Congregation of further steps in these initiatives.

Our work with those living on the margins of society has new challenges every day. We are trying to respond to these new challenges with a Vincentian heart, with the creativity of love that reaches to infinity. We are a Family dedicated to the service of establishing, here and now, a new humanity in which the dignity of all is undeniably respected. Thanks for your support!



Icon of the Charism

Luigi Mezzadri, CM

Divided by history, united by charity.

It has been 400 years since the days of Folleville and Châtillon. That long period has not wizened the Vincentian charism like the oak at the Berceau. It is as alive as a spring high in the mountains.

The Polish artist, Mariola Zajączkowska-Bicho, on a sketch by Father Luigi Mezzadri, CM, painted a folding triptych icon. It connects us to the beginnings of our charism, speaking to us not with difficult concepts, but essentially with images and colors, understandable to the wise and the ignorant, as in the noblest tradition of the Church. In fact, Jesus said, “I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike” (Matthew 11:25). We all know that, when we come before a picture of ancient or modern art, we need a thorough knowledge of art history. However, to understand the icon we need to pray.

The triptych icon appears closed with the following dimensions: 60cm x 40cm x 6cm. If we open the two panels, the 23.75-carat gold that makes-up the backdrop dazzles us. Gold is the divine light that surrounds Saint Vincent, who holds a Bible and a loaf of bread. These two symbols remind us of the events of Folleville (January 1617) and Châtillon-les-Dombes (August 1617), when a young priest had

the courage to commit to beginning the work of the missions and to organizing the laity in the “Charities” in order to make known a God who forgives and who invites us to solidarity. The divine light is the divine seal on the Vincentian charism.

The saint is not old, as in our iconographic tradition, in which we want him to appear “old as a young man” (*senex a puero*, as in the Litany of Saint Vincent), but he is young, because he shares in the fullness of God (Colossians 2:10). He has a white habit, as in the icons of the Transfiguration, because he lived transfiguring service into vision. He is wrapped in a blue cloak, a color that in times past was obtained from the fragmentation of lapis lazuli. Blue is the color of faith, which clothes us in immortality. In his hands, he has a book and a loaf of bread. The book is red like the work of the Holy Spirit, who, at Folleville, “opened his mouth,” as in the *Ephphatha* rite of Baptism, and inspired him to proclaim the wonders of the Lord. The bread is neither white nor honey-colored, like the bread of the rich, but very dark, like the bread of the poor.

An image of the Madonna of Pokrov is at the top. She displays a gesture of maternal protection toward all Saint Vincent’s works and refers to the entrustment of the Miraculous Medal in 1830.

Saint Vincent is on the left panel. He is a young man surrounded by young people, because everyone has the age of his or her own sins. In the back, there are two mountains. On that on the left, there is the tree of earthly paradise, from whose trunk will be extracted the wood of the cross, so that the action that would have destroyed us became the cause of salvation. On the right, the higher mountain is the messianic mountain: “The mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established as the highest mountain and raised above the hills. All nations shall stream toward it” (Isaiah 2:2). This mountain, which exceeds every other, symbolizes the Christ.

The right panel presents that which sprung from Châtillon. The saint is not holding up the children as in classical iconography, because the care of the little ones was confided to the sisters and the

laity. The sister on the right is dressed in blue, the color of Christ's robe, of the Virgin's and the apostles' garments to signify that her action is a celebration of charity. The loaves are, in fact, in the sign of the Cross, because the greatest poverty is hunger for God. She does not look at the saint, because she is not coerced in her vocation, but looks forward into the future, like a figurehead on the bow of a ship.

The icon, if we contemplate it in prayer, has a magnetic force that attracts us to the Holy City, Jerusalem, the kingdom of God hidden within us to which goes the heart's desire, so that the entire Vincentian Family can be wrapped in the cloud of God's glory.

5

Theme: Sense of Belonging and the Vincentian Charism

Identity and Sense of Belonging: Our Journey to the Heart of Humanity and the Earth

Guillermo Campuzano, CM
Representative at the UN

“The Word became FLESH and made his dwelling among us.”
(John 1:14)

“A human being is a part of the whole, called by us, “universe,” a part limited in time and space. [S/He] experiences [herself/himself], [her/his] thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of [her/his] consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. Nobody is able to achieve this completely but striving for such achievement is, in itself, a part of the liberation and a foundation for inner security.” A. Einstein

With the papacy of Francis, the Church has reached a moment of history and ecclesial awareness in which we see the urgency of putting life, humanity, and earth, at the center of our priorities (theological, moral, and pastoral). In the teachings of the Pope, expressed above all in the encyclical *Laudato Si'*, the earth and humanity form a single reality. Both share a common destiny and that is why life-threatening problems have a single root. The earth is alive, as it is Mother Earth (*pacha mama*) that “self-regulates in such a way that it is always conducive to life” (L. Boff). From this land have arisen all known forms of life, a true community of

unique life. Within this community of life, when everything was propitious, emerged the conscious/rational/intelligent dimension of life: humanity. Humanity is at the heart of the plural life that flowed from the earth and this is why it is inseparable from both the land, from which it was born, and from life as a whole, since it is there that it develops, following the rhythm of evolution. We believe that the creative hand of God has been present in this unfathomable mystery of evolution and is still present today holding, transforming, and renewing everything created. As time passes, we understand better that God uses us, humanity, to preserve and protect life and this action in turn generates a communion that advances humanity and the whole of creation to its fullness. According to Teilhard de Chardin, this fullness will be consummated, in due time, in God himself.

I see with deep concern that, in response to the theological, spiritual, and pastoral invitations of Pope Francis, the most reactionary sectors within the Church accuse him of what they call theological, pastoral, and liturgical “ignorance”: “he does not know!” We are witnessing a clear intellectual and pragmatic resistance to the prophetic papacy of a man who brings from his own experience a new theological and pastoral language, coming from the south of the earth, from the very peripheries of history. What is our own attitude toward the exhortations of the Pope? How is the teaching of the Pope affecting our way of being and our way of being charismatic, ecclesial, and human?

I write these lines as an invitation to rethink our identity and our sense of belonging beyond ourselves, expanding our congregational and ecclesial sense in such a way as to widen our tent (cf. Isaiah 54:1-5) and to experience what the Pope has called the “ecological conversion” (*Laudato Si'*, Chapter IV). This conversion to which the Pope has called the Church and humanity will only be possible if we rethink our collective identity and our sense of belonging in the total and true acceptance of the essential unity and diversity of this unique human family. I feel in everything that is happening a call

of the Spirit, as in Ezekiel, forcing us to walk among the dry bones and through unpleasant odors to see how God recreates life again and again in the face of our own perplexity and inertia; helping us understand that God continues to create, in the desert, green spaces where life blossoms (see Ezekiel 47:6-12 and 37).

We all belong to the earth and to humanity; this belonging defines our identity in its fundamental features. Neither the earth nor humanity belongs to us; both belong to no one. The possession, use, and abuse of the land and of humanity are causes/matrixes that generate inequality in the access to the goods of the land. This, in turn, causes the loss of the balance that is necessary for life. According to many experts, this is an unquestionable root of hunger, misery, violence, and all the evils of humanity! The earth generated us. We come from it and we return to it, according to the very tradition of the Church that we repeat, sometimes unconsciously, in the rite of Ash Wednesday. "This feeling of belonging is strengthened when we live in care for her, respect for her immense biodiversity, kinship with all living beings, gratitude and responsibility for everything she gives us," and when we believe in Him, who is Alpha and Omega, the beginning and end of all created things (Revelation 22:13).

Our identity and our sense of belonging in times of planetary crisis

It is impossible to deny, as some claim, the innumerable environmental, economic, financial, political, social, cultural, ethical, and spiritual challenges of today and their irrefutable interconnection. Systemic thinking and vision have helped us to understand that the evils of humanity and the earth interact and relate intrinsically. Solutions to these evils must take into account their nature and therefore must be inclusive, systemic, structural, and capable of regenerating broken tissue in humanity and the environment. After so many years insisting on the issue of systemic change, I wonder if this process has generated a systemic vision and thinking of the reality and the challenges of our personal and community life in our Vincentian way of being and acting.

Scientists, visionaries, thinkers in many areas of human knowledge believe that the threats that weigh on the earth and on humanity can lead to the eventual disappearance of our human species and cause dangerous damage to the planet. The earth has already survived five or six major catastrophes. However, not all species survived these catastrophes – just remember the extinction of the dinosaurs. The question we are asking today is whether humanity will survive this eventual catastrophe and whether it is avoidable, considering our passivity and indifference. Humanity still has time to choose its future if, as a whole, we assume the ethical obligation to forge a future where life is sustainable in all its forms and where the binomial humanity/land is always and especially respected and protected! We, the CM, can contribute with all our strength and passion in the decisions of the political and social order at local, national, and global levels, always in favor of life, where it cries! The work we do every day at the side of the poor has a global reach that we cannot ignore.

According to the Brundtland¹ Commission, the two major challenges of our time are:

- resolving the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs and
- sustainability, that is, economic and social well-being within ecological limits.

The sustainability of life is also the fruit of solidarity between generations. This sustainability can be achieved only through the humanization of our humanity. When I speak of the humanization of humanity, I am referring specifically to the reconstruction of our

¹ The United Nations established the Brundtland Commission (Worldwide Commission for the Environment and Development - WCED) in 1983. Its main function is to research the accelerated deterioration of the human environment and natural resources and the economic and social consequences of this deterioration.

basic sense of belonging and identity, to the healing of the ecology and human fabric. This “common home” (earth/humanity) of which we now speak on a daily basis is our responsibility and should be the priority in our local, provincial, and congregational agendas so that we truly follow the rhythm and direction of the Spirit. That the Pope has decided to take this step, to express this through an encyclical that is so clear, reveals the potential to impel transformation in the thinking and way of acting of the Church (its identity) in deep communion/solidarity with the needs of all humanity, as the Council wished.

Alliances, solidarity, collaboration at all levels

The Congregation of the Mission is a Society of Apostolic Life. The determinant of our identity and our sense of belonging is framed in the action (prophecy) that has its source in contemplation (mysticism). The prophetic act of today necessarily passes through common action with others and in favor of the common good, an action decided in favor of the majority that has threatened its existence.

“The dispossessed, the hungry, those who suffer the most from inclement and climatic disasters, are people.”² For this reason, dialogue, solidarity, collaboration, and common strategic action is the methodology and the path that *Laudato Si’* traces to achieve: the ecological conversion and the care of the common home. The Pope has insisted that it is essential to put the human person at the center of all action aimed at the protection and care of the planet and the promotion of sustainable development for humanity. As we have already said, the goods of the earth have a common destiny: they are for all. We must collaborate in what benefits everyone as a means to abandon petty and biased interests. Will the Vincentians of today be able to embrace the common good as their own good and play the whole for its own sake? Or will we remain in limited thought

² Pope Francis’ speech to the UN in September 2015.

and action, inspired by myopic identity and a sense of belonging, incapable of contributing to the collective action of a humanity, which is trying to preserve life and safeguard the planet?

It is necessary that we develop criteria of action that address the various issues in a global and integral way, without forgetting that the care of humanity/land is the responsibility of all – of all nations, cultures, races, religions – of humanity – and that will be possible through coordinated, intentional and strategic joint action! In this sense, it is important to follow the pedagogy of small gestures; this logic of small gestures so rich in the teachings of Jesus in the gospel. If we want to make gestures capable of transforming reality, we should assume those in which international politics and everyday local actions interact. These gestures have the potential to transform social, religious, and political culture in such a way that it is always in favor of life. Can we Vincentians today incorporate into our common identity the gestures of dialogue, collaboration, solidarity, and coordinated action among ourselves and with others outside our circle?

If concern for humanity/land becomes the driving force of our pastoral (*Evangelii Gaudium*) and ecological (*Laudato Si'*) conversation, we will also inexorably find a way to enter into an ecumenical, interreligious, and extra-religious dialogue capable of making us alive in the transformation of the world into a place of justice and freedom for all. “Everything we have said about the dignity of the human person, and about the human community and the profound meaning of human activity, lays the foundation for the relationship between the Church and the world, and provides the basis for dialogue between them.”³

Making alliances, collaborating, acting in solidarity, caring for one another, collectively caring for humanity and the land are the only ways to stop the real risk of destruction that threatens us. Our Vincentian charism is called to make many strategic alliances in

³ *Gaudium et Spes* 40.

order to be able to be responsible for the essential care of compassion with all those who suffer in humanity and in nature today. The commonalities of our identity and the heart of the charism are in solidarity with those left behind, whom Vincent called “the most abandoned.” Today, to that founding element, we must add the protection of the land in respect to all living beings and in the shared, sustainable, equitable, and peaceful use of goods and services in this land that is our mother. The good of humanity/earth is a value that should be made essential. This is an element of rereading and charismatic reinterpretation that can help us in our own Vincentian re-foundation in the face of this historical turn.

Conclusion

It is enough for us to be radically human to the gospel of the incarnation, the one Saint Vincent meditated without fatigue. In that radicalness, which unfailingly unites us to the earth, we find our identity and strengthen our sense of belonging. The evidence of this kind of essential identity and connection could be revealed in a total commitment of our human and economic resources and of all our structures in the protection of life in all its forms, in the preservation of the planet, and in a full awareness and commitment to the rights of the poor and to the construction of a more just society. This kind of dynamism would take us back to the heart of the gospel where the charism was born, or, better still, would bring back to the heart of our personal and community life a gospel capable of making everything new (Revelation 21:5).

I am convinced that the Spirit calls us to come back to our path – that path that Jesus traced with his own steps and that we have decided to continue in our historical existence. We must find a way out before it is too late: “When you cannot find an outlet for decadence, fear ends up imposing itself and opposing hope.”⁴

⁴ Commentary on “O Principio Esperança” [“The Beginning Hope”] of Ernest Bloch (Ed. Contraponto) in the magazine *Ultimato*, March-April 2006.

We have a great challenge ahead of us. This challenge could become the axis from which the formation in the Congregation is thought. I believe that we must generate formative processes that DO NOT separate the human from the Christian, but holistically integrate these elements. A formation that seeks above all to form people, authentic human beings, and that “the human presents it as presented by Jesus” so that the identity and sense of belonging in relation to humanity and the earth will never be distorted. The human identity is relational and for this reason every Christian vocation is relational, which implies the encounter of the other and is realized in love. This is the point of balance, integration, and realization in our life. Let us recover the love/passion for the earth and for humanity to return to the gospel, to return to Jesus, to walk towards God, to humanize our identity and our sense of belonging.

Our institutional failure as a Catholic Church, and of ourselves as a consecrated body within this Church, reveals yet another facet of the failure of institutional religion that the new generations today reject with more force (radical secularism). Recent studies reveal that young people of the trans-modern generation identify with many kinds of spirituality, but do not want to know anything about formal religions.⁵ This failure is due to the self-centrism of religion and, in our case, of Catholicism. It is evident that the great religions of the world, the so-called Abrahamic and monotheistic religions, are often incapable of entering into free dialogue with every human person and institution of good will to respond to the main challenges of our human co-existence. Francis’ prophesizing calls us to make anthropological/ecological concern the center of our theological pastoral debates and to invest all our human, economic, and structural resources in it.

⁵ I recommend the reading of a study conducted by Christian Smith and Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (2005). In this work, the authors describe a religious experience of North American teenagers with these words: Therapeutic Moralistic Deism.

I conclude with this quotation from Schillebeeckx that masterfully expresses the path of our identity and our sense of belonging: “The Kingdom of God is a new relationship of human beings with God that has a visible and tangible new type of liberating relationship between men and women in a reconciled and pacified society... The Kingdom of God is a new world of liberation from suffering; a world of men and women completely liberated and healed in a society where the relations of owner-servant, master-slave, no longer exist.”⁶ To update our identity and sense of belonging to the community there is only one way: conversion to the Kingdom.

⁶ Schillebeeckx, Edward, *Jesús en Nuestra Cultura* [*Jesus in Our Culture*], Ediciones Sígueme 1987, pp. 31-32.

Identity and a Sense of Vincentian Belonging

Luigi Mezzadri, CM

The experiences of Folleville and Châtillon have been liminal experiences.¹ The two founding moments of the Vincentian Family opened the eyes of the saint to the need for word and bread for the people of his time in France and made him understand his mission and the identity of the Congregation of the Mission.

A question

Identity is the set of features that make Vincent unique and unmistakable. At one time, at least for missionaries, their dress also contributed. The circular letters from the 17th and 18th centuries are full of warnings on buttons, beards, and shoes. Uniformity was dogma. The schedule and the usages of Paris were the law everywhere in the world. Of course, it was not the habit that made the Lazarist. A habit full of nothing defines nobody. Identity is the daughter of the charism. Although it is clear that, as happens in life, children can betray the parents' legacy.

¹ J.-P. Renouard, *Saint Vincent de Paul maître de sagesse: Initiation à l'esprit vincentien* [Saint Vincent de Paul, Master of Wisdom: Initiation in the Vincentian Spirit], Paris 2010; L. Nuovo, *San Vincenzo de' Paoli. La carità credibile della Chiesa* [Saint Vincent de Paul. The Credible Charity of the Church], Jaca book, Centro liturgico vincenziano 2016; L. Mezzadri, *Ritorno alle sorgenti. S. Vincenzo de' Paoli a Folleville e Châtillon ieri ed oggi* [Return to the Sources. Saint Vincent de Paul at Folleville and Châtillon Yesterday and Today], Tau, Todi, 2017; *idem*, *S. Vincenzo e i suoi poveri* [Saint Vincent and His Poor], S. Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 2017; *idem*, *San Vincenzo de' Paoli e gli esclusi del Tempio e della Storia* [Saint Vincent de Paul and the Excluded of the Temple and History], Tau, Todi, 2017 (in preparation).

Identity can be compared to drupes (or stone fruits) like the apricot, peach, and cherry. The fruit consists of a hard core surrounded by the pulp. The core represents the institutional structure: name, government, vows, norms, traditions. If we look at the nut, we find that differences with other religious families are not great. In our rules, one can recognize expressions even dating to Pacomius, the founder of cenobitic monasticism, though borrowed from the rules of the Jesuits. There is nothing new under the sun. We are called back constantly to the rules. But what was that call? The rule as Saint Vincent wanted it was not a two-slot machine: it can or cannot be done, which contradicts the meaning. He did not want to lead the Missioners to live under a morality of law but under a morality of obedience to the Gospel.

Obedience to what? To do what? Vincent's answer is clear: "If Our Lord imprints His own character on us, and gives us, so to speak, the sap of His Spirit and grace, uniting us to Him like the vine branches to the vine stock, we do the same as He did on earth – I mean we carry out divine actions and, like Saint Paul, filled with this Spirit, beget children to Our Lord." (XI: 311, Conference 153).

All this to answer a question formulated thus by Saint Vincent himself: goal or target at which we are aiming. "If someone were to ask us, 'Why are you in the Mission?' we should acknowledge that God established it so that we can work: (1) at our own growth in holiness; (2) for the salvation of the poor; and (3) to be of service to the clergy, and say, 'That's why I'm in it.'" (XII: 68, Conference 195).

Christ and the poor

The answer seems obvious, especially for those who joined the community after the 80s of the last century. But this was not the common feeling of those who had joined the congregation earlier.

The key biblical text for the saint was the discourse in the synagogue of Nazareth:

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me
to bring glad tidings to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.”*
*Rolling up the scroll, he handed it back to the attendant and sat
down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him.*
*He said to them, “Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your
hearing.” (Luke 4:18-21).*

A concrete man, who wanted to see everything with his own eyes and touch everything with his own hand (IV, Letter 1539; VI, Letter 2316), Vincent did not allow himself to be guided by emotions or abstract ideas. “The charism is to be incarnate, born in a concrete place and then grow. But you must always look for where it was born” (Pope Francis). Vincent’s charism, he was sure, was born of the encounter with the missionary Christ sent by the Father to be the evangelizer of the poor. Therefore the missionaries’ purpose, as he repeated in his conferences, is to spend one’s life for the salvation of the poor “in imitation of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the one true redeemer. He fulfilled perfectly the meaning of his name Jesus, that is, savior.... While he lived on earth he thought of nothing but our salvation, and he continues this same work” (Abelly book III, chapter 8, section 1, 90). When Vincent had the happy intuition of defining Christ as “the rule of the Mission” (XII:110, Conference 198), he meant that the Mission is directed by Jesus Christ (“rule” comes from “to rule”); indeed, it is measured on Jesus Christ, so that the missionaries should have his “heart of charity” (XII:216, Conference 207) and open up to His abyss of gentleness (XII:95, Conference 196) to be chosen “as instruments of His immense, paternal charity, which is intended to be established and to expand in souls” (XII:214, Conference 207).

Identity is conformity to Christ: “The intention of the Company is to imitate Our Lord to the extent that poor, insignificant persons can do. What does that mean? It means that the Company aspires to take Him as a model in the way He acted, what He did, His ministries, and His aims.” (XII:67, Conference 195).

The centerpiece of the Vincentian identity is thus constituted by Jesus Christ and the poor.

Evolution and/or decline

The elements of this have been highlighted by the growth of its works. Vincent did in fact go in for a cascade of projects. He sought out the ways of the Lord (Psalm 24:4). He tried not to convey an aggressive style, typical of an industrialist. All his foundations were accepted only if the proposal came from others, which for him meant the will of God. The search for divine will was for Vincent the cornerstone of his vision of the founder of a community that had the mission of the evangelization of the poor. But it was still a matter of concrete needs, for a concrete mission, for men with their feet on the ground and their eyes on the heavens.

To make real the term “today” has been the diversifying element of Vincent and the tradition of his successors. Vincent felt guided by the Spirit, who is “the Creator,” as it creates “the resemblance to Christ, gentle and humble of heart,”² while for his successors the Rule was certainly something precious, but only to guard. Like a relic. They did not live for today. Like Lot’s wife, they looked back. They were men of yesterday. We have the example in the Madagascar mission. “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. *Quoi!* Messieurs, shall we leave our good M. Bourdaise

² The Constitutions and Statutes of the Company of the Daughters of Charity, Article 18, present this concept well.

all alone there?” (SV XI: 372, Conference 172). Bourdaise had had been dead for more than a year, and the Vincentian mission in the distant island died shortly after his death.

In fact, little by little, in the development of the Little Company, a veil of fog had risen, and, little by little, it had thickened.

The first warnings had already been experienced by the saint:

“‘But,’ someone will say to me, ‘why burden ourselves with a hospital? Look at the poor people in the Nom-de-Jésus who are diverting us from our ministry; we have to go to say Mass for them, to instruct them, to administer the Sacraments, and to supervise the overall care of their lives. Why go to the border towns to distribute alms, to run the risk of many dangers, and to be diverted from our ministries?’ Eh, Messieurs! Can we find fault with these good works without failing in our duty? 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? So then, 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.’” (XII:77, Conference 195).

“Evangelize with words and deeds,” Saint Vincent said. It was for him “the most perfect thing.” In fact, after his death, evangelization

prevailed only in words. Shortly after the death of the saint, the royal parishes were taken on (1661 and following). Then was the turn of the College of St-Cyr (1692). The bishops in the meantime asked us to take part in the formation of the priests in the seminaries. Missions and seminaries, two classical ministries of the word, had the upper hand.

In fact, the conviction arose that evangelizing the poor belonged to the Missioners while assisting them was the competence of the Daughters of Charity.

The Constitutions of 1954 distinguished between a general purpose (the glory of God and the perfection of each member) and the special one, divided into three paragraphs: 1. to evangelize the poor, especially those of the countryside; 2. to help ecclesiastics; 3. to conduct works of charity and education.

These Constitutions did not stay in force for many years. These were the ones on which my generation was formed. And the lesson we received was to consider the identity of the Mission principally based on the ministry of the Word (missions and seminaries) and not on that of charity. So Folleville became separated from Châtillon. At the center was the man, invited to an ascetic, applying all his efforts to attain holiness. All the formation of the ordained given in the 60s was indebted to a spirituality in which the Holy Spirit was absent, while the verbs “to have to, to be able to, to will to” were predominant. But the poor were mostly absent.

On the path toward repair

The Second Vatican Council arrived. *Perfectae Caritatis* defined religious life as a life in the Church, for the Church, and of the Church.³ Critique of the conception of religious life was evident

³ L. Mezzadri, *Fatevi mondo, fatevi Chiesa. Laici, seminaristi, presbiteri e religiosi* (Il Concilio Vaticano II) [*Make Yourself World, Make Yourself Church. Laity, Seminarists, Priests, and Religious* (The Second Vatican Council)], Tau, Todi 2014, 99-121.

as “escape from the world” (*fuga mundi*). There were some who questioned the traditional expression of the “Carthusian at home” for the Missioner. But there was no reason to do so as it referred to the interior life of the Missioner. Most important to us was the call for adaptation and renovation (*accommodata renovatio*) of the communities, pointing to five guiding principles:

- 1) Following Christ: it was the supreme rule, therefore the various institutes were called upon to overcome everything else (rules, customs, statutes) to refer mainly to the Gospel;
- 2) The second point was the return to the spirit and charism of the founder or foundress;
- 3) The third point was the request made to religious institutes for insertion into the life and mission of the Church;
- 4) The fourth was a call to adapt to the demands of the times, which involved a discernment of the values of the world;
- 5) The conclusion was an invitation to make an update that was chiefly spiritual.

Renewal should therefore have had good feet on the ground. It had to be founded on the return to the sources of Christian life and inspiration of the founders and to adapt to the conditions of the time; hence, neither archeology nor modernity. In other words, the Council was saying that religious should not be dictated in the agenda of renewal either by their past or by the world, but by Christ.

Consequently, the documents of the individual institutes had to be revised: “Therefore let constitutions, directories, custom books, books of prayers and ceremonies and such like be suitably re-edited and, obsolete laws being suppressed, be adapted to the decrees of this sacred synod” (*PC* 3).

The Congregation started a triple course. The most challenging was the Assemblies in 1968-69 and 1980, as well as that bridge in

1974.⁴ The second was the one of the studies, which flourished in various regions and resulted in conferences, studies,⁵ biographies, and magazines. The third was that of pilot experiences in the fields of evangelization and charity.

From the 1980 Assembly came another vision of the community, an “outgoing” community in the footsteps of Christ “proclaiming the Gospel to the Poor” (Constitutions, article 1). The Gospel is not our work; salvation is not the fruit of our efforts.

The first part of the Constitutions of 1980, the fundamental one, is titled “Vocation,” a title derived from a text by Saint Vincent: “That’s what Missioners profess to do, it’s their special characteristic to be, like Jesus Christ, committed to the poor” (XII:71, Conference 195).

At 400 years from the beginning, everything can begin again. The lymph is healthy, flows generously, and is called “Caritas Christi.” It is time to let it act to make us look again at the novelty of the days of Folleville and Châtillon, of those few who “went out of the house,”

⁴ M. Pérez Flores, “Desde las Constituciones de 1954 a las de 1980” [“From the Constitutions of 1954 to Those of 1980”] in *SIEV. Vincentien Month* (Paris 2-28 July 1984), in *Vincentiana* 28 (1984):751-784.

⁵ The General Curia became the promoter of initiatives of study (GIEV, SIEV, CIF) which focused on meetings (the important one was in 1981), which appeared in *Mois vincentiens* [Vincentian Months] and in the *Storia della Congregazione* [History of the Congregation], begun by J. M. Román and L. Mezzadri and finished by J. Rybolt. From France there were the publications of A. Dodin, R. Chalumeau, J.-P. Renouard, J. Morin, C. Lautissier, J.-Y. Ducourneau, and the *Fiches vincentiennes* [Vincentian Booklets]. From Spain: *Semanas de Salamanca* [Salamanca Weeks] and the publications of J. M. Román, J. M. Ibáñez, the *Diccionario vicenciano* [Vincentian Dictionary]. From Italy, there were the initiatives of the *Gruppo di animazione vincenziana* [Vincentian Animation Group] and the works of C. Riccardi, L. Mezzadri, L. Nuovo, E. Antonello. From the United States, *Vincentian Heritage* and the contributions to the history of the Congregation by J. Rybolt.

giving the key to the neighbors, and met to plan the shifts of charity. They were few but were not alone: Jesus Christ was with them; and also the poor.

Folleville and Châtillon were like the tiny fire of Moses' bush. They were the signal of a life that was beginning. We have known the Name and Mission and the Charism, which are words of the future, which has given us breath like the first Adam. Folleville and Châtillon have given us a style, which is like the dress of the Vincentian, which makes us recognizable, which allows us to tell who we are. It is a style composed of sobriety and modesty that loves to listen and welcome and prefer to celebrate well according to the Council.

Men die; a charism never dies. This makes us hope for a renewal, indeed for a rebirth, which will not be certified by statistics or numbers, but from the Church and the poor.

Translator's note: The citations are taken from the English translation of Coste, and refer to the volume, followed by the page number, and the number of the letter or conference.

Translated from the Italian by John E. Rybolt, CM

Mission and Charity: An Identity in Relationship

Vinícius Augusto Teixeira, CM

The Latin American Religious Phenomena and the Vincentian Identity

Charity and Mission. This is the binomial which synthesizes and expresses the richness of the Vincentian Charism, its mysticism and its prophecy. It is that which structures and mobilizes our identity, delineating a form of being and acting in the Church and in the world. Immersed as we are in a very diverse, pluralistic, and multifaceted scenario in all of its areas (ethnic, esthetic, cultural, religious, ecclesial, spiritual, apostolic, and community), we cannot forget the grace and challenge to integrate, live, and radiate the values and demands of our charism – charity-missionary – with all that it inspires and requires, in the different contexts that we live as bearers of the inheritance that we have received from Saint Vincent de Paul.

Almost two centuries ago, the Vincentian Charism was planted in Latin America, beginning in the fertile soil of Brazil in 1820, with the arrival of the Portuguese Fathers.¹ During this period, the

¹ It was in the year 1820 that the Congregation of the Mission (CM) was formally established in Brazil, with Fathers Leandro Rebelo Peixoto e Castro (1781-1841) and Antonio Ferreira Viçoso (1787-1875), this future Bishop from Mariana, today *Venerable*, on the path to beatification. But it seems that, already in 1640, the *Propagation of the Faith* had offered Saint Vincent a mission in Brazil. This is what was taken from a postscript added by our founder to a letter written to Father Lebreton, resident of Rome (cf. CCD II, 105). Brazil was also on the apostolic horizon of the mystic of charity and mission! [cf., Rybolt, John. *The Vincentians: A General History of the Congregation of the Mission*, Volume 3: *Revolution and Restoration (1789-1843)*, New York: New City Press, 2013, p. 593-596].

nefarious prejudices of the European revolutions could not destroy the vitality of the missionary charism of the Congregation. At the same time, new perspectives were unfolding through an ultra-marine expansion, in particular within the American continent.² Little by little, other countries were being converted into fertile ground for mission and charity, thanks to the apostolic zeal of the sons of Saint Vincent: Mexico (1844), Chile (1854), Peru (1858), Argentina (1859), Central America (1862), Cuba (1863), Colombia and Ecuador (1870), Puerto Rico (1873), Costa Rica (1893), and Venezuela (1931).³ On the continent of hope and love, charity and mission revealed their fecundity, developing and producing abundant fruit, unfolding in action and institutions dedicated to the evangelization and service of the poor and an ongoing formation of clergy and laity. Our soil was watered by the sweat of hundreds of missionaries who gave their lives, clothed with the spirit of Christ and faithful to Saint Vincent. In our countries, geographically extending more or less, the Vincentian Family flourished admirably, attracting and sending men and women for the harvest of the Kingdom, serving the call of the Church, attentive to the current needs.

In this brief approach, guided by the “*Documento de Aparecida*” [“Aparecida Document”] (DA),⁴ we will take up some aspects of the Latin American religious phenomena. Then we will look to the Vincentian Charism for inspiration and impulse to revitalize charity and mission in today’s context. Lastly, we will present some insights for the purpose of making our fidelity more creative and effective.

² Cf. Román, José María, “Lecciones de Historia General de la Congregación de la Misión” [“Lessons from the General History of the Congregation of the Mission”] in *Anales de la Congregación de la Misión y de las Hijas de la Caridad*, Madrid, volume 113, n. 4-5, July-October 2005, p. 405.

³ Data taken from *Congregatio Missionis Catalogus Provinciarum, Domorum ac Personarum (2014-2016)*, Roma: Curia Generalitia.

⁴ Emanated from the *V Conferencia General del Episcopado de Latino América y del Caribe* [V General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean] (13-31 May 2007).

Secularization, crisis of meaning, and religious irruption

Cultural, social, and religious fragmentation has caused a generalized “disease” which has provoked in many people a profound feeling of insecurity, anguish, frustration, and anxiety, if not real emotional and psychic disequilibrium. Scholars refer to this phenomenon as a *crisis of meaning*. This crisis is not limited to the “multiple partial meanings that individuals can find in the everyday actions that they perform, but the meaning that gives unity to everything that exists and happens to us in experience, which we believers call the religious sense” (DA 37). All of these cultural tendencies and impacts take place mainly in urban settings, but their influence can also be detected in the rural context, principally due to the effects of globalization, abundant although unequal, and of the widespread communication media, particularly the dissemination of social networks with the advantages and risks they present. When the view of the transcendent dimension of existence is lost, dispensing the religious experience, circumscribing its movement and its goal to its proper interiority, in history or in nature (immanentism), the horizon of life and its fundamental relationships is narrowed. In fact, “the integrating force of the sacred permits that all of the created realities acquire, from it, its meaning, its value, and its consistency. To separate or withdraw from the sacred is to submit to anomie, to the loss of meaning, to chaos.”⁵ In other words, when religious meaning diminishes, the dynamic unity between *to be* and *to act* is diluted, and the *I* is imposed as the absolute and arbitrary unquestionable criteria, objective recognition of human dignity is debilitated, ethical values vanish, and the most radical aspirations give way to tyranny of the desires, the ecological conscience is impoverished, the social-transforming commitment is impoverished or degenerates into

⁵ Libanio, João Batista, *A religião no início do Milênio* [*Religion at the Beginning of the Millennium*], São Paulo: Loyola, 2002, p. 94. In this masterful work, the author, who died in 2014, analyzes in detail the contemporary religious phenomenon distinguishing its forms, causes, and consequences.

sectarian and narcissistic ideologies, deprived of clear principles and ends. As such, an existential vacuum is established, often resulting in an attempt to fill with furious voracity, only to later throw one's self into the tedium of isolation (facilitated today by the virtual world), with a compulsion for sex or avid desire for consumerism. All of these tendencies, highly visible in postmodern culture, contribute to the fading of the meaning of life and the trivialization of values, feelings, and attitudes that ennoble the human being, its options and actions.

However, now and again, "the crisis of meaning and of value more easily provokes religious desires and needs in people who experience it."⁶ In Latin America, the process of secularization, with its characteristics of autonomy and indifference, works alongside a singular and complex religious outbreak. This phenomenon, in its impressive variety of forms and expressions,⁷ is characterized by a distancing from formal traditions to an emphasis on subjectivity and an insatiable search for satisfaction in the enormous variety of religious products available today to everyone. The phenomenon has its effects on institutional religion, which is more socially organized, has structured rites, symbols, and doctrines that are transmitted through tradition to a community adept in its faith and is seen as losing ground to this fluid, subjective religiosity, with its powerful affective-emotional content. The objective dimension of faith is renounced, such as that which is supported by transcendent data or by the revealed word, which calls us to attachment, conversion, and commitment of the *homo religious*.⁸ So what results

⁶ Libanio, *ibid*, p. 39.

⁷ As the great pastoral theologian Alberto Antoniazzi assures, in reference to the Brazilian religious scene: "The great tendency in these last decades or in modernity in the field of religion is diversification and fragmentation" (cited by Libanio, *ibid*, p. 25).

⁸ Father Libanio dedicates an entire chapter of his book to an interesting conceptual delimitation on the three semantic fields of religion, religiosity, and faith putting forth the differences and convergences (cf. Libanio, *ibid*, p. 87-110).

is the displacement from the institutionalized traditions and also a syncretistic confusion for intimate accommodations by spiritual conveniences or isolated practices, chosen according to taste and the urgency of each individual. The number of people disconnected from religious institutions increases in the search for other experiences that give meaning, vigor, and hope, without attention to where or from whom such existential unrest can be satisfied (traditional institutions, non-denominational churches, movements, Pentecostal believers, new age, neo-paganism, and others). J. B. Libanio has observed a perfect synthesis of the “sacred secularity” that makes up the contemporary religious phenomena in Latin America: “From within the announcing of the death of religion and advance of secularization, springs forth branches full of life of the most diverse religious expressions.”⁹ Today, the most recurring religious experiences tend to focus on the subject himself, gravitating between the profundity of his soul and the immensity of the universe.”

In view of the secularist pretensions which unceasingly affirm the autonomy of everything and everyone in relationship to religion and God and taking into account the complexity of religious irruptions of most subjective character together with their derivations (and degenerations), Christians are challenged to a stronger and more convincing adherence to the Gospel as a permanent inspiration of the experience of faith and supreme norm of its action in history. As followers of Jesus Christ, we firmly believe in the transformative power of his message, with its ability to communicate life and hope to all human beings, so as to enrich and purify all of culture which is exposed to its light, having as a dynamizing center the charity that comes from God and unites us to each other. According to each of the last Popes, (John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis) in spite of the variations of emphasis, each adopted the importance of the Gospel, with its lights and exigencies, to make up the background curtain of the New Evangelization. The transmission of the message

⁹ Libanio, *ibid*, p. 11.

contained in the life and mission of Jesus Christ, structural nucleus of the Christian faith, requires wisdom, faith, courage, creativity, and perseverance on the part of all the People of God.¹⁰ Through the testimony, service, dialogue, and proclamation, the Church is called to resonate the Good News of salvation in all hearts and in all corners of the world, comforted by the company of its Lord (Matthew 28:20) and affirming itself in fidelity to the Kingdom of God.

In the context of the radical “epoch of change” the Church in Latin America feels challenged “by new social and political turbulence, by the expansion of a culture distant from or hostile to Christian tradition, and by the emergence of varied religious offerings which try to respond as best they can to the manifest thirst for God of our peoples” (DA 10). This Church, which sees itself as a “home for all peoples and the house of the poor,” is also being pushed to a profound rethinking and relaunching of fidelity and courage to its mission in new circumstances arising in Latin American and the world, without falling into pessimism and losing heart, and to stand up to superficiality and conformity, adapting itself to the circumstances, without straying from the center and goal that the Christian faith gives it. Most urgent, here, is a return to Jesus Christ, who reinvigorates the Church as to her mystery and her mission: mystery of grace and holiness, mission of evangelization and service. Only in this way, can the Church confirm, renew, and revitalize “the newness of the Gospel rooted in our history, out of a personal and community encounter with Jesus Christ that raises up disciples and missionaries” (DA 11), committing itself so that “faith, hope and

¹⁰ Cf. Álvarez, Félix, “Reflexiones a propósito de la Nueva Evangelización” [“Reflections on the New Evangelization”] in *Anales de la Congregación de la Misión y de las Hijas de la Caridad*, Madrid, volume 121, n. 2, March-April 2013, p. 125-140. “La misión que el Señor confía a todos los miembros del Nuevo Pueblo de Dios requiere el coraje, la audacia y el profetismo de las mejores épocas de la Iglesia” [“The mission that the Lord entrusts to all members of the New People of God requires the courage, audacity, and prophesy of the Church’s best times”] (p. 140).

love renew the life of persons and transform the cultures of peoples” (DA 13). After all, “what defines us is not the harsh dramatic living conditions, nor the challenges of society, nor the tasks that we must undertake, but above all the love received from the Father through Jesus Christ by the anointing of the Holy Spirit” (DA 14).

Consecrated life and ordained ministry are immersed in the secularized society and, as such, do not escape the danger that their identity can be diluted. This danger presents itself surreptitiously and often, intrudes in the life of not just a few. This is what we see, for example, among those who are, although very dedicated to important social works and activities of direct service in our institutions, do not escape a spiritual emptiness that attacks and is manifest in the introjection of the implicit code and correct reason of social justice, joint politics, gestation techniques, but not directly related to Christ and his Gospel. If it is true that “from the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34), to not speak specifically about Christian faith may be the sign of an urgent need to *evangelize one’s own vocation*, again filling the heart with that which, or better yet, with that Whom we should be announcing and whose plan we are called to live. One consequence of secularization of which we are more or less aware is the emergence of partial adherence to selective aspects of the ministry and of consecrated life; that is, those aspects of the life that are more pleasing to the ego or more to one’s personal liking: a spirituality with many personal nuances, some of which are foreign to the Christian faith. We choose only certain people with whom we will live or the places where we will serve or do ministry, the selection of those more suitable activities and particular skills or experiences, a prioritization of virtues more easily incorporated to one’s personality, the development of a hybrid lifestyle that lacks convictions and commitments, adaptation to fashion and trends, psychological legitimization of all kinds of positions and justification of processes, being “each to his/her own,” “there is no accounting for taste,” “it is up to each person,” and “only God is the judge.” Rejection of objective values and principles gives light to the “lite,”

superficial, incoherent, decaffeinated, and weak in faith, in mission, in charity, in community, in the virtues, in the Evangelical Counsels, in one's essential identity¹¹ consecrated person, priest, or missionary. This can occur or worsen in any stage of life.

In the same way, the CM feels challenged to tone its spiritual and apostolic life, without ever losing sight of the dynamic center which is none other than Jesus Christ, sent by the Father to evangelize the poor (Luke 4:8), as Saint Vincent contemplated and proposed for our contemplation. Only when we put on the spirit of Christ, can we be on fire with his charity and fulfill his mission. In these times of secularization and the irruption of the crisis of meaning of the religious, nothing would seem to be more urgent than this: return to Jesus to evangelize.¹² Jesus Christ is the rule of inspiration and the fundamental content of the New Evangelization, to which we are called by the Church during this springtime of the pontificate of Pope Francis.

¹¹ Cf. González-Carvajal, Luis. "La fe de Vicente de Paúl ante una sociedad de increencia" ["The Faith of Vincent de Paul in Face of an Unbelieving Society"] in *Anales de la Congregación de la Misión y de las Hijas de la Caridad*, Madrid, volume 118, n. 3, May-June 2010, pp. 281-283.

¹² This is the title of a timely and enlightening article, published in preparation for the 42nd General Assembly, which warns us of the risk of regarding the apostolic identity of the Congregation from a purely pragmatic and operative consideration, without taking into account the indispensable presupposition of our spiritual identity (cf. Ubillús, José Antonio, "Volver a Jesús para evangelizar" ["Return to Jesus to Evangelize"] in *Anales de la Congregación de la Misión y de las Hijas de Caridad*, Madrid, volume 123, n. 3, May-June 2015, pp. 251-265). In note 3, the author states: "It appears to me that, if the external mission is imperative at this point in time, so is the internal knowledge of what is to be transmitted in the mission: Christ. One cannot give that which he or she does not have! I have the impression that, generally, we focus more, as is understandable, on the missionary demands and less on the offering; that is, on what we are to offer, transmit, and share, primarily, in the mission. This may be a sign, on the one hand, of the limited conception that we have of what the mission of Christ, the Church, and the CM is, or, on the other hand, of a spiritual problem (pp. 251-252).

2. At the source of charity and mission

In the midst of the plurality that characterizes our time and insertion in a Church enriched and defied by an ample variety of spirituality, we feel more strongly the need to go back to the sources of our charism; charism symbolized by the experiences of Folleville and Châtillon, from which Saint Vincent awakened to the singularity of the grace that was given to him for evangelization and service to the poor.¹³ Grace received in faith, assimilated in prayer, proven by action, and then shared with all those that will come together to the evangelical ideal of the mystic of missionary charity.¹⁴ Only by going back to the sources we can reencounter, strengthen, and update the essential values and the determinant features of the Church with the spiritual density and apostolic zeal which, with all good reason, can be expected from the sons of Saint Vincent.

¹³ With expert authority, Father J. M. Ibañez said, “In these experiences of faith (Gannes-Folleville and Châtillon-les-Dombes), Vincent discovers his vocation and mission. Due to the fact that, in the depths of himself, he decided to give himself to God in his service to the poor, he can no longer have doubts about where to find God and to live the demands of this gift; a gift from God that constantly feeds the confrontation of faith with the injustice perpetrated against the poor. From this double experience, Vincent decides to dedicate himself with all his strength to serve God in the poor, who “die of hunger and are damned” (*Vincent de Paul: a fê comprovada no amor* [*Vincent de Paul: Faith Proven in Love*], Sao Paulo: Paulinas, 1997, pp. 53-54).

¹⁴ On Saint Vincent as a mystic, see Grossi, Getúlio Mota, *Um místico da Missão, Vincent de Paul* [*A Mystic of the Mission, Vincent de Paul*], 2nd edition, Belo Horizonte: Congregation of the Mission, 2016, pp. 287-330, (Chapter VI: “Um místico da Missão?” [“A Mystic of the Mission?”]). Orcajo, Antonio, “San Vicente de Paúl, un Místico de todo tiempo” [“Saint Vincent de Paul, A Mystic of All Time”] in *Anales de la Congregación de la Misión y de las Hijas de la Caridad*, Madrid, volume 116, n. 2, March-April 2008, pp. 142-156. On Vincentian mysticism and its unifying character of contemplation and action, see Álvarez, Javier, “The Vincentian Mystique” in *Echoes of the Company*, March-April 2009, n. 2, pp. 103-115.

Our founder was already convinced of the importance of an ample and profound appropriation of the specifics of our vocation, but without this implying a superiority complex or narcissistic isolation. On the contrary, Vincent insisted that his Priests and Brothers would recognize the merits of the different spiritual families that adorned the Church of his time. That is what he made clear in his Conference on Charity on 30 May 1659: “God has raised up this Little Company, like all the others, for His love and good pleasure. They all aim to love Him, but they love Him in different ways: the Carthusians by solitude, the Capuchins by poverty, others by chanting His praises; and we, my dear confreres, if we have love, we should show it by bringing people to love God and the neighbor, to love the neighbor for God and God for the neighbor. We’ve been chosen by God as instruments of His immense, paternal charity, which is intended to be established and to expand in souls” (CCD XII, 214). Identity is the visible manifestation of that which we essentially constitute, the historical realization of what we are as a spiritual and apostolic identity. The Vincentian identity has a dual structure: inner or, charism, that includes values, predispositions, convictions, and motivations; and exterior or, prophetic, that translates itself in a markedly charitable and missionary lifestyle. Although it has a permanent character, the Vincentian identity configures itself in a continuous construction process, in light of the circumstances and needs of each context in which it roots itself and flourishes. It is thereby a “trajectory drawn between two rocks: that of the inherited essence and that of the historically constructed existence.”¹⁵

We are at the same time heirs and artisans of our identity. As to charism and prophecy, the Vincentian identity presents itself as a gift and task, not only a testament received from the past, but also a goal to achieve, a purpose to be assumed, enriched by

¹⁵ Suess, Paulo. *Introducao a Teologia da Missao. Convocar e enviar. Servos e testemunhas do Reino* [Introduction to Mission Theology. Called and Sent. Servants and Witnesses of the Kingdom], Petropolis: Vozes, 2007, pp. 186.

multiple interactions, always in the search of the unity that gives sense and endows consistency and content to our experiences and commitments.¹⁶

In the same way as a plant, regardless of how robust and vigorous it might be, needs the sap that comes from its roots, also the updating of a charism cannot be achieved without searching in its origins the freshness of the inspiration that gave birth to it and that maintains it dynamic; that is, open to timely adjustments and prophetic, capable of responding to different challenges and realities with effectiveness. “When the inheritance tries to impose itself as something finished and when the construction of the new leaves the roots aside, too many open or closed fields emerge.”¹⁷ The “news” that we want to offer to the poor and to the Church, as heirs and craftsmen of the Vincentian identity, in no way can do without going back to the intuitions of the holy founder, to the spiritual heritage he left us, and to the tradition that has been set over 400 years in carrying out the charism.

Following the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI recalled that return to the sources is a principle of permanent charismatic and apostolic principle, inviting everyone to be “faithful to the spirit of their founders, to their evangelical intentions and to the example of their sanctity. In this it finds one of the principles for the present renewal and one of the most secure criteria for judging what each institute should undertake.”¹⁸ The current Pontiff knew how to update this appeal: “Recounting our history is essential for preserving our

¹⁶ On the dynamic and evolutionary character of any identity, see: Bauman, Zigmunt, *Identidade. Entrevista a Benedetto Vecchi* [*Identity. Interview with Benedetto Vecchi*], Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 2005, pp. 16-31. Buehler, Pierre, “A identidade Crista: entre a objectividade e a subjectividade” [“Crest Identity: Between Objectivity and Subjectivity”] in *Perspectiva Cristiana* [*Christian Perspective*]: Concillium, 216 (1988/3) pp. 25-27.

¹⁷ Suess, *op. cit.*, pp. 186.

¹⁸ *Evangelica Testificatio*, n. 11.

identity, for strengthening our unity as a family and our common sense of belonging. More than an exercise in archaeology or the cultivation of mere nostalgia, it calls for following in the footsteps of past generations in order to grasp the high ideals, and the vision and values which inspired them, beginning with the founders and foundresses and the first communities.”¹⁹

Our task, therefore, is to shorten the distance between the return to the fundamentals and the projection of new routes for the present and the future of the mission and of charity. In fact, especially in times of so many “diversities,” we are not authorized to consider as sufficiently assimilated the principles that form the backbone of our identity, define our own physiognomy, and ensure the prophetic force of the Vincentian Charism. If we do not appropriate the specifics of our charism, we will not have anything to offer but a hybrid presence, an innocuous word, and an inconsistent performance. Deprived of its vital impulse, provided only by the charism that the Spirit gave through the mediation of the founder,²⁰ the Congregation would not be able to communicate hope to the poor or to cooperate in the new evangelization that the Church intends at this historic moment, at the same time convulsive and promising, encouraged by the lucidity of a

¹⁹ Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter to All the Consecrated People on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life, n. 1.

²⁰ It is interesting to highlight here what is said about the Consecrated Life (CL). In the multiplicity of its expressions, the CL characterizes itself by its charismatic and prophetic aspects. The charismatic dimension points to the actions of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the founders, moving them to reply with concrete and original initiatives to the challenges of the Church and of society in each era, above all in crisis and lack of humanity. This founding experience turns into a framework of reference for each congregation. It will be necessary to refer to it again and again, under the penalty of incurring infidelity of spirit, in case it disappears into oblivion. The prophetic dimension has to do with the historic moment and the ecclesiastic socio-economic context in which the congregations operate (cf. Vitorio, Jaldemir, *A pedagogia na formacao: reflexao para formadores na vida religiosa* [*Pedagogy in Formation: Reflection for Formators in Religious Life*], Sao Paulo: Paulinas, 2008, pp. 21-22).

providential man named Francis (whom, perhaps, we would like to call Vincent!).²¹

Nobody can consider himself unaware of this truth of faith that Vincent de Paul wanted to engrave with golden letters in the hearts of his priests and brothers: “Christ is the Rule of the Mission” (CCD XII, 110),²² permanent inspiration, frame of life, and perfect model for each missionary. The latter, in fact, recognizes himself as destined to continue the saving work of the Son of God, sent to evangelize the poor (cf. Luke 4:18). For this reason, he needs to be in continuous relationship with Christ to receive all that should be placed at the disposal of those whom he evangelizes. To Saint Vincent, the complete adherence to Christ is the core of the charitable-missionary vocation of his confreres: “The state of the Missioners is one in conformity with the evangelical maxims, which consists in leaving and abandoning everything, as the Apostles did, to follow Jesus Christ and, in imitation of Him, to do what is proper” (CCD XI, 1).²³ This is the commitment that accompanies and enriches the existence of the Missionary, despite his limitations and weaknesses: progressively resemble Jesus Christ, conform increasingly to his person, assimilate his values and criteria, assimilate his attitudes and feelings (cf. Matthew 11:29; John 13:15; Philippians 2:5), in a continuous conversion process, so that the Gospel is revealed in the life, common life, and actions of the members of the Congregation: “The intention of the Company is to imitate Our Lord to the extent that poor, insignificant persons can do. What does that mean? It means that the Company aspires to take Him as a model in the way He acted, what He did, His ministries, and His aims. How can one

²¹ On the Consecrated Life in the Pontificate of Francis, see Palacio, Carlos. “O Papa Francisco interpela a Vida Consagrada” [“Pope Francis Addresses Consecrated Life”], in *Convergencia*, Brasília, year LI, n. 488, January-February 2016, pp. 62-76.

²² Conference on “Seeking the Kingdom of God,” 21 February 1659.

²³ Excerpt from a conference on “The Vocation of a Missioner,” not dated.

person represent another, if he doesn't have the same characteristics, features, manners, and looks? That can't be. So, if we're determined to make ourselves like this divine model, and feel in our hearts this desire and holy affection, it's necessary, I repeat, it's necessary to strive to model our thoughts, works, and intentions on His" (CCD XII, 67-68).²⁴ As our holy founder assures us, taking on our human condition, Christ "willed to place in us the seed of love, which is our resemblance to Him" (CCD XI, 131).²⁵ It is from Christ that the Christian receives his "shape" (Galatians 4:4).²⁶ Only in him, the human being finds his full realization. Outside of him, the apostolic work runs the risk of degenerating into compulsive activism and moralism without soul. Therefore, in the sense of Saint Vincent, the Missionary is, firstly, a convinced and passionate follower of Jesus Christ.

Put on the spirit of Christ to evangelize

Amid the setbacks of the current context, the DA shows the direction: "Christians must start over from Christ, from contemplation of Him who has revealed to us in his mystery, the complete fulfillment of the human vocation and its meaning. We need to become docile disciples, to learn from Him, in following him, the dignity and fullness of life. We likewise need to be consumed by missionary zeal, to bring to the heart of the culture of our time that unifying and full meaning of human life that neither science, nor politics, nor economics, nor the media can provide. In Christ the Word, God's Wisdom (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:30), culture can again find its center and depth, from which reality may be viewed with all its aspects together, discerning them in the light of the Gospel and

²⁴ Conference on "The Purpose of the Congregation of the Mission," 6 December 1658.

²⁵ "Exhortation to a Dying Brother" in 1645.

²⁶ In his Commentary on Galatians, Saint Augustine affirms: "Christ is formed in him who receives Christ's mould, who clings to him in spiritual love. By imitating him he becomes, as far as is possible to his condition, what Christ is. John says: *He who remains in Christ should walk as he did*" (Office of Readings for Thursday of the Fifth Week of Ordinary Time).

granting to each its place and proper dimension” (n. 41). We start from Christ, with the contemplation of his face, and the revelation that He brought to us about the paternity of God, source of life and love, and of the dignity of the human being, called to become who God made him to be in the same love that created him, holds him, and gives wholeness to him. So we have to make Christ the absolute reference of life, the focal point of our relationship with God and our neighbor, the permanent inspiration of our action. To do so, the first step is to become disciples who listen, learn, and assimilate. The second step, simultaneous to the first, is to share, propose, and announce what we have seen and heard in living together with the Teacher, convinced as we are that in Him are delineated the full sense of human existence, the perfect transparency of the Father, the most illuminating ethical criteria, and ultimate horizon of life and history (cf. Colossians 2:6-7, 9).²⁷

We believe in Jesus Christ as the complete and definitive answer to the mystery of the human being and of history, because only He reveals to us the source, the breadth, and the destiny of our humanity and all creation (cf. Colossians 1:15-20). In the person of Jesus – the way by whom God comes to us to attract us and by whom our steps are directed to God — “is the origin, that which is essential and to which we always have to return, especially in times of instability and change.”²⁸ The centrality of Christ, therefore, is not only an issue of spirituality. Its horizon is much wider. It also has to do with ethics on which our life, coexistence, and acting rests. From an authentically Christian mysticism, a behavior fueled by the same sap is born, bound with the same values and aimed at the same goal. A well-cultivated Christian spirituality inspires and boosts the sense

²⁷ Vatican II was sufficiently clear in illuminating with the mystery of Christ the most disturbing questions about human beings and the world: cf. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 10.

²⁸ Mesters, Carlos, “Voltar às origens: voltar ao essencial da Boa Nova que Jesus nos trouxe” [“Back to Origins: Return to the Essentials of the Good News That Jesus Has Brought Us”], in *Convergencia*, Rio de Janeiro, year XLI, n. 389.

and consistency of life, human integrity and personal consistency, honesty and transparency, fidelity and creativity, warmth and compassion, availability and dedication, service to others and the care of creation, hope and perseverance. Without the cultivation of Christian spirituality, without conscious and clear reference to Christ, all these values and attitudes, therefore, would be lacking a solid foundation, a safe guide, a continuous improvement, and vital impulse.

Given the fragility of religious experiences that swarm among our contemporaries at this time of many fleeting emergencies and few deep experiences in the field of spirituality and ethics, we easily come to see how much we need a more consistent faith, as well as a constant and overflowing spiritual life that makes us live and act accordingly to the gift of grace. The famous axiom of Karl Rahner, properly applied to our vocational identity also serves for us, Priests and Brothers of the Mission: the Vincentian missionary will either be mystical, someone who has made a strong experience of God in the center of his life, or he will not be a truly Vincentian missionary.²⁹ We all know that every true Christian experience of God requires, as *conditio sine qua non*, the following of Jesus Christ, understood and lived as identification with His person, assimilating His message and commitment to his mission. Saint Vincent de Paul leaves no doubt in this respect. Only robed with the spirit of Christ, we enter into communion with the Father, welcoming the initiative of His true love, discerning His will, and embracing the mission that He gives us by participating in the saving work of the Trinity. In the same way, only identified with Christ, can we be for the poor a new

²⁹ This is the exact affirmation of Rahner: "The Christian of the future will either be a mystic, that is, a person who has experienced something, or will not be Christian." And he adds, giving us a picture of the society in which we find ourselves today "because the spirituality of the future will no longer be based on a unanimous, evident, and public conviction, nor on a generalized religious environment, prior to personal experience and decision" (*Escritos de Teología VII. Escritos Pastorales* [*Theological Writings VII. Pastoral Writings*], Madrid: Taurus, 1969, p. 25).

parable of the Kingdom, an irradiation of compassionate charity learned from the Teacher. The knowledge of Jesus Christ is the love that generates bonding, that gives us its shape or that forms it in us (*crístiformes*), that gives insight into His friendship (*crístófilos*), that makes us capable of taking Him in everything we do and talk about (*crístóforos*), allowing His heart to beat in us, allowing His feelings and criteria to be seen in our presence and performance.

A. To *conform ourselves to Christ*, cultivate friendship with Him, and take Him wherever we go involves, arguably, continuous rewriting of the spiritual dimension of our life, the only one able to nourish and develop the experience of God and Father of Jesus of Nazareth (cf. Luke 11:1ff), solidifying our convictions, improving our humanity, recreating our loyalty, and boosting our missionary zeal. Through the centuries, the Church has never feared to consider the three sources of encounter with Christ: the *Gospel*, the *Eucharist*, and the *Poor*. Saint Vincent knew how to keep them closely related in his experience of faith and apostolic commitment, insisting that his missionaries have them always present and integrated.³⁰ If we do not find Christ in himself, according to his humanity made of unconditional love of the Father and His brothers, as the Gospel presents it,³¹ if we do not celebrate his mystery in the Eucharist, in

³⁰ The Common Rules assure us of this integration: cf. CR I, 1; X, 3 and 8. In the conference on “Observance of the Rules” of 17 May 1658, the holy founder says, “Another motive why we should be exact in keeping our Rules is that they’re all drawn from the Gospel, as you’ll see, Messieurs, as you’ll see. All of them aim at conforming our lives to that which Our Lord led on earth. Our Lord came and was sent by His Father to evangelize poor persons ... to the poor, Messieurs, to the poor, as, by the grace of God, the Little Company strives to do” (CCD XII, 3).

³¹ A saintly bishop of the fifth century, Asterius of Amasea, shows, in one of his homilies, how we can evolve from the contemplation of the Gospel to the pastoral practice of charity: “Let us then be shepherds like the Lord. We must meditate on the Gospel, and as we see in this mirror the example of zeal and loving kindness, we should become thoroughly schooled in these virtues” (Office of Readings for Thursday of the First Week of Lent).

a conscious, active, and fruitful way, in communion with those who follow Him along the same way, how will we recognize his image in the disfigured faces of the poor, with whom He identifies himself and through whom He appeals to us? How can we see the poor with the eyes of Christ, taking into account the dignity and the value they have, if we do not know closely the sensitivity and care with which Jesus of Nazareth welcomed, understood, and catered to the least of his brothers? The encounter with Christ in the poor presupposes, confirms, and clarifies the encounter with Christ in the Gospel and the Eucharist. Whatever happens, Christ always leads us to the poor. It is impossible, for example, not to discover the poor as the usual company of Jesus in the Gospels and his main companions.³² The Eucharist, celebrated with honesty, always renews the call to charity and to the missionary mandate,³³ without which, the sacramental experience

³² Cf. Mark 1:32-33; 7:24-30; Matthew 5:3; 8:16-17; 11:25-26; 19:13-15; Luke 4:40-41; 6:20-23; 8:2ff; John 4:7-42. We already know what Saint Vincent said about the relationship between Jesus and the poor during the conference on "Perseverance in Vocation" on 29 October 1638, "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" (CCD XI, 98).

³³ One time, talking to the Daughters of Charity, during the conference of 18 August 1647, Saint Vincent surfaced the relationship between the Eucharistic community, faithfulness to vocation, and charity towards the poor. "The Daughter of Charity who has made a good Communion does nothing displeasing to God because she does the actions of God himself ... So, when you see a Sister from the Charity nursing the sick gently, lovingly, and attentively, you may say confidently, 'That Sister has made a good Communion'" (CCD IX, 262-263). Abelly collected this question addressed by Saint Vincent to his priests and brothers, "do you not feel divine fire burning in your breast when you receive the adorable body of Jesus Christ in communion?" (Book III, Chapter VIII, 79). Other references of Saint Vincent on the Eucharistic: Maloney, Robert, "Love Is Creative Even to Infinity. On the Eucharist in the Vincentian Tradition" in *Vincentiana*, Rome, year 47, n. 2, March-April 2003, pp. 107-126.

would be robbed of its most crucial aspects.³⁴ Nevertheless, without reference to Christ, the poor can be limited to a mere social category, against which, at most, we can report findings, give discourses, and carry out research, but not necessarily show compassion for and commit ourselves to because we lack what is most important, the basis of faith that allows us to recognize the dignity so often hidden behind the misery that degrades, the indigence that humiliates, and the despise that marginalizes. To be with the poor in a significant way, evangelize them, serve them, and let ourselves be evangelized by them, we need, therefore, to frequent the Gospel and to live the Eucharist; we need, at last, a rich spiritual life, consistent and diffusive that will debug us humanly as missionaries. To consider the poor only as comrades, without before seeing them as brothers in Christ, does not seem to be the specific Christian predilection for the disenfranchised of history, and much less of the destination to the poor that essentially defines the Vincentian identity. A proper vision of the poor will certainly afford us a particularly rich understanding of the Gospel and a more involved experience of the Eucharist.

B. There is no one better than Saint Vincent to let us know this truth and imprint it on our being: only a spiritual life of continued growth and maturation can shape in us the true follower of Christ, the evangelizer of the poor. Abelly retained this statement of him who was

³⁴ An echo of our founder's intuitions regarding the Eucharist can be seen in Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Letter "Mane nobiscum Domine" (7 October 2004) in reference to the Eucharist as a project of mission and impulse of Charity towards those most in need: "entering into communion with Christ in the memorial of his Pasch also means sensing the duty to be a missionary of the event made present in that rite. The dismissal at the end of each Mass is *a charge* given to Christians, inviting them to work for the spread of the Gospel and the imbuing of society with Christian values. The Eucharist not only provides the interior strength needed for this mission, but is also — in some sense — *its plan* ... We cannot delude ourselves: by our mutual love and, in particular, by our concern for those in need we will be recognized as true followers of Christ (cf. John 13:35; Matthew 25:31-46). This will be the criterion by which the authenticity of our Eucharistic celebrations is judged" (nn. 24-25, 28).

his illustrious formator, “one cannot hope for much from someone who does not continually converse with God. Further, if someone does not serve the Lord as they should, it is because they are not attached enough to God, and have not asked for his grace with perfect confidence.”³⁵ Throughout the 8000 pages of writings, conferences, and documents of Vincent de Paul, one can notice how abundant are the references to the value and necessity of prayer, meditation, contemplation, discernment, sacraments, inseparable aspects of the spiritual life.³⁶ On one occasion, to encourage the vocational discernment of a selfless priest of the mission, who said that he was captivated by the gathering of the Carthusians, the founder said: “the apostolic life does not exclude contemplation but encompasses it and profits by it to know better the eternal truths it must proclaim” (CCD III, 344).³⁷ On different occasions, Father Vincent will reveal himself strongly convinced of the need to cultivate the contemplative dimension of the vocation of his missionaries, especially emphasizing the practice of prayer (cf. CCD XI, 361). Only a genuine mystic is able to give to prayer the place that it deserves as an exercise that disposes us to receive what the Lord wants to give us with docility to make our lives fruitful and boost our missionary commitment. After listening to the founder himself so clearly and incisively refer to the spiritual life and knowing his career was so strongly marked by the experience of prayer, it is impossible to say that spiritual life is not a priority among the members of the CM or that apostolic activity is sufficient for living the Vincentian vocation and configure

³⁵ Abelly, Book III, Chapter VI, 56.

³⁶ Cf. Maloney, Robert, “On Uniting Action and Contemplation. A Key to Understanding Vincent de Paul” in *Vincentiana*, Rome, year 44, n. 2, March-April 2000, pp. 171-188. See also, Dodin, André, *En prière avec Monsieur Vincent*, Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1982 (with a large anthology of prayers composed by Saint Vincent). Also the ten articles compiled in the volume: *San Vicente de Paúl y la oración. XXV Semana de Estudios Vicencianos [Saint Vincent de Paul and Prayer. XXV Week of Vincentian Studies]*, Salamanca: CEME, 2000.

³⁷ Letter to Father Claude Dufour, missionary in Saintes, 24 July 1648.

our identity in the Church. It is also impossible to accept as normal that a missionary not set aside moments of each day for meditation; that a local community does not set times for prayer, supported by the liturgy of the Church and the Vincentian tradition; that we do not prepare to announce the word of God with conviction and in an understandable way; that we do not celebrate the Eucharist with devotion, simplicity, and beauty; that we do not regularly receive the sacrament of reconciliation, seeking pardon and peace that only the Lord can give us; that we do not create times and opportunities for silence in our houses; that we are not truly spiritual men, which would in no way make us less apostolic. In fact, quite the contrary, in our founder, we have a full and indisputable proof that the more we are strengthened from the sap of Jesus Christ in prayer, the more fruitful we will be in charity and in the mission, both personally and communally. From the advice directed to the young Father Durand, Saint Vincent said: "Something important to which you must faithfully devote yourself is to be closely united with Our Lord in meditation; that's the reservoir where you'll find the instructions you need to carry out the ministry you're going to have" (CCD XI, 311).³⁸

In the decades prior to the Vatican Council, the spiritual life in the Congregation (and the Consecrated Life as a whole) was going through a kind of saturation, plagued with obsolete customs and practices, especially in reference to schedules, forms, language, styles, etc.³⁹ The process of reception by the Council, was the appropriate occasion to make the culture of personal and community prayer less rigid, without ceasing to be profound; less formal, while remaining constant; less legalistic, without ceasing to have its

³⁸ Antoine Durand, named Superior of the Agde Seminary in 1656.

³⁹ For a general view of Consecrated Life in the period immediately prior to Vatican II, from an emblematic experience: Matos, Enrique Cristiano José, *Um Religioso em Mudanca de epoca [A Changing Era for Religious]*, Volume 1, Belo Horizonte: CMM, 2010 pp. 123-134.

method. Among ourselves, our attempts to pray were not always faithful, fruitful, and happy, sometimes opting to relegate prayer to the background and serve ourselves, too often, from questionable justifications and even contrary to the spirit of the CM; for example, that our spirituality would be dedicated only to action and, therefore, this would become our prayer, dispensing us from praying. There is not, neither in Saint Vincent nor in the legitimate tradition of the Company, absolutely anything that would serve as the basis for this type of discourse or practice. It would be sufficient to analyze the argument surrounding the repeated phrase: “*Totum opus nostrum in operatione consistit.*” In truth what is called for is a perfect integration between contemplation and action, prayer and work, love towards God and the neighbor: “The Church is compared to a great harvest that requires workers, but hardworking ones. Nothing is more in conformity with the Gospel than to gather light and strength for our soul in meditation, reading, and solitude on the one hand, and then to go out and share this spiritual nourishment with others. This is to do as Our Lord did, and His Apostles after Him; it’s to unite the office of Martha to that of Mary and to imitate the dove, which half digests the food it has eaten and then uses its beak to put the rest into that of its babies in order to feed them. That’s what we should do, that’s how we should witness to God by our works that we love Him” (CCD XI, 33).⁴⁰ Only a consistent spiritual life, nourished by prayer, allows us to make our apostolic efforts a clear demonstration that we love the Lord, “with the strength of our arms and the sweat of our brows” (CCD XI, 32), holding together affective and effective love. In the last few years, we have taken into account the thirst for God and the desire for a deeper spiritual life of young people who come to our houses of formation, as well as many confreres in general, especially those who feel somewhat tired and disillusioned, even after having devoted their best energies to the Mission. Would this not be a sign

⁴⁰ Excerpt from a conference on “Love of God.”

of the times worthy of attention on the part of us all? Is it not time to modify the emphasis employed or move in directions that have been forgotten and adjust our ideas, discourses, and practices to a more faithful and unifying understanding of the heritage of Saint Vincent? Perseverance, loyalty, and enthusiasm necessary for charity and the Mission, are they not related to the rediscovery of the richness and depth of the spiritual life, which identifies us and gives strength to us as Vincentians? Would not this spark a renewal and coherence, which we need so much in our evangelical commitment to the cause of the poor?

C. As mentioned above, the cultivation of the spiritual life has divisions of remarkable ethical scope, because all mysticism has an impact on the Community and on the Mission, in the common life and in the work of the missionaries. As such, a well-cultivated Vincentian spirituality certainly will not fail to have an impact on the assimilation of the virtues that characterize the spirit of the Congregation.⁴¹ These virtues that lead us to “always try to follow the teaching of Christ Himself” (CR II, 1), looking for the Kingdom of God above all, and faithfully fulfilling the will of the Father. Saint Vincent wanted these virtues to be “the faculties of the soul of the whole Congregation” and “everything each one of us does may always be inspired by them” (CR II, 14).⁴² When configured

⁴¹ On the five Vincentian virtues see: Maloney, Robert, *The Way of Vincent de Paul: A Contemporary Spirituality in the Service of the Poor*, Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1992, pp. 37-69. Pérez-Flores, Orcajo, *El Camino de San Vicente es Nuestro Camino [The Way of Saint Vincent is Our Way]*, pp. 121-136. On the Christian virtues in general, including those that characterize the CM, it is worthwhile to know the outstanding work of Motto, Andrés Román, *La moral de virtudes en San Vicente de Paul [The Moral of Virtues in Saint Vincent de Paul]*, Salamanca: CEME, 2010.

⁴² Another image adopted by Saint Vincent to show the importance of these virtues markedly apostolic is to compare them to the “five smooth stones with which, even at the first assault, we will defeat the Goliath from hell in the name of the Lord of Armies” (CR XII, 12).

to Jesus Christ, the virtues humanize and empower the missionary to live his vocation as an evangelizer of the poor, according to the charism that the Spirit gave him through the founder.⁴³ At this point, we must be careful not to confuse virtue with natural inclination, psychological predisposition, or cultural heritage. The *Catechism* defines virtue as “an habitual and firm disposition to do the good. It allows the person not only to perform good acts, but to give the best of himself. The virtuous person tends toward the good with all his sensory and spiritual powers; he pursues the good and chooses it in concrete actions.”⁴⁴ Virtue requires, as such, asceticism, commitment to freedom, permanent efforts to polish humanity itself and make it suitable for what is revealed as true and good, just and timely, because it is inspired by God (cf. Philippians 4:8). Therefore, the continuous exercise of the virtues that shape the spirit of the CM focuses and perfects the intelligence and the will of the Missionary, ordering his thoughts, words and actions in light of his specific vocation. In this line, charity and mission always will be accompanied by authenticity (simplicity), freedom (humility), tenderness (gentleness), perseverance (mortification), and passion (zeal).

The contribution of the CM to the New Evangelization requires the deepening and the recreation of its charitable-missionary identity, whose center is in following Jesus Christ, evangelizer of the poor, on

⁴³ The apostolic virtues of simplicity, humility, meekness, mortification, and evangelical zeal are powerful tools used by the mystic of charity to put on the spirit of Christ and to carry on his saving work (Orcajo, *San Vicente de Paul, místico de todo tempo* [*Saint Vincent de Paul, Mystic of All Time*], p. 156). Father Maloney also reveals the central role that the virtues play in the Vincentian tradition: “These virtues are so central to Saint Vincent’s thinking that in efforts at renewal all those who share in the Vincentian tradition must grapple with their meaning and the forms they might take in the modern world” (*The Way of Vincent de Paul: A Contemporary Spirituality in the Service of the Poor*, p. 37).

⁴⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1803.

the way travelled and indicated by Saint Vincent de Paul. Without this continuous reference to the sources, there is no fidelity that shows itself creative, as well as no creativity that maintains itself faithful. In fact, “the Vincentian spirituality is marked by the spiritual experience of Christ and the poor that Saint Vincent had. Thus, to be faithful today to our identity in its double aspect, spiritual and apostolic, involves our conversion to this experience: live a greater rooting of our life in Christ and a greater dynamism to continue His mission among the poor. From there springs up a new ardor to collaborate in the new evangelization to which the Church calls us today. Without this, it would be useless to discuss new methods and new expressions. Therefore, the CM, prior to evangelizing and serving the poor, must drink from the sources from which its identity flows. The first spring of living water was Saint Vincent de Paul’s passion for Christ and for His evangelizing mission to the poor, the one that transformed his life, providing new meaning and direction to his existence. To fine tune, resonate, and relive the spiritual experience of our founder is the condition *sine qua non* of evangelizing renewal.”⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Ubillús, José Antonio, “Volver a Jesús para evangelizar” [“Return to Jesus to Evangelize”], op. cit., pp. 252-254.

Mission and Charity in “Desert Situations” and the Challenges to the CM

Nélio Pita Pereira, CM

In n. 15 of *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis reminds us that the gospel is for everyone without exception and Christians “*should appear as people who wish to share their joy, who point to a horizon of beauty and who invite others to a delicious banquet.*” Evoking his predecessor, Benedict XVI, Francis underlines the truth that the Church does not grow by proselytizing, but by attraction. Basing ourselves on statistics, especially if we take into account the Western world, we affirm that the attracting force of the gospel seems to have lost vigor. The reality of the statistics attests the vertiginous fall of the number of practicing people in Catholic countries. As different authors underline, in a secular atmosphere, the Church has become one more among many institutions, which compete to have their voice heard in the public forum. Nevertheless, could this phenomenon by itself justify the lack of attraction and the consequent desertification of the sacred space?

In this article, I propose to reflect about the possibility of evangelizing in the concrete circumstance we metaphorically call “dessert times.” In general terms by “desert” one understands the time and place of the absence of favorable conditions for the appearance and balanced development of a way of life like the religious (Christian) one, the one offered to us basing itself on the Word and the Eucharist. We should let ourselves be concerned by the questions, more than stubbornly seeking the correct answers, the strategies that permit us to live under the anesthetized illusion of having a solution for today’s problems, the time we might characterize, from another perspective as “a favorable time.”

1. Desert Times: What Diagnostic?

What time are we in? Is it possible to define a time in which everything moves so quickly? Do the signs we associate with the present historical circumstances tell us something about a time of such pain? In the introduction to his book *The Civilization of the Spectacle*, Vargas Llosa keenly states: “It is probable that never in history have so many treatises, essays, theories, and analyses been written about culture as in our time.”¹ Just as bodily pains, once identified, are the language for diagnosis, the pains of our time, once identified, can help understand the dominant pathology, i.e., the configuring traits of our collective personality. What are the most significant complaints of the people of our time? What are their pains? What are the symptoms of this technologically developed society with never before attained levels of wellbeing? They are the pains of the soul: indifference, lack of interest in the causes of the “common good,” tedium and emptiness, symptoms of a society which multiplies the “no places” (M. Augé), which does not get along well with authority, and so is deeply submerged in a cultural atmosphere that is fragmented and fluid (Z. Bauman). This is the time of the “no times” for tolerating the maturation in the acquisition of a pleasure, in the obtaining of a prize, in the unfettered seeking of satisfaction at any price which, rapidly, becomes tiresome. It is the time of the dictatorship of narcissism, the empire of the ephemeral (G. Lipovetsky) which, on the other hand, in terms of our present neoliberal economic system, imposes conditions of work that in some places are akin to slavery. It is a culture which favors the “corrosion of character” (R. Sennett). Nevertheless, it is in this time that we are called to evangelize. If the message of the Teacher of Palestine has crossed the centuries, it is because it is valid for all times. Today it continues to be the inspiring answer for men and women of every kind. Therefore, we are called to propose it in our time as well.

¹ Vargas Llosa, M. *A Civilizacao do espetaculo* [*The Civilization of the Spectacle*], Lisbon, Quetzal, p. 11.

1.2 The End of Christianity?

Today we can state that the older generations shared a code of life whose coordinates were offered by the values of a society in which the Church occupied a central place. The ringing of the (church) bell marked the passing of time and called for the participation of the faithful in the most varied celebratory occasions. From birth to death, the sacraments marked the most important stages of our personal history and nourished, by means of the Eucharist and eventually through reconciliation, the weekly routine of believers. Referring to this model, the French theologian P. Bacq states: “people became Christians almost by osmosis, adopting, simply, the ways of thinking, the behaviors, and the practices of the believing environment to which they belonged. Matters of faith developed naturally, identifying themselves with the practice: being Christian was being baptized and practicing.”² The churches were filled with the faithful and the children who did well in school or who had the economic resources for it came to the seminary. Once ordained, they were sent to the numerous parishes where they replicated the pastoral model dominant for centuries in their native lands.

This model of Christianity lasted for centuries. Today, in many European cities, instead of full churches, we find places filled with objects and images we would easily associate with a museum, places that awaken interest from an artistic point of view, that evoke historic facts, that arouse the curiosity of tourists, but which rarely are visited as places for the celebration of the faith.

Why has the theme of faith been transformed into a “rare thing,” to such a degree that there are those who wonder about the end of Christianity? Will we be the last generation of Christians? We recognized that there is a perverse effect of the religious phenomenon

² Bacq, P, “Para una pastoral da gestacao” [“For Pastoral Care of Pregnancy”] in Theobald, C. and Bacq P., *Uma nova oportunidade par a Evcangelho* [*A New Opportunity for the Gospel*]. Lisbon: Paulinas, 2013, p. 8.

that has aroused the passionate reaction of some atheists, as the writer C. Stenger sums up in his popular work, *O medo da insignificancia* [*Fear of Insignificance*].³ Stenger illustrates the new wave of criticism advocated by the “horsemen of the apocalypse”⁴ in their well-known works, and concludes that for them religion is always bad and poisons the life of man and should thus be eliminated. To what degree can we reverse this situation?

2. The Return of God

The attacks of these “horsemen” on the religious conception did not dispel the existential horizon of the religious phenomenon. On the contrary, they have had the merit of awakening new ways of approaching the sacred, above all, of stimulating the purification of the expressions which detracted from the message of Jesus. In general terms, in the beginning of the 21st century, there is a notable vigor in religious movements as demonstrated in the study carried out by J. Michlethwait and A. Woolbridge titled *The Return of God – How the Return of Faith Is Changing the World*. Turning to facts and to the reading of statistics, the authors find evidence of a resurgence of a plurality of religious expressions, even in countries where the name of God has been prohibited like Russia and China. The thousands of refugees who today “invade” Europe are, in their great majority, believing men and women who profess another creed and, therefore, to European eyes, constitute a threat to their security and challenge the tenuous identity of a continent with an aging population. As R.

³ Strenger, C., *O medo da insignificancia: Como dar sentido a nossas vidas no século XXI* [*Fear of Insignificance: How to Make Sense of Our Lives in the 21st Century*]. Lisbon: Lua de Papel, 2012.

⁴ Cf. Harris, S. (2004), *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror and the Future of Reason*, New York, NY: Norton; Dennett, D.C. (2005), *Breaking the Spell: Religion as Natural*, New York, NY: Viking; Hitchens, C. (2007), *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Absolutely*, New York, NY: Twelve Books; Onfray, M. (2007), *Atheist Manifesto*, New York, NY: Arcade; Dawkins, R. (2006), *The God Delusion*, New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin.

Dawkins says, in the U. S. and Europe today, surely for distinct reasons, ridiculing religion is as risky as burning the national flag in the headquarters of an extreme right wing group.⁵ Religious fervor is at the source of the greatest tensions; but it is in this paradoxical context that the follower of Jesus is called to evangelize.

2.1 The Search for God in the Questioning about Meaning

In the beginning of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is the affirmation that man thirsts for God, and only in Him “will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for.”⁶ The theme of man’s natural aptitude for God is a recurring one in universal literature, and in particular, in the writings inspired by Christianity. It is clear in all the great authors, from the Fathers of the Church to the most recent conciliar documents. They are all unanimous in affirming that the human vocation is only fully realized in communion with God.

The question about meaning is one of the privileged ways for discovering God. Upon asking himself about the meaning of history, personal and collective, man necessarily debates with God. As W. Kasper wrote, in asking about the meaning of life the question of God inevitably arises. That question “is only possible in a horizon of universal questioning. We can only speak sensibly about God when we are not asking about this or that thing, but rather when we ask ourselves about the meaning of the whole of reality. The question of meaning is thus transformed into the starting point for an understandable and responsible discourse about God.”⁷

⁵ Cf. Dawkins, R. (2006) *A Desilusão de Deus* [*The Disillusionment of God*], Lisbon, Casa de las Letras, 2nd Ed. 2007, p. 17.

⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 27.

⁷ Kasper, Walter, *Introdução à fé* [*Introduction to Faith*], Porto: Ed Telos, 1972. About this theme, cf., for example, Fisichella, R., *A fé como resposta de sentido. Abandonar-se ao mistério* [*Faith as a Response to Meaning. Abandoning Oneself to Mystery*], Lisboa: Paulinas, 2006.

Existential psychology, for example, confirms that religious experience is inevitable because it exercises an important function to the extent that it protects man from anxiety, especially in the face of his anguish about death. Faith endows man with an attitude of confidence which allows him to face the most dangerous abysses throughout his life. The cosmovision of the believer finds meanings beyond what is explicable; and, to paraphrase the French poet, C. Peguy, this gazing towards the eternal is the basis of hope, that which, as the youngest of the three sisters – faith, hope, and charity – is the most resistant, the one that guides the older ones. If God is the answer to man in every age, what can we do so that His message arrives to all its recipients, promoting a liberating movement of all the structures which despise life and prolong senseless suffering?

2.2 The Adventure of Faith

The perspective of faith tells us that man is essentially the same creature born from God’s hands. It is true that the virus of evil contaminates his nature or, as Cardinal Ratzinger stated, “it is infiltrated by a different factor which, besides the tendency oriented towards God, is another call that moves us away from God.”⁸ The sacred texts retain a surprising timeliness because we continue to be like Cain, the brother who, for envy, killed his brother; or, as an alternative, we are like Abraham the example of the believer who, motivated by a divine impulse, contemplates the starry heavens searching for answers to his anxieties. We are like David or one of the disciples, capable of the best and the worst; very different roads about which the ancient sage reflected as he composed Psalm 1.

Matters of a pastoral nature are on the table. What strategies should we take on? As Vincentian pastoral agents, what contribution can we give to make the “the gospel effective”? As J-M Donegani emphasizes, the unprecedented nature of our present circumstances

⁸ Ratzinger, J., *Deus e o mundo: A fe crista explicada por Bento XVI* [God and the World: The Christian Faith Explained by Benedict XVI] Coimbra: Tenacitas, 2006, p. 49.

does not mean, by that mere fact, that they are more adverse to the Gospel proposal than former times.⁹ The paradigm shift which looms on the horizon demands of pastoral agents a greater attention to the signs of the times in order to give an adequate response in accord with our charism summed up in the gospel passage: “He has sent me to preach the Good News to the poor.” Curiously, history shows that, in these great transitional periods, men inspired by God have appeared who knew how to respond to the necessities of the time in accord with the gospel. We have, for example, Saints Benedict, Francis of Assisi, and Vincent de Paul. The study of the inculturation of the gospel message is certainly helpful for understanding the present day; but it would be useless to seek in the old trunk pastoral responses for today’s challenges. The past may be enlightening, but as the wise man of the Old Testament affirmed: “everything has its time; and whatever you want under the heavens has its hour” (Ecclesiastes 1:1). Our time demands new resources, new language, and a different attitude.

2.3 A Proposal: the Pastoral Plan for Gestation (Development)

The joint work published in 2004 under the direction of the theologians P. Bacq and C. Theobald, titled *Une nouvelle chance pour l’Evangile. Vers une pastorale* [A New Chance for the Gospel. Towards a Pastoral Plan] is presented as a relevant reflection from which we can mine some concrete lines of action. After putting forward the current pastoral models – the pastoral of transmission or of setting; the pastoral of welcome, that of proposal and of initiation – P. Bacq gives time to the pastoral proposal of gestation, defining it as one which refers us “to the most powerful, most fragile, most joyful, most painful human experience which exists.”¹⁰ It contains a project which gives rise to life from love (not from ideology or guilt), the life which is defended in every circumstance in which it

⁹ Donegani, J-M., *Inculturacao e gestacao do crer* [Inculturation and Development of Believing] in Theobald, C. and Bacq, P., *op. cit.*, pp. 35-55.

¹⁰ Cf. Bacq, P., *op. cit.*, pp. 7-34.

is precarious or marginalized. The author recalls that the “heart of the gospel is there” in the unyielding defense of life. Furthermore this perspective seeks the harmonious involvement of the masculine and the feminine because “no one engenders by himself.” This approach invites us to recognize fully the gifts of each one and it encourages reciprocal relationships which foster the “same care of each one towards the others” (1 Corinthians 12), a care which develops ecclesial cells on a human scale, in continuous dialogue, from which spring entirely new pastoral initiatives, a “handmade” pastoral plan, not an assembly line one. In this environment, it is desirable that each one arrive at his own identity, that each one be faithful to himself. Freed from the obsession of defining strategies, this model prioritizes reflection about the following points: What goes on between God and these men and women who live at the dawn of the 21st century? How does God invite the Church to transform its traditional way of believing and living to permit the encounter? How does God draw near to the person with whom I am speaking?

To these questions, we, as Vincentians, can add some others: To what degree can the Vincentian charism contribute to the development of God’s seeds in these periphery situations? Are we in the context of the desert?

2.4 A Vincentian Optic: Mission and Charity

The Vincentian perspective brings with it a mark that encompasses two moments, which, although different, are inseparable – two sides of the same coin: Mission and Charity. What do we understand by these words? In certain contexts a partial vision prevails which tends to restrict the Mission to the proclamation and the charitable activity to the works. If, at the conceptual level, it is possible and even advantageous to make this distinction, in practice it only makes sense if we understand them as different moments of the same process of evangelization. The Word of God is, in its essence, operable, that is, generative of a new reality. In Sacred Scripture, from its very first pages, we can see the intimate relationship between what is

announced and what is carried out. Thus in the creation narrative we find, on the one hand, “God said,” and, on the other hand, “it was done, it was created.” The word and the event are inseparable. Indeed the Hebrew word “*dabar*” means simultaneously *word* and *action* as the passage of Isaiah 50:10-11¹¹ suggests. Christ is, par excellence, the Word of God not only for the word he preached, but also for the gestures he carried out. His many miracles are the guarantee of the truth of the presence of God’s reign among men. From this same perspective, Vincent de Paul proposes a “format” for the mission which inevitably includes the exercise of charity. The missionary is called to imitate Jesus with two facets, spiritual and corporal, because the perfect following of Jesus lies in these two movements.

And so, as Vincentians, in conformity with the charismatic intuition of our founder, we are called not to neglect these two aspects in our pastoral action. The proclamation of the Word commits us to the cause of the poor with its different implications, i.e., not just in an assistencialist attitude, but also in the promotion of the disadvantaged and in the struggle against the structures which allow for exploitation. If the Word is just repeated without consequences for daily life, personally and communally, i.e., if there is no conversion translated into concrete gestures like those of Zacchaeus who, for having met Jesus, decides to return what he had robbed, then it is not God’s Word and has not been received as such.

In Conclusion: a way through the desert

The Book of Acts describes the episode in which Philip is sent on a road through the desert. On the surface, this proposal would be absurd for a missionary, because in the desert he would find no people to evangelize. The attitude of Philip, obedient to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, is to go forward into arid land, and thus he draws out the reason for being of the Church. As Benedict XVI says, the

¹¹ Cf. Santabárbara, L. González-Carvajal, *Con los pobres contra la pobreza* [With the Poor against Poverty], Madrid: San Pablo, 1991, pp. 173-187.

mission of the Church is to rescue people from the desert and lead them “towards the place of life, towards friendship with the Son of God, towards the One who gives us life, and life in abundance.”¹²

Today, the Holy Spirit continues to challenge us to follow roads in the desert, improbable routes, in order to explain and to baptize new Ethiopians. They are demanding journeys. They can only be survived by those who are prepared and who maintain a sufficiently motivated perspective towards the future, capable of compensating for the bitterness of a journey full of unforeseen happenings. The temptations of the flesh pots of Egypt or to remain bogged down contemplating the past like Lot’s wife will be frequent. The earth burned by the sun will easily become the burial ground of the unprepared.

But this barren land is also the place where God’s voice can be heard more easily. In the silence of empty places the voice resounds which attracts us and calls our name. As members of the CM, animated by the love for God’s nomads, will we know how to give drink and heal the wounds of the malnourished? Will we be prepared for this mission? Will we be working so that from this dead land can spring up green spaces, small oases where the seed of God’s word can be generously sowed?

Taking on this mission of guides in the desert demands reinforcing our identity in the light of our foundational charism; it implies an internal *aggiornamento*, a dissuading ourselves from seeking easier paths, but far from the pilgrims who, every day, ask about the meaning of the scriptures. This is the time in which, assuredly, God’s voice is heard with greater clarity. Let us sharpen our hearing.

Translated from the Spanish by Joseph V. Cummins, CM

¹² Homily at the Mass for the beginning of his Pontificate, 24 April 2005. AAS 97 (2005), 710.

The Vincentian Charism Fidelity to the Founder's Charism

Antonio Orcajo, CM

Introduction

This year, 2017, we are celebrating the 400th anniversary of the origin of the Vincentian Charism. On 25 January 1617, the tutor of the De Gondi children, Vincent de Paul, preached a sermon to the faithful of the parish in Folleville (the region of Picardy, France), a village that was part of the De Gondi estate. The sermon touched Vincent's listeners and, today, motivates us to celebrate the birth of the charism.

The members of the Congregation of the Mission have always celebrated January 25th as "their" feast day and the rest of the Vincentian Family was limited to congratulating them. This celebration of the 400th Anniversary of the Vincentian Charism is shared by all the members of the Vincentian Family, not only members of the traditional branches (members of the International Association of Charities, of the Congregation of the Mission, of the Company of the Daughters of Charity, of the Miraculous Medal Association, of the Vincentian Marian Youth, of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society, of the Vincentian Lay Missionaries), but also members of all those branches inspired by the Vincentian Charism. Indeed, there are millions of men and women who are members of the worldwide Vincentian Family, all of whom are inspired by the gospel spirit of Vincent de Paul.

We ask, therefore, what charism is being referenced: the charism of evangelization or the charism of the Founder? There is no doubt about the fact that Vincent referred to the sermon at Folleville as “the first sermon of the Mission” (CCD:XI:4).¹ Furthermore, Vincent viewed 25 January 1617 as the day on which the Congregation of the Mission was born. Such considerations, however, demand a hermeneutic that is contextualized within the emotional confines in which the charism was expressed.

This celebration of the Vincentian Charism is most welcome because we are able to deepen our understanding of that charism which has been gifted to us by Vincent de Paul. At the same time, we are able to reflect on our own vocational story and we also can rewrite the theology of the charism (a word that is often used but, at the same time, used with no reference to the religious and spiritual context that influenced and inspired Saint Paul and the Church’s magisterium).

Three fundamental documents of the Church’s magisterium will be used to ground this presentation: the Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelica Testificatio* (ET); the Decree, *Mutuae Relationes* (MR); the Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata* (VC). These documents are rooted in other documents that were approved during the Second Vatican Council, more specifically, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, and the Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life, *Perfectae Caritatis*.

The Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelica Testificatio*, (on the renewal of religious life) was promulgated by Paul VI on 29 June 1971 (the feast of Saint Peter and Saint Paul). The Decree, *Mutuae Relationes*, which outlines the pastoral principles that should guide

¹ *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. 4; future references to this work will be inserted into the text using the initials [CCD] followed by the volume number, then the page number.

the relationships between bishops and religious, was promulgated by the Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes on 14 May 1978. Finally, the Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, was promulgated by John Paul II on March 25, 1996, and was addressed to the bishops and clergy, religious orders and congregations, societies of apostolic life, secular institutes, and all the faithful.

The invitation of the Second Vatican Council was to engage in a process of renewal under the inspiration of the Spirit, thus returning to “the original spirit of the institutes” and to “the founders’ spirit and special aims” (PC, #2). This invitation led theologians to focus their attention on a deeper understanding of the charism. The charism, which was gifted to the founders, was not a private gift, something that belonged in some exclusive manner to them. Rather it was a gift that was given to the whole Church.

It would be good to take the time to reflect upon some material that has been published in recent years on the spirit, vocation, mission, identity, and charism of Vincent de Paul. More specifically, I refer to the XXII Vincentian Studies Week that was held in August 1995 in Salamanca, which was entitled *Let Us Relive the Vincentian Spirit* (the conferences and various workshops were published by Editorial CEME). For a basic bibliography, I refer the reader to *Concilium*, an international theological journal, #129 published in 1977 and dedicated to the theme of “The Charisms.” I also recommend the work of Fabio Ciardi, *Los fundadores, hombres del espíritu* (The Founders, Spirit-filled Men and Women). This work was published by Ediciones Paulinas, Madrid, 1983.

In more recent years, many distinguished Vincentian scholars from various parts of the world have written about and commented on the charism of Vincent de Paul. Each one of those individuals has used his/her own particular historical, theological, and/or juridical perspective in order to come to some conclusion in this regard. As might be expected, the differences in the development and the approach to this subject are most obvious.

[1.] Nature and evolution of the word *charism*

Charism comes from the Greek χάρισμα, *khárisma*, and is related to the root from which the word *grace* is derived, χάρις, *kharis*, *grace*. Thus, *charism* is the result of a grace that is given by the Holy Spirit, the Author of every gift. We note here, however, that the word *charism* was seldom utilized in classical, secular Greek. Today, those persons who are renowned for some type of activity or outstanding in some field of knowledge (science, politics, economics, sports, art, etc.) are often referred to as persons who possess a *charism*, or as charismatic individuals. Almost any human ability is referred to as a *charism*.

Charism, in a religious context, is understood as a gift that the Spirit bestows upon an individual for the good of the faithful and of the Church and as a means to remedy specific needs. Charism is a “manifestation of the Spirit that is given for some benefit” (1 Corinthians 12:7).

In accord with the needs of the time, the Spirit enriches men and women with special graces that enable them to confront and resolve calamitous situations, which afflict humankind and the Church. Founders confronted those situations that arose on various fronts: educational/cultural, social/religious, prayer/contemplation, evangelization/outreach. To mention just a few groups here, such activity was initiated by the Benedictines, Dominicans, Franciscans, Jesuits, Salesians, and countless others groups of consecrated men and women.

In order to understand things better, the origin of a community has to be framed within the broader context of salvation and the building up of the Church. Therefore, the response to the situations that give rise to an institute should not be sought simply in an analysis of the historical and social phenomenon that existed at that time. Such elements are certainly important, but even more important is the

charism of the Founder. The Spirit bestows his graces and gifts to whomever he wishes, however he wishes, and whenever he wishes. For us, the movement of the Spirit is mysterious and often beyond our understanding.

Pope John Paul II, in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Redemptionis donum*, speaks explicitly about the charism as a gift that is given to consecrated persons as well as to the community. The Pope does not hesitate to affirm that in such gifts men and women will find valid elements that will strengthen them as they live their consecration: *It is difficult to describe, or even to list, the many different ways in which consecrated persons fulfill their love for the Church through the apostolate. This apostolate is always born from that particular gift of your founders, which, received from God and approved by the Church, has become a charism for the whole community (Redemptionis donum, #15).*

No biographer of Vincent de Paul had dared to speak about the *charism* that the Spirit bestowed upon Vincent in the year 1617, a pivotal year in Vincent's priestly and missionary life. We should not be surprised by that fact because up until the time of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the word *charism* was rarely used and when it was used it was only in light of the understanding of Saint Paul (cf., Romans 1:11, 5:15, 6:23, 11:29, 12:6; 1 Corinthians 12:4, 9, 28, 30-31; 2 Corinthians 1:11; Ephesians 4:11-13; 1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6) and Saint Peter (who used the word only once, 1 Peter 4:10). Here we make note of the fact that not all the translators of the original Greek Bible (beginning with Saint Jerome, the author of the *Vulgate*) translated the word χάρισμα with the word *charism*, but used other synonyms.

[1.1.] Charism for founding and charism of the founder

Various authors make a distinction between the charism for founding and the charism of the founder. The first is understood as

the ability to found/establish, an ability that is not transferrable. On the other hand, the charism of the founder is a special grace that is manifested as a specific spiritual faith experience, an experience that is incarnated and embodied in the life of a man/woman. In fact, the charism for founding is framed within the charism of the founder and thus both of these can be reduced to the single reality of the charism of the founder. Through the charism one is entrusted with a mission in the Church, a work of service on behalf of others (cf. Ephesians 4:12).

In addition to the charism for founding, Vincent received other gifts from the Spirit that also could be used to describe his personality. For example, Vincent received the gift that enabled him to touch the hearts of his listeners and, in fact, they considered themselves as most blessed to be able to listen to Vincent and to follow his teachings. Brother Ducourneau, Vincent's secretary, wrote the following words in his "Memo on the Talks of Saint Vincent": *If the works he has done are works of God, as they seem to be, God must have given him His Spirit to do and maintain them: consequently, the advice and teachings used for that purpose must be considered divine and be gathered up like manna from heaven, whose various tastes have attracted so many different persons of both sexes and of every rank, associated in various ways for so many different good works untaken and sustained by his guidance* (CCD:XI:xxvii-xxviii).

The fact that, on 25 January 1617, Vincent was enlightened with regard to his priestly vocation has led some to affirm that on that day he received a charismatic seed (an insight that perhaps was veiled). If, at that time, he did not receive it manifestly, he certainly received it later, shining most brightly.

Others claim that this charismatic seed was deposited in the soul of Vincent de Paul when he passed through that painful temptation against his faith, a temptation which lasted from three to four years (1612-1615). His first biographer, Louis Abelly, says that he was freed from that temptation when he made *a firm and unbreakable*

resolve to honor Jesus Christ and to imitate him more perfectly than ever before by committing his entire life to the service of the poor (Abelly, III:115-116).²

[2] Social and religious context that led to the establishment of the Mission and charity

In order to understand Vincent's charism we have to distinguish his call to evangelize the poor from his later decision to found the Congregation of the Mission. We should not lose sight of the fact that Vincent, before receiving the charism as a founder, was enriched by the Spirit of God with many other graces that prepared him to be an outstanding evangelizer and a distinguished herald of charity and to serve so many men and women afflicted with both material and spiritual poverty.

Two experiences, one that occurred in January 1617 and the other in August of the same year, become our reference points. Both experiences gave origin to the mission and charity and ultimately became the Congregation of the Mission (1625) and the Company of the Daughters of Charity (1633). We note here that there already existed Associations of the Mission and Confraternities of Charity, but Vincent was able to give those institutions a new structure, a new life.³

² 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. Future references to this work will be inserted into the text using the name (Abelly), followed by the volume number (I, II, or III), followed by the page number.

³ Cf. Marion, M., *Dictionnaire des Institutions de la France aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles* [*Dictionary of Institutions of France in the 17th and 18th Centuries*], Paris Édit. A. & J. Picard, 1976, sub v. « Confréries » [“Confraternities”]; Taveneaux, R., *Le catholicisme dans la France classique 1610-1715* [*Catholicism in Classical France 1610-1715*], S.E.D.E.S., Paris 1980, Volume 1, Chap. VII: “La pastorale caritative” [“Charitable Pastoral Care”].

[2.1.] The experience in Folleville

The first experience is related to the sermon that Vincent, at the insistence of Madame de Gondi, Marguerite de Silly, the wife of Philippe Emmanuel de Gondi, preached in Folleville. Vincent himself explained what occurred on the unforgettable January 25, 1617: *That took place in the month of January 1617, and, on the twenty-fifth, the feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul, that lady asked me to preach a sermon in the church of Folleville to urge the people to make a general confession, which I did, pointing out to them its importance and usefulness. Then I taught them how to make it properly; and God had such regard for the confidence and good faith of that lady – for the large number and enormity of my sins would have hindered the success of this act – that He blessed what I said; and those good people were so moved by God that they all came to make their general confession ... That was the first sermon of the Mission and the success God gave it on the feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul, and He certainly had a plan in mind on that day* (CCD:XI:3-4).

The enlightenment of his priestly vocation was crucial with regard to his missionary life. It was at that time Vincent became aware of the reality that henceforward he ought to dedicate his life to evangelization of the poor country people. Here I refer to the insight of the Vincentian historian, José María Román: *It was a revelation. Vincent decided this must be his mission; this was what God was calling him to, he was to take the gospel to these poor country people. He did not found any congregation that day. Perhaps the idea of forming one never entered his head. He just preached a sermon, “the first sermon of the Mission.” Eight years were to pass before he set up the Congregation of the Mission and yet throughout his life he would have his missionaries celebrate January 25th as the birthday of the company.*⁴

⁴ J. M. Román, *St. Vincent de Paul: A Biography*, translated by Sister Joyce Howard, DC, Melisende, London, 1999, p.115.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the author of *An Abridgement of the Course of Meditations* affirmed this tradition and stated: *each January 25th reminds us of our humble beginning*. The meditation concludes with the following words: *This is the Lord's doing and it is wonderful in our eyes* (Psalm 118:23).⁵

When the Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation were approved in 1984, the book of meditations was no longer used because its method was viewed as inadequate. It must be stated, however, that Vincent never viewed himself as the Founder of the Congregation. In a conference to the Missionaries Vincent stated, *I ask you, who has established the Company? Who has set us to work in the missions, or with those preparing for ordination, or the conferences, or retreats, etc.? Is it I? No way! Is it M. Portail, whom God associated with me from the beginning? Not at all, for we weren't thinking of all that and had made no plan for it. So then, who is the author of all that? It's God. It's His paternal Providence and sheer goodness* (CCD:XI:31).

[2.2.] The experience in Châtillon

The second experience is related to Vincent's pastoral activity in Châtillon-les-Dombes on Sunday, August 20, of the same year 1617. That day he received a complementary enlightenment to the one he had received in Gannes-Folleville: the first Confraternity of Charity was established. Once again let us listen to Vincent's words about this event: *I, though unworthy, was Pastor of a small parish. As I was about to give the sermon, someone came to tell me there was an indigent man who was sick and very badly lodged in a poor barn. I was informed of his illness and poverty in such terms that, moved by compassion, I made a strong plea, speaking with such feeling that all*

⁵ A priest of the Congregation, *An Abridgement of the Course of Meditations for Every Day of the Year*; Eastern and Western Provinces of the United States, 1958, p.476.

the ladies were touched by it. More than fifty of them set out from the town, and I did the same. When I visited him, I found him in such a state that I judged it wise to hear his confession. As I was taking the Blessed Sacrament to him, I met the ladies returning in droves, and God gave me this thought: 'Couldn't these good ladies be brought together and encouraged to give themselves to God to serve the sick poor?' ... After dinner a meeting was held in the home of a good townswoman to see what help could be given them, and everyone present felt urged to go to visit them, console them with their words, and do what they could to help them. After Vespers, I took with me an upright citizen of the town, and we set out together to go there. Along the way, we met some women who had gone before us and, a little farther on, we met others who were returning home. Since it was summertime and the weather was very hot, those good ladies were sitting by the side of the road to rest and refresh themselves ... and that's the first place where the Confraternity of Charity was established (CCD:IX:165-166, 192-193).

These are the precise details concerning the events that occurred in 1617 in Folleville and in Châtillon, details that can be amplified in light of the civil, political, and religious situation of France at the beginning of the 17th century. It has often been said that the 17th century was the golden era in France because of the many works and distinguished individuals renowned for their knowledge and holiness.

As is well known, the Daughters of Charity came into existence through the Confraternities of Charity. Vincent, however, did not consider himself a Founder of that work: *And that, dear Sisters, is how God brought this work into being [that is, the Company of the Daughters of Charity]. Mademoiselle never thought of it, neither did I, nor did M. Portail, nor that poor young woman either [Marguerite Naseau] ... it's God himself who has done it. Who gave the spirit to the poor Daughters of Charity ... so it's from Him. Never forget that human beings didn't do it, but God (CCD:IX:473).*

The year 1633 was the year in which the charism of Vincent de Paul was made manifest. On January 12th, the Congregation of the Mission was approved by Pope Urban VII through the promulgation of the Bull, *Salvatoris Nostri*. In July of that year, the Tuesday Conferences were initiated and some of the most distinguished members of the clergy became part of this group. On November 29th, because of some very clear failings of the Confraternities of Charity, the first community of the Daughters of Charity was established. Mademoiselle LeGras, Louise de Marillac, took on the responsibility of forming this group of women.

[3] Elements that accompany the charism

To know the Vincentian charism better, one can do nothing more beneficial than review the group of factors that go with it. All these elements combined and blended express, concretize, and configure a community approved by the Church.

[3.1] The area of Mission or Action

The specific task of Vincent de Paul and of his congregations was developed around the evangelization of the poor. For the whole Vincentian Family, the poor are our reason for being and our mission. The poor explain its vocation and its dedication to the mission in the Church and in the world in imitation of Jesus Christ: *Our Lord asks us to evangelize the poor; that's what He did and what He wants to continue to do through us. We have great reason to humble ourselves here, seeing that the Eternal Father is using us for the plans of his Son, who came to preach the Gospel to poor persons, giving this as a sign that He was the Son of God and that the long-awaited Messiah had come ... One important reason we have for this, then, is the dignity of the matter: to make God known to poor persons; to announce Jesus Christ to them; to tell them that the kingdom of God is at hand and that it's for persons who are poor. Oh, what a great thing that is!* (CCD: XII: 71).

The mission was given to our Founder to be carried out not just by him, but also by a group of persons who would form a community based on the living out of the same charism and the same service to the Church. The charism is not an individual gift, but rather a social one. Thus, it may be transmittable and lasting. This charism or grace and the mission linked to it suppose a vocation from God. God calls, in effect, the founder and all those who are to be graced with the participation in the same charism.

The first and principal work of the Congregation of the Mission was the popular missions, which in a short time called for foreign missions. Sometime later the field of work widened and included the direction of seminaries. It is a question, more than of one concrete work, of responding to the needs of the Church. In effect, the original apostolic commitment spilled over into other works sealed by urgent charity. And so, the Founder would say: *They were given to us either by those who have authority to do so, or from sheer necessity; that's how God involved us in these plans. Thus, everyone thinks this Company is from God because people see that it hastens to the relief of the most pressing and neglected needs* (CCD: XII: 80).

In brief, then, *poor persons are our portion, the poor... 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, who avoided the towns and went to the country to seek out those who were poor. That's what our Rules engage us to do, to help poor persons, our lords and masters* (CCD: XII: 4). This help to the poor was intended to remedy every kind of corporal and spiritual necessity. *We [are] to run to the spiritual needs of our neighbor as if we were running to a fire* (CCD: XI: 25).

In 1654 Vincent wrote to a priest of the Mission ministering in the popular missions with great nostalgia for his former work: *I cannot restrain myself and must tell you quite simply that this gives*

me renewed, greater desires to be able, in the midst of my petty infirmities, to go and finish my life near a bush, working in some village. I think I would be very happy to do so, if God were pleased to grant me this grace (CCD: V: 204).

In a similar manner, Vincent explained service to the poor to the Ladies of Charity and the Daughters of Charity. To the latter he said: *Married persons and servants are filled with concerns and dissatisfaction; and the pleasure they may have can't be compared to the pleasure and consolation of a Sister of Charity who serves those who are poor.... I confess that I never had greater consolation than when I had the honor of serving the poor.... 'Man is happy' to practice charity* (CCD: X: 546).

The cry of the poor roused the zeal of the Founder, who exclaimed in November of 1657: *I remember ... when I'd come back from giving a mission, it seemed to me that, when I reached Paris, the gates of the city were going to fall upon and crush me; and seldom did I return from a mission without that thought coming to my mind.*" (CCD: XI: 391).

It was to this same cry of the poor that Paul VI appealed to spur on the missionary zeal: *You hear rising up, more pressing than ever, from their personal distress and collective misery, "the cry of the poor." Was it not in order to respond to their appeal as God's privileged ones that Christ came, even going as far as to identify Himself with them* (*Evangelica Testificatio*, #17).

The great French orator Jacques Bossuet, a member of the Tuesday Conferences and a friend of Saint Vincent, inspired by the words and works of the holy Founder, developed a famous sermon in three points in which he tried to prove "*the eminent dignity of the poor in the Church*" (cf. *Sermons choisis de Bossuet, Sur l'éminente dignité des pauvres dans l'église* [Selected Sermons of Bossuet, On the Eminent Dignity of the Poor in the Church], Garnier Frères, Paris).

It is not surprising that another great friend of his, Bishop Henri Maupas de Tour, exalted the deceased Vincent de Paul in the funeral sermon he pronounced on November 23, 1660, in the Church of Saint Germain l'Auxerrois in Paris, for his dedication to the temporal and eternal salvation of the poor, saying: *He all but changed the face of the Church* (Oraison funèbre à la mémoire de feu Messire Vincent de Paul [Funeral Oration to the Memory of the Late Monsieur Vincent de Paul]).

François-Marie Arouet, better known as Voltaire (1694-1778) somewhat later than Saint Vincent in time, said of him: *My saint is Vincent de Paul, the patron of the founders. He has earned the praise as much of philosophers as of Christians.* (Oeuvres Complètes, T.44, Garnier, Paris, 1885, pp.167-168).

[3.2.] Spirituality

As a means of perseverance and fidelity to the evangelization of the poor, the Founder of Mission and Charity made use of a body of spiritual doctrine, which was his own nourishment and support and that of his community. Certainly the term “spirituality” was never used by the saint, and neither was “charism.” Between mission and spirituality there exists a bond that is impossible to break. The Founder had to dedicate time to assimilate a spirituality that was distinctly evangelical, adapted to the nature of Mission and Charity, as shown by his interventions before the Ladies of Charity (1628), before the Missionaries of the Congregation (1632), and the Daughters of Charity (1634), although the chronology of these documents and of his correspondence was a few years earlier. Vincent de Paul would have the gospel as his ensign and the rule of a life given over to the evangelization of the poor, although on some occasions he also made use of teachings taken from the Holy Fathers, theologians, and writers on the spiritual life.

Vincentian spirituality, which will be forged and take on its own body and form with the passage of the years, is centered on Jesus

Christ, the Missionary of the Father and the Evangelizer of the Poor. Its experience and the living out of it are explained by the way of knowing, understanding, feeling, and living the mystery of *Jesus Christ, the Rule of the Mission* (cf. CCD: XII: 110).

With great affection, he said to his first companion in the Mission, Father Antoine Portail in 1635: *Remember, Monsieur, we live in Jesus Christ through the death of Jesus Christ, and we must die in Jesus Christ through the life of Jesus Christ, and our life must be hidden in Jesus Christ and filled with Jesus Christ; and in order to die as Jesus Christ, we must live as Jesus Christ.* (CCD: I: 276).

Saint Vincent begins to explain to his disciples just what the spirit is from which his spirituality is derived and which should animate the missionaries as those who continue the mission of Jesus Christ by telling them of the *love and reverence towards the Father, compassionate and effective love for the poor, and docility to divine providence.* (Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission, #6). In the moment of handing over the Common Rules to the Missionaries in 1658, the Spirit had gifted him with a rich spiritual and apostolic experience. As can be seen, the spirituality of the Founder is somewhat subjective as a way of possessing in time and space what the charism implied. Since it is the Church which places its seal on the institutionalization of the charism, it is important to see the charism and the institution as two aspects of one and the same reality.

Vincentian spirituality, extracted from the gospel of Jesus Christ, also has another source of inspiration: the poor. St. Vincent used to say: *What I retain from my experience of this is the judgement I've always made that true religion – true religion, Messieurs, true religion – is found among the poor. God enriches them with a lively faith; they believe, they touch, they taste the words of life. You never see them in their illnesses, troubles, and food shortages get carried away with impatience, or murmur and complain; not at all – or rarely* (CCD: XII: 142).

From what has been said one can gather that three loves, melded into one, constitute the spirituality of Saint Vincent: Jesus Christ, the Church, and the poor.

[3.3.] The Nature or Characteristic Style

If between the mission and the spirituality there exists an unbreakable bond, we affirm something similar about the spirituality and the nature or characteristic style of those called by Jesus to serve in Mission and Charity. Vincentian spirituality revolves around putting on the spirit of Jesus: simple, humble, gentle, mortified, and filled with zeal for the salvation of people.

Attentive to the doctrine of the Church, we transcribe the decree *Mutuae Relationes*: “*The very charism of the Founders appears as an “experience of the Spirit,” transmitted to their disciples to be lived, safeguarded, deepened and constantly developed by them, in harmony with the Body of Christ continually in the process of growth.... This distinctive character also involves a particular style of sanctification and of apostolate, which creates its particular tradition, with the result that one can readily perceive its objective elements*” (MR 11).

The particular style of sanctification and apostolate of the Vincentian Family calls for the practice of these five apostolic virtues that constitute the spirit of the Mission: simplicity, humility, gentleness, mortification, and zeal for the salvation of humanity. History records these features of the way of being and acting by which they have made themselves known. Never has the charism of the Founder been so talked about as it is now. Would this be, perhaps, because the spirit of the world is trying to drown the nature and characteristic style that identify the Congregation? If the Vincentian community went so far as to forget its characteristic style, it would lose its identity and its force of attraction. The example of life and spirit is the best recommendation and the most effective invitation to bring others to embrace our missionary vocation.

The advice given in the letter of May 2, 1660, to Father Pierre de Beaumont, superior of Richelieu, is valid for a whole vocational program. *We have a maxim ... never to urge anyone to embrace our state. It is for God alone to choose those whom He wishes to call to it, and we are sure that one Missionary given by His fatherly hand will do more by himself than many others who would not have a true vocation. It is up to us to ask Him to send good workers into His harvest and to live so well that we will give them, by our example, an attraction rather than a distaste for working with us* (CCD: VIII: 342).

[3.4.] The Group of Disciples

The individual and community style of life lived with an apostolic spirit raises up in a contagious manner disciples of Saint Vincent to live our way of life. The testimony cited above from Brother Ducourneau to which we add that of Bossuet: “We listened avidly to his words” (*Letter to Pope Clement XI seeking the beatification of Vincent de Paul*) speaks to us of the group of disciples that associated themselves with Mission and Charity. The example and vocation of Vincent de Paul attracted men and women disciples to his work in an irresistible way.

The process began by itself, without publicity, but with joyful dedication to the following of Jesus, the evangelizer of the poor. As far as the missionaries are concerned, we know that the first three signed an act of association (cf. CCD: XIIIa: 222-223), installing themselves in Bons Enfants College (1624), attracted by their teacher. Once they were established in Saint Lazare Abbey in 1632, the number of missionaries grew unceasingly. The following year, 1633, Pope Urban VII approved the Congregation of the Mission, thus giving a new impulse to the fledgling Congregation.

It is indisputable that the dedication and the joyful spirit with which the Founder and his community lived fascinated other people who, in their turn, received the same spiritual and apostolic experience. He will exhort the Daughters of Charity to be living

examples, to guarantee the service to the poor, carried out with a spirit of *compassion, gentleness, cordiality, respect, and devotion*. Joy pervades those virtues springing from the direct love of: *Jesus, the source and model of all charity* (CCD: XIIb: 151; Common Rules of the Daughters of Charity I, 1).

From 1617 onward, the Ladies or Confraternities of Charity, known today as the International Association of Charities, grew at a faster pace than the missionaries. The Founder will say to these good women: *Ladies ... Providence is turning today to some of you to supply what was lacking to the sick poor of the Hôtel-Dieu. They corresponded to God's plan, and soon after, when others joined the first ones, God established them as mothers of abandoned children ... Those good souls have responded to all that with zeal and firmness* (CCD:XIIIb:432).

[3.5.] Fidelity to the Charism of the Founder

The insistence on fidelity impresses any observer of the history of the Church and of its congregations, for the specific charismatic note of any institute demands, both of the Founder and of his disciples, a continual examination regarding fidelity to the Lord; docility to His Spirit; intelligent attention to circumstances and an outlook cautiously directed to the signs of the times; the will to be part of the Church; the awareness of subordination to the sacred hierarchy; boldness of initiatives; constancy in the giving of self; humility in bearing with adversities. The true relation between genuine charism, with its perspectives of newness, and interior suffering, carries with it an unvarying history of the connection between charism and cross (MR, #12).

Fidelity goes beyond the limits of perseverance and places its accent on love and joy in the fraternal life and in the service of the poor in whom one must discover the suffering Jesus Christ. There can be no fidelity to the charism without progress, nor progress without fidelity to the foundational charism. A fidelity that does not update its basic inspirations leads the community to death.

The post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* insists above all on fidelity to the charism. This simple observation should make us reflect on the responsibility that falls upon those called to Mission and Charity. Vocational work insists on the importance of both personal and community witness, because the former are not sufficient without the latter.

We have come to a state of indifference in the face of so many broken commitments. Absences at scheduled community exercises like community prayer and work promote the dissolution of the community, for permanence does not come in an unreflective way or through arbitrary formulae, but rather by means of dynamic fidelity.

The fear that the Congregation might be unfaithful to its apostolic and spiritual commitments led Vincent to ask the Lord: *Two or three times every day I ask God to destroy us if we're not useful for His glory* (CCD: XI :2). He had a clear consciousness that the community was useful only to the degree that it remained faithful to its foundational spirit and charism.

CONCLUSION

From what we have said we can conclude that the charism renews and invigorates itself throughout one's life, especially from the moment we say "Yes" to the Lord's call to follow him wherever he goes. In a particular way, the notes that usually accompany the charism testify to the authenticity of the very charism approved by the Church. It pertains to the Church to verify if the charism is a true good for the faithful and for the Church itself. In the case of the Congregation of the Mission, its approbation by Pope Urban VIII in 1633 is clear. From that time onward, the Founder began to set out for his disciples a spirituality that confirms and demonstrates the charism received.

The approval of the Company of the Daughters of Charity by the Holy See also confirms it, even though this was delayed until 1668, eight years after the death of the Holy Founders. At that time, Father René Almérás was the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and of the Daughters of Charity (1661-1672).

Translated: Joseph Cummins, CM and
Charles Plock, CM

Welcoming the Stranger Saint Vincent de Paul and the Homeless

Robert Maloney, CM

“There was no room for them in the inn.”¹ Those stark words dampen the joy of Luke’s infancy narrative, which we read aloud every Christmas. No room for a young carpenter and his pregnant wife? Was it because they asked for help with a Galilean accent that identified them as strangers?² Was there no room for the long-awaited child at whose birth angels proclaimed “good news of great joy that will be for all people”?³ No, there was no room. Their own people turned Mary and Joseph away. Their newborn child’s first bed was a feeding trough for animals.

Matthew, in his infancy narrative, recounts another episode in the story of Jesus’ birth, where once again joy gives way to sorrow.⁴ He describes the death-threatening circumstances that drove Joseph and Mary from their homeland with Jesus. Reflecting on this account in Matthew’s gospel, Pius XII once stated, “The émigré Holy Family of Nazareth, fleeing into Egypt, is the archetype of every refugee family.”⁵ Quoting those words, Pope Francis has referred to the plight of the homeless and refugees again and again and has proclaimed their right to the “3 Ls”: land, labor, and lodging.⁶

¹ Luke 2:7.

² People from Galilee had a clearly recognizable accent. Cf. Matthew 26:73: “A little later the bystanders came over and said to Peter, “Surely you too are one of them; even your accent gives you away.”

³ Luke 2:10.

⁴ Matthew 2:13-15.

⁵ These are the opening words of the Apostolic Constitution *Exsul Familia* (1 August 1952).

⁶ In Spanish, Pope Francis uses “3 Ts”: tierra, trabajo y techo.

Today, in one way or another, 1.2 billion people share in the lot of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus. Can our Vincentian Family have a significant impact on their lives?

In this article, I propose to examine the theme in three steps:

1. Vincent and the homeless
2. The Vincentian Family Global Initiative against Homelessness
3. Blending systemic change and a “culture of encounter” in serving the homeless

1. VINCENT AND THE HOMELESS

The homeless ranked high on Vincent’s agenda. A careful analysis of his life, writings, and conferences produces a very concrete picture of his works on their behalf.

The “13 houses” – Vincent’s efforts to provide a home for foundling children.

In 1638, Vincent took up the work of the foundlings. Initially, the children stayed with Louise de Marillac and the sisters. Then Vincent rented a house for them on the rue des Boulangers.⁷

Between 1638 and 1644, the number of children “found” grew to 1200. One can imagine all the problems involved in lodging, staffing, and financing this work. Vincent was quite inventive in that regard. In fact, his creative arrangement for housing the foundlings illustrates what a shrewd businessperson he was.

When Louis XIII died in 1643, a provision in his will permitted Queen Anne of Austria to assign a million dollars to Vincent as a stable endowment for his Congregation’s missions in Sedan. Vincent chose to use the money to build 13 small houses close to

⁷ In 1647, the Ladies of Charity acquired the Château de Bicêtre, where weaned babies were taken. Then, in 1651, all recognized that Bicêtre was harmful to the children’s health, so they returned to Paris and were housed at the far end of the Saint-Denis suburb. In 1670, they were in two houses, one opposite Notre-Dame and the other in the Saint-Antoine suburb.

Saint-Lazare, the Motherhouse of the Congregation of the Mission. He then rented them to the Ladies of Charity to use for lodging the foundlings. The regular rent money became the stable endowment to support the missions in Sedan. Notice how Vincent got two for one on the deal! The money from the king's bequest bought the houses for the foundlings, and the rent money from the Ladies of Charity supported the missions in Sedan.

But the number of foundlings continued to grow and funds to provide for them were difficult to find. In 1647, the Ladies of Charity considered abandoning the work. Vincent saved it by making an impassioned appeal to them, calling the foundlings their children:

*Well then, Ladies, compassion and charity have led you to adopt these little creatures as your own children; you have been their mothers according to grace since the time their mothers according to nature abandoned them. See now whether you, too, want to abandon them. Stop being their mothers to be their judges at present; their life and death are in your hands. I am going to take the vote; it is time to pass sentence on them and to find out whether you are no longer willing to have pity on them. If you continue to take charitable care of them, they will live; if, on the contrary, you abandon them, they will most certainly perish and die; experience does not allow you to doubt that.*⁸

Eventually, Vincent assigned numerous Daughters of Charity to care for the foundlings. He wrote a special rule for the Daughters who were working in the Foundling Hospital.⁹ It is touching in its practicality and its spirituality. Describing the sisters' vocation, he wrote,

⁸ CCD:XIIIb:423-434; IX:165-166. 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.

⁹ CCD:XIIIb:209.

They will reflect that their ministry is to serve the Infant Jesus in the person of each baby they are raising, and in this they have the honor of doing what the Blessed Virgin did to her dear Son, since He affirms that the service rendered to the least of His people is rendered to Himself. In accordance with that, they will do their utmost to raise these poor children with as much attention and respect as if it were to the very person of Our Lord.¹⁰

He descended into numerous practical details about the children's meals, their nap time and play time, their cleanliness, the washing of their diapers, their prayer, their learning to read and write, etc. It is a document remarkable for its concreteness and its gentle approach toward disciplining the children.

Apparently, the sisters were quite successful in raising and educating the foundlings. At a Council meeting of the Daughters of Charity held on 13 August 1656, Vincent wanted some of the foundlings to be admitted to the community. The sister in charge of the Foundling Hospital opposed the idea (she wondered what people would think!).¹¹ It is not clear whether the Daughters at that time accepted Vincent's recommendation. Over the years, however, attitudes toward foundlings and orphans changed significantly. Today, many wonderful Daughters of Charity are proud to say that they were raised in homes run by the sisters.

Housing for refugees – Vincent's efforts to find lodging and assistance for thousands of displaced men, women, and children during the wars in Lorraine.

Beginning in 1639, Vincent began organizing campaigns for the relief of those suffering from war, plague, and famine. This work went on for ten years. During that time, Vincent succeeded in supplying Lorraine with help amounting to more than 60 million

¹⁰ CCD:XIIIb:209.

¹¹ CCD:XIIIb:353.

dollars and more than 38,000 yards of various fabrics.¹² He raised funds initially from the Ladies of Charity and eventually obtained contributions from the highest authorities. King Louis XIII made a gift of \$1,800,000.¹³

One of Vincent's assistants, Brother Mathieu Regnard, made 53 trips, crossing enemy lines in disguise, carrying money from Vincent for the relief of those in war zones.¹⁴ On his return trip, he often brought with him a number of people whom he had found in dire circumstances. In October 1639, Vincent wrote of him, "He brought in a hundred last month, among whom were forty-six young women ... He fed them and accompanied them right into this city where the greater number have already been placed."¹⁵

Vincent demanded strict accountability. He insisted that he receive regular reports on how relief money was being spent, so that benefactors would know how their donations were used and would be encouraged to give even more. He wrote to his confrere François du Coudray,

*... obtain a receipt for everything they give, because we must keep an account of it so that, whatever the pretext may be, not a speck of it is diverted or applied elsewhere. And please send me by way of Brother Mathieu a copy of the accounts, signed by M. de Villarceaux, and a copy of his orders, if there is one. Also send me every month the amounts you have given out or ordered to be distributed in other places.*¹⁶

¹² Bernard Pujo, *Vincent DePaul, the Trailblazer*, translated by Gertrud Graubart Champe (University of Notre Dame Press, 2003) 131.

¹³ For the reader's convenience, I have converted the *livres* of Saint Vincent's time into dollars today, but I must candidly admit that this is a precarious process. For further information on the relative values of the currencies, cf. John Rybolt, "Saint Vincent de Paul and Money," *Vincentian Heritage Journal* 26 (2005) 92; cf. also, Gerry Lalonde, "Monetary Values in 1650 – 1750 in New France Compared to Today," which can be found at: <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~unclefred/MONETARY.htm>

¹⁴ Dodin, *op. cit.*, p. 45, states that Brother Mathieu carried \$1,000,000 to \$1,200,000 a trip!

¹⁵ CCD:I:582.

¹⁶ CCD:II:75.

As he did throughout his life, Vincent told the members of his family that they should not only offer material help, but also provide spiritual assistance to those who were fleeing to the towns and cities. In a letter written on 12 October 1639, after describing the displacement of the population in Lorraine and the material help that was being provided, he stated: "We are assisting them spiritually by teaching them everything necessary for salvation. We have them begin by making a general confession of their entire past life and then continue to confess every two or three months."¹⁷

Reflecting on Vincent's accomplishments in Lorraine, the historian Bernard Pujo concluded:

*This support for Lorraine is remarkable for more than the amount of aid distributed and the number of suffering people helped. It was the first attempt at organized assistance for a whole endangered region. Without having received any specific charge, Vincent de Paul assumed the role of a secretary of state for refugees and war victims. Going far beyond the responsibilities expected of him as superior of the Congregation of the Mission, he placed himself, on his own initiative, in a national role.*¹⁸

The "Name of Jesus Hospice" – Vincent's efforts to shelter, clothe, and feed those living on the streets of Paris.

By 1652, as poverty enveloped Paris during the civil war,¹⁹ Vincent, at the age of 72, was running massive relief programs, providing soup twice a day for thousands of poor people at Saint-Lazare and feeding thousands of others at the houses of the Daughters of Charity. He organized collections, gathering each week 5-6 thousand pounds of meat, 2-3 thousand eggs, and provisions of clothing and utensils.²⁰

¹⁷ CCD:I:582.

¹⁸ Pujo, *op. cit.*, 134.

¹⁹ Usually called "the Fronde," this war lasted from 1648 to 1652.

²⁰ For many interesting details on Saint Vincent's handling of money and his administration of charitable works, cf. René Wulfman *Charité Publique et Finances Privées : Monsieur Vincent, Gestionnaire et Saint* (Villeneuve d'Ascq, France: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 1998).

He provided lodging for the displaced. For instance, when a wealthy anonymous merchant in Paris gave Vincent four million dollars to be used in some good work, he founded a hospice called "The Name of Jesus." After discussing his plan with the benefactor, he earmarked \$440,000 for the purchase of the house. He also allotted money for its enlargement and furnishings and provided it with a substantial annual income. It was already in operation in March 1653. Saint Vincent chose as its first inhabitants 20 male and 20 female artisans who were without work, and he provided them with looms and other tools. Louise de Marillac mentions that, over the years, the residents were bootmakers, shoemakers, button makers, muslin workers, lace makers, glove makers, tailors, and pin makers. The Daughters of Charity worked closely with them. A Priest of the Mission, in accord with the terms of the contract, acted as chaplain. Saint Vincent often came to visit and instruct them.²¹

Vincent wrote to one of his priests, describing the situation, "We have more troubles here than ever. Paris is swarming with poor persons because the armies have forced the poor country folk to seek refuge here. Meetings are held daily to see how they can be helped. A few houses have been rented in the outlying districts where some of them have been housed, particularly poor girls."²²

He added, "In addition, about eight to nine hundred girls have been placed in private homes, and all the refugee nuns living in the city – some of them in questionable places, so it is said – will be housed in a monastery prepared for this purpose."²³ Vincent and

²¹ CCD:XI:184. The Name of Jesus hospice later became the municipal health center. Its buildings were on the site now occupied by the offices of the Gare de l'Est. There are many references to this hospice in the writings of Vincent and Louise de Marillac. Cf. *Spiritual Writings of Louise de Marillac*, edited and translated from the French by Sister Louise Sullivan, DC (New York; New City Press, 1991), 794-795.

²² CCD:IV:386-387.

²³ CCD:IV:396.

Louise de Marillac often put up young girls initially in the homes for the foundlings; later, they were placed in better-off households as maids. Young boys were housed at Saint-Lazare until work could be found for them.

To feed the hungry, all the parishes organized soup kitchens. The parish of Saint-Hippolyte served 900 people; the parish of Saint-Laurent, 600; the parish of Saint-Martin, 300. Vincent wrote that at Saint-Lazare “soup is distributed daily to 14 or 15 thousand persons, who would die of hunger without this assistance.”

The Daughters of Charity worked tirelessly. Vincent wrote to Lambert aux Couteaux, the superior in Warsaw, describing the situation,

This is how God chooses to have us participate in so many holy projects. The poor Daughters of Charity are more involved than we in the corporal assistance of the poor. They prepare and distribute soup daily for thirteen hundred poor, humiliated people at the home of Mademoiselle Le Gras and for eight hundred refugees in the Saint-Denis area. In Saint-Paul parish alone, four or five Sisters make the distribution to five thousand poor persons, in addition to the sixty to eighty patients they have on their hands. Other Sisters are doing the same elsewhere.²⁴

The “Little Schools” – Vincent’s efforts to organize educational programs for teaching job skills and for catechizing those living in desperate circumstances.

Though the terminology “systemic change” was unknown to Vincent and Louise, they both recognized, on a seminal level, that education and job training were extremely important in transforming the lives of the homeless and the poor.²⁵

²⁴ CCD:IV:400.

²⁵ In *Populorum Progressio*, 35, Pope Paul VI wrote: “Lack of education is as serious as lack of food; the illiterate person is a starved spirit.”

Vincent and Louise de Marillac were deeply committed to the education and moral formation of young people living on the streets or in dire conditions. They wanted them to develop the skills needed to get jobs. For that reason, with Vincent's support, Louise founded the "petites écoles" (little schools) and made the instruction of poor young people one of the principal works of the first Daughters of Charity.²⁶

The task was not easy. First of all, since families often regarded children as part of the work force, the sisters had to convince parents to send the children to school. On top of that, sickness was rampant, so absences were frequent. In addition, the children themselves were often truant, wandering off on the streets to play or to beg. When they came knocking on the school door at mealtime, the sisters used the occasion to teach them how "to pray, read, and write; in a word, (to do) every good work in which they may be useful."²⁷

Louise taught in these schools herself. She wrote a catechism for the sisters to use in teaching young children. She insisted that instruction given in the schools should be clear and practical.²⁸ Knitting, sewing, and embroidering were among the skills taught to young women.

The sisters also organized education programs in their hospitals²⁹ to teach children between seven and 11 years of age to learn how to earn a living.³⁰

²⁶ Cf. Matthieu Brejon de Lavergnée, *Histoire des Filles de la Charité* (Fayard, Paris, 2011) 493-498.

²⁷ CCD:XIIIb:145, 211.

²⁸ Today, the schools of the Vincentian Family have over a million members. Beyond the schools, the Vincentian Marian Youth groups offer formation to more than 120,000 young people.

²⁹ It is easy to forget that, etymologically, *hospital* is related to *hospitality*, as well as to *hospice* and *hostel* (shelter for the needy). It is also related to the Latin *hospes*, meaning "guest" or "host."

³⁰ Matthieu Brejon de Lavergnée, *op. cit.*, 498.

II. THE VINCENTIAN FAMILY GLOBAL INITIATIVE AGAINST HOMELESSNESS

For its 400th anniversary, the worldwide Vincentian Family has chosen a theme with deep biblical roots: “Welcoming the Stranger.”

a. Biblical roots

The Hebrew Scriptures, especially Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy, often exhort the Israelites to cherish “the alien in the land,” reminding God’s people that they too were once “aliens” in the Land of Egypt.³¹ Most striking of all is Deuteronomy 10:18-19, “God executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and loves the resident alien, giving them food and clothing. So you too should love the resident alien, for that is what you were in the land of Egypt.” The frequent repetition of this theme is an indication that resident aliens were often treated badly.

The New Testament continues the theme. In Matthew’s gospel, among the criteria by which we shall be judged, Jesus lists, “When I was a stranger, you welcomed me.”³² The author of Hebrews accents the same point: “Do not neglect hospitality to strangers, for, in doing so, some have entertained angels without knowing it.”³³ Given this scriptural background, sheltering the homeless quickly found a place on Christianity’s list of corporal works of mercy.

Matthew 25:31-46, describing the last judgment, influenced Vincent de Paul profoundly. In his conferences, he often referred to the climax of the scene, in which Christ identified himself with the poor person: “As long as you did it for one of these, the least of my brothers and sisters, you did it for me.” Seeing Christ in the poor person, Vincent felt a gnawing concern to do the works of mercy listed in the judgment scene, particularly caring for the homeless.

³¹ Exodus 23:9; Leviticus 19:33-34; Deuteronomy 10:17-19; 14:28-29; 16:9-12.

³² Matthew 25:35.

³³ Hebrews 13:2.

Reflecting on this biblical data at its meeting on January 6-7, 2017, the Executive Committee of the International Leaders of the Vincentian Family approved a proposal to launch, as a Family, a megaproject focusing on homelessness. Father Tomaž Mavrič announced, “We would hope to begin this project by July 1, 2017, to celebrate our Jubilee Year, and we envision that it will continue at least until 2030, so that it will coincide with the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations.”

b. Steps leading to the decision

In order to determine what type of megaproject might best fit our Family, last autumn a small group visited the European Union in Brussels, the United Nations in New York, and Catholic Charities in Baltimore and asked representatives and experts in those places for suggestions. Gradually, they came to the conviction that two criteria should guide the Family’s choice: 1) that the project would be of genuine service to the poor in as many countries as possible and 2) that it would enable numerous branches of the worldwide Vincentian Family to work together.

In the end, after reviewing a list of possibilities, the International Vincentian Family’s Executive Committee decided on a megaproject directed toward homelessness, encompassing three dimensions:

1. people without accommodations; e.g. street sleepers
2. people living in temporary accommodations; e.g. refugee camps or internally displaced people
3. people living in inadequate/insecure accommodations; e.g. slums and favelas, hostels.

This three-dimensional definition, carefully formulated by the Institute of Global Homelessness, has been accepted by the United Nations as a standard for measuring and combatting homelessness.

The Executive Committee felt that, of all the issues proposed as possible megaprojects, this would be the one that we could best address as a worldwide Family. Homelessness, in one form or another, exists everywhere, so we hope that it will be possible for us to address it in all the countries where our Vincentian Family exists.

At present, we have identified 225 branches of the Family. These branches work in more than 150 countries. If we work together in the service of the homeless, our efforts could have an enormous impact.

c. The megaproject

The Executive Committee sees this megaproject as one of the most significant ways of celebrating the 400th anniversary of the birth of our Vincentian charism.

Depaul International, one of the newest branches of our Family, has offered to administer the project. Founded in 1989, Depaul International specializes in homelessness. It has spread rapidly from England to Ireland, Slovakia, Ukraine, the United States, and France.

The Institute of Global Homelessness, which began two years ago at DePaul University in Chicago, will assist Depaul International actively. Over the past two years, the Institute has been gathering the latest information on the topic and has been bringing together experts to address it. It has formulated a definition of homelessness, described above, which the United Nations has accepted. As a result, for the first time in history, we have the opportunity to gather accurate statistics about homelessness and attempts to eliminate it. The UN estimates that over 1.2 billion of the earth's seven billion inhabitants are homeless in one form or other. This number continues to grow because of conflicts, natural disasters, and urbanization.

All the branches represented at the January meeting of the Executive Committee have already expressed a commitment to join actively in this project: the AIC; the Congregation of the Mission; the Daughters of Charity; the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul; the

Sisters of Charity Federation of the United States and Canada; the Sisters of Charity Federation in France, Germany and Austria; and the CMM Brothers. All 225 branches of the Family are being invited to join in the project.

Of those served already by the Vincentian Family, many fall within the broader definition of being homeless – those living on the streets or in shelters, refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced people, or those living in temporary settlements such as slums or favelas.

d. Some of the strategies being developed

Depaul International is already developing a series of strategies for moving forward. Below, I have listed these under five headings. As time goes on, others undoubtedly will be added.

1. Measuring and Gathering Data

- Create, with the help of the Vincentian Family Office, a global map of existing Vincentian Family projects directed at homelessness.
- Build a dynamic database which will allow us to analyze our current investment of people, time, and finances in this area and to plan how to measure the impact of the Vincentian Family's work with homeless people.

Planning

- Host a planning conference for members of the Vincentian Family working in homelessness in order to build networks, share best practices, and develop a work plan in the three areas of street homelessness, refugees, and slum dwellers.
- Name a commission of thought-leaders in homelessness from across the Vincentian Family to advise on the delivery of specified work plans.

3. Building Capacity

- Appoint an Operations Manager to oversee this project within Depaul International.
- Produce a short film, in multiple languages, showcasing best practices of the Vincentian Family in the three different aspects of homelessness.
- Create an online toolkit.
- Provide a consultancy service encouraging groups to develop new works for the homeless at an international, regional, national, or local level.
- In consultation with leaders of the Global Vincentian Family, agree on a protocol and delivery mechanism to help the Vincentian Family respond to global humanitarian crises, with a particular focus on the provision of shelter and primary services such as healthcare.
- Align the resources of the Institute of Global Homelessness to serve this Vincentian Family initiative by providing training for emerging and existing leaders, giving access to a planned Online Homelessness Hub (focusing on research and best practices) and offering invitations to issue-based (e.g., on advocacy or fundraising) and/or geographically-focused symposiums.

4. Working toward Structural Change

- Host an event at the EU to launch the homeless initiative and begin to develop lobbying capacity in this forum.
- Plan and deliver a Symposium on Street Homelessness and Catholic Social Teaching at the Vatican³⁴ to promote debate and action within faith groups and beyond.

³⁴ Until recently, for some reason, Catholic Social Teaching, which addresses so many topics, has said little explicitly about homelessness. Over the last several years, Pope Francis has addressed the question frequently when speaking about the 3 Ls: land, labor, and lodging. In 2000, the United States Catholic Conference treated the matter in “Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity.” In 2011, the same Conference published “Welcoming Christ in the Migrant.”

- In consultation with the existing Vincentian delegations at the UN, agree on a work plan in the area of global homelessness linked to concrete outcomes; e.g., measuring street homelessness as part of the Sustainable Development Goals.

5. Building a Communications Network

- Appoint a Communications Manager and develop a communications strategy.
- Create a portal within the Depaul International website (using key languages of the family) as the focal point for the project and linking this closely to the famvin website.
- Produce a quarterly newsletter.
- Produce materials for leaders of the Vincentian Family on the initiative.
- Attend global gatherings of the Vincentian Family to promote the project.
- Produce an annual report for the international leaders of the Vincentian Family.

In this context, it is important to note that over the last 20 years, the Vincentian Family has strongly emphasized Systemic Change and Collaboration. The megaproject will highlight both emphases.

Systemic change lies at the root of what Frédéric Ozanam longed for: the ability not just to offer charity to those most in need, but also to strive for justice by analyzing why people are needy and by advocating with and for them to change the systems that trap them in poverty. For more than a decade now, the Vincentian Family Commission for Systemic Change has been offering workshops throughout the world to foster a systemic-change mentality.

Collaboration is not a new concept within the Vincentian Family. It was the model that Vincent proposed from the very beginning. Throughout his lifetime, the close partnership between the

Confraternities of Charity, the Ladies of Charity, the Congregation of the Mission, and the Daughters of Charity maximized the impact that Vincent's Family had on the lives of the poor at a local, national, and international level. Recently, academics at Stanford University have begun to call this "collective impact."

An ongoing question for the Vincentian Family is this: having fostered formation in a systemic-change methodology and having encouraged collaboration, how will we move forward? How will we balance the autonomy of each branch with the solidarity that comes from being part of the Vincentian Family? The megaproject aims at uniting the energies of autonomous branches, so that they might collaborate in working toward a common goal in the service of the homeless.

III. BLENDING SYSTEMIC CHANGE AND A "CULTURE OF ENCOUNTER" IN SERVING THE HOMELESS

Over the last several years, Pope Francis has highlighted three themes that have enormous relevance for the Vincentian Family.

First, he has stated repeatedly, as Saint Vincent did, that the poor are a gift to us and that we need to let them evangelize us.³⁵ In celebrating this 400th anniversary year, it will be important for the Family to thank God for this gift and to listen to the poor well, so that, by uniting our energies, we might be able to serve them more effectively. They are – to use the phrase Saint Vincent uttered so often – "our Lords and Masters."³⁶

Secondly, Pope Francis has often emphasized the need for structural or systemic change. In his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, he underlined repeatedly how "everything in the world is connected,"³⁷

³⁵ *Evangelii Gaudium*, 198. Cf. Jubilee Audience, 22 October 2016.

³⁶ CCD:II:140; X:215, 268; XI:297, 349; XII:4; XIIIb:196.

³⁷ *Laudato Si'*, 16, 42, 51, 70, 91, 111, 117, 138, 162, 240.

a theme that the Vincentian Family Commission for Promoting Systemic Change has been stressing in all its workshops. Speaking in Bolivia in July 2015, Pope Francis made a dramatic appeal for systemic change.

There is an invisible thread joining every one of those forms of exclusion: can we recognize it? These are not isolated issues.

... let us not be afraid to say it: we want change, real change, structural change. This system is by now intolerable.

... there is a widespread sense of dissatisfaction and even despondency. Many people are hoping for a change capable of releasing them from the bondage of individualism and the despondency it spawns.³⁸

Thirdly, Pope Francis has urged contemporary society to create a “culture of encounter” and a “culture of dialogue,” in which we are prepared not only to give, but also to receive from others.³⁹ Hospitality, he says, grows from both giving and receiving.⁴⁰ He warns against the “globalization of indifference.”⁴¹

In order to serve the poor with a love that is “affective and effective,” as Saint Vincent puts it,⁴² below I offer a series of reflections. I hope that they will be helpful to those engaged in the megaproject, so that we might work together for systemic change and, at the same time, create a “culture of encounter” in our work with the homeless.

³⁸ World Meeting of Popular Movements, 10 July 2015.

³⁹ Address to Migrants, 12 September 2015.

⁴⁰ At a meeting with alumni from Jesuit schools in Europe on 17 September 2016, Pope Francis stated that “authentic hospitality is our greatest security against hateful acts of terrorism.”

⁴¹ Cf. Message for World Food Day, 16 October 2013, 2.

⁴² CCD:IX:467.

1. Listening to the homeless

Listening is the foundation of all spirituality.⁴³ If we do not listen, nothing enters our minds and hearts. The scriptures tell us that listening is crucial. “Blessed are those who hear the word of God,” Jesus says, “and act on it” (Luke 11:28). On the other hand, he bemoans, “Seeing, they did not see and hearing, they did not hear” (Mark 4:12).

My experience, I regret to say, is that, while some are good listeners, many are not. Some, unfortunately, are so filled with technical knowledge and skills, or with their own goals, that they cannot hear the voice of the person in need who is crying out for help. How many people really listen to the homeless?

Listening is essential in bringing about systemic change. The first two principles that the Commission for Promoting Systemic Change teaches are:

- a. Listen carefully and seek to understand the needs and aspirations of the poor, creating an atmosphere of respect and mutual confidence, and fostering self-esteem among the people.
- b. Involve the poor themselves, including the young and women, at all stages: identification of needs, planning, implementation, evaluation, and revision.

In his wonderful book on community, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “The first service that one owes to others in the community consists in listening to them.”

2. Seeing and serving Christ in the homeless

Following Jesus’ lead in the 25th chapter of Matthew’s gospel, Vincent continually urged his followers to see the face of Christ in the face of those in need. He said to the Daughters of Charity:

⁴³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (London: SCM Press, 1954) 75.

*You serve Jesus Christ in the person of the poor. That is as true as our being here. Ten times a day a sister will go out to visit the sick, and ten times a day she will find God there ... O my Daughters, how wonderful that is! God graciously accepts the service you render to the sick and he considers it done to himself.*⁴⁴

Using terminology resonant of Vincent's, Mother Theresa of Calcutta spoke of the real presence of Christ not just in the Eucharist, but also in the suffering.⁴⁵

Many other religious traditions have a similar emphasis, asking, "Where do we find God?" and responding, "We meet God in our needy brothers and sisters."⁴⁶

In practice, this means treating the homeless (and all those we serve) with dignity. Recently, John Rybolt has reminded us of the "white tablecloth," a charming detail that accents dignity. In the rule that Vincent wrote in 1617 for the first Confraternity of Charity in Châtillon, he stated:

Then, after preparing their dinner, they will take them, at nine o'clock, some soup and meat in a pot, some bread in a white cloth, and some wine in a bottle. They will do the same for supper around four o'clock in the afternoon. When they enter the patient's room, they will greet him or her in a friendly way; then, drawing near to the bed with a cheerful expression, they will encourage him to eat, raising the head of the bed, arranging the cover, setting up the little tray, the white tablecloth, plate, and spoon, rinsing out the glass, pouring some soup on the bread, putting the meat on a small plate, saying grace with him and

⁴⁴ CCD IX, 190-201.

⁴⁵ Along the same lines, Jon Sobrino, a noted Latin American theologian, has entitled a book *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People Down from the Cross* (Orbis Books, 1994).

⁴⁶ Jews, Christians, and Muslims all refer to Abraham as a model for hospitality. Much more could be said about hospitality and various religious traditions.

*feeding him the soup. They will cut up the meat and help him to eat it, while saying some little light-hearted, consoling word in an effort to cheer him up. They will also pour him something to drink, inviting him once again to eat. Lastly, when he has finished eating and the dishes have been washed, the tablecloth folded, and the tray removed, they will say grace with the patient, and leave him right away in order to go serve someone else.*⁴⁷

Vincent's words make it evident that "seeing and serving Christ in the homeless" entails, to use today's terminology, providing quality care that meets professional standards.

3. *Offering friendship*

Friendship lies at the heart of Jesus' relationship with his followers. He says to them, "I no longer call you servants. I call you friends."⁴⁸ The relationship of friendship is characterized by warmth, conversation, sharing, service, sacrifice, and forgiveness.

One of the principal gifts we can give others is friendship. It is integral to the spirituality of mercy that Jesus outlines in the judgment scene in Matthew 25:31-46.

In our Family, Vincent calls us to treat those we serve not as "the poor" but as persons. He asks us to treat them not as clients but as friends for whom we care deeply.

In the end, all good care is relational. We offer people not just lodging, but hospitality. We visit them in their homes. We reach out to them in friendship.

4. *Providing holistic service*

Homelessness affects the whole person, physically, psychologically, emotionally, and relationally. We have all

⁴⁷ CCD:XIIIb:40; also CCD:XIIIb:12 and 13. Cf. a brief video on the topic: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0CgJVAC7Na8>.

⁴⁸ John 15:15.

experienced how deep the wounds of the marginalized are. Many homeless people suffer the stigma of prejudice within their own country or in a foreign land. Many find themselves isolated and lonely. Some struggle with psychological or drug or alcohol problems. Some do not speak the local language well. Many have legal or medical problems. Many suffer from depression and have lost joy in life.⁴⁹

Holistic service is fundamental to systemic change. Everything is connected to everything else. When any single element in a system breaks down, everything else is affected.

5. *Serving as advocates*

Psalm 85:10 tells us that in God “Mercy and truth have met each other: justice and peace have kissed.” Mercy, truth, justice, and peace are all linked. None of these qualities is self-standing. Mercy seasons justice.⁵⁰ Peace without truth and justice cannot last. The works of mercy are only a palliative solution if the works of justice do not accompany them.

A systemic approach calls us to stand at the side of the homeless as their advocates: advocates striving to wipe out prejudice, advocates striving to win the support of governments and foundations, advocates striving to reunite them with their families and with communities which may have isolated them. Here, let me simply note that many of strategies formulated by the Vincentian Family Commission for Promoting Systemic Change coincide with the best practices formulated by organizations that are successful in advocating with and for the homelessness.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Romans 12:8 urges the caregiver, “If you do acts of mercy, (do them) with cheerfulness.”

⁵⁰ Cf. Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, Act IV, Scene 1.

⁵¹ Cf. Louise Sullivan, DC, *Vincentian Mission in Health Care* (Daughters of Charity National Health System, 1997). It is available at: http://famvin.org/wiki/Vincentian_Mission_in_Health_Care. She describes eight essential

For the homeless, of course, finding a home is a fundamental. Adequate housing is a basic human right.⁵² Pope Francis has often spoken of the “3 Ls”: land, labor, and lodging.⁵³ The 13 houses that Vincent purchased near Saint-Lazare symbolize his awareness of how important for human dignity a home is.

CONCLUSION

In 1823, John Howard Payne wrote the lyrics for a song destined for his opera, *Clari, or the Maid of Milan*. Eventually, he decided to publish the song separately, entitling it “Home! Sweet Home!” It became immensely popular, quickly selling 100,000 copies. The song contained a famous line, “Be it ever so humble, there’s no place like home.” Little by little, many other cultures assimilated Payne’s song and its sentiments.⁵⁴

attributes of the Vincentian mission in healthcare. They are quite relevant for a Vincentian Family approach toward homelessness: 1) spiritually rooted; 2) holistic; 3) integrated; 4) excellent; 5) collaborative; 6) flexible; 7) creative; 8) focused.

⁵² Cf. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, art. 25. Many other international declarations list adequate housing as one of the basic human rights.

⁵³ *Laudato Si’*, 152. Cf., also, Address at Expo Fair in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, on Thursday, 9 July 2015; Address in Nairobi, Kenya, on Friday, 27 November 2015; Address at Bachilleres College, State of Chihuahua, Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, on Wednesday, 17 February 2016.

⁵⁴ In 1827, the Swedish composer Franz Berwald quoted Payne’s song in his *Konzertstück for Bassoon and Orchestra* (middle section, marked Andante). In Italy, Gaetano Donizetti used the theme in his Opera, *Anna Bolena* (1830), Act 2, Scene 3, as part of Anna’s Mad Scene to underscore her longing for her childhood home. In England, Sir Henry Wood used it in his “Fantasia on British Sea Songs.” The French organist and composer Alexandre Guilmant used it in his “Fantasy for Organ,” Op. 43, and in the « Fantaisie sur deux mélodies anglaises. » In 1857, the Swiss composer/pianist Sigismond Thalberg wrote a series of variations for piano (op. 72) on the theme of “Home! Sweet Home!” In Japan, it became famous as “*Hanyū no Yado*” or “My Humble Cottage.” In 1909, the silent film “The House of Cards” featured it. Subsequently, it was

The English word “home” has strong emotional connotations. A “house” is a structure with walls, windows, floors, and ceilings, but a “home” is a place where we feel at ease, secure, and peaceful.⁵⁵ “House” serves as a noun and a verb, while “home” is simply a noun. We can “house” people, but we cannot “home” them. Many other languages have words or expressions for “house” and “home” with various connotations.⁵⁶

Will our worldwide Vincentian Family, working together, have a significant impact on the lives of the homeless, bringing them a sense of security, peace, and a viable future, in the 150 countries where we live and serve? That is the goal of the megaproject we are launching to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the birth of Saint Vincent’s charism.

used in many movies.

⁵⁵ Henry David Thoreau expressed this quite eloquently: “The place which you have selected for your camp, though never so rough and grim, begins at once to have its attractions, and becomes a very center of civilization to you: ‘Home is home, be it never so homely.’” Cf. Henry David Thoreau, *Canoeing in the Wilderness*, published posthumously and edited by Clifton Johnson (Houghton Mifflin, 1916) chapter 9.

⁵⁶ *Casa* and *hogar*, *Haus* and *Heimat*, *maison* and *chez moi*, *casa* and *da me*, etc. I am sure that others can add to this list and can identify various nuances better than I.

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**In our next
issue...**

**The Vincentian
Jubilee year,
400 years
of the Charism**

Cover page:

Icon of the Charism. *Divided by history, united by charity.*

The Polish artist, Mariola Zajączkowska-Bicho,
on a sketch by Father Luigi Mezzadri, CM.