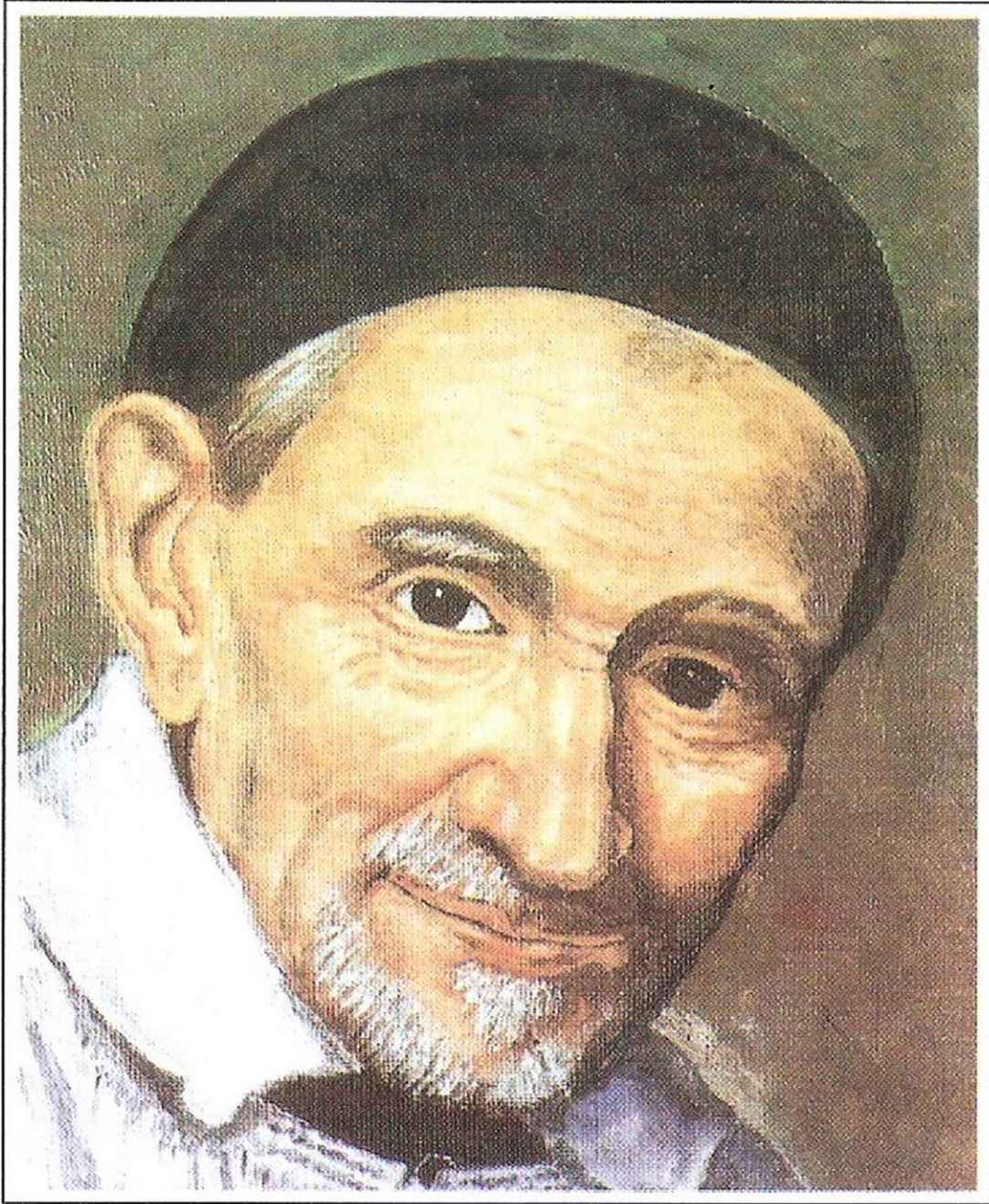


VINCENTIANA

44th YEAR, N° 2

MARCH-APRIL 2000



FEATURE:

The Challenge of Formation

CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION

GENERAL CURIA

March 7, 2000

To the members of the Vincentian Family throughout the world

Our very dear brothers and sisters,

In Rome, on February 3-5, 2000, those responsible for various branches of the Vincentian Family came together for their sixth formal meeting. The following representatives of the various groups, listed in the order of foundation, took part: for AIC (1617) — Patricia Palacios de Nava (President), Anna Rovetta, and Rosamaría Casas; for the Congregation of the Mission (1625) — Robert Maloney (Superior General) and Benjamín Romo; for the Daughters of Charity (1633) — Sr. Juana Elizondo (Superior General) and Sr. Therezinha Remonato; for the Society of St. Vincent de Paul (1833) — José Ramón Díaz Torremocha (President), Joseph Mueller, Erich Schmitz, Pierre Bonnassies and Juan Tirado; for the Religious of St. Vincent de Paul (1845) — Yvon Laroche (Superior General) and Tito Marega; for the Vincentian Marian Youth (1847) — Edurne Urdampilleta (Provisional President); for the Association of the Miraculous Medal (1905) — Charles Shelby; for MISEVI (1999) — Marcos Amador.

At the beginning of the meeting each group shared with everyone an account of its principal activities during the past year and a projection of those for the coming Jubilee year. Of particular importance during the year 2000 will be the First General Assembly of our Vincentian Marian Youth (JMV). Elected representatives from about 40 countries will come to Rome, on August 8-12, to take part. Almost immediately after that, on August 15-20, about 2500 Vincentian young people will participate in World Youth Day here in Rome. Of course, feeding them and lodging them will be an enormous undertaking!

Together, we evaluated several Vincentian Family activities in 1999. By all accounts the annual day of prayer of the Vincentian Family, held in 130 countries around the time of the feast of St. Vincent, received very positive comments. All branches take part. There has been an increasing participation of the poor. A number of countries have used this gathering as an occasion for the ongoing formation of the members. We also assessed our efforts at acting in solidarity with the poor in emergency situations (e.g., in response to natural disasters as in Turkey, Taiwan, and Venezuela, as well as in situations of violence as in Kosovo and East Timor). Through the use of Internet we have been able to disseminate information quickly, gather funds and material goods, and channel these to disaster areas. Within those areas, members of numerous branches of the family have been able to work together. We evaluated too the Jubilee 2000 Declaration on Behalf of the Poor. We found that the process of

preparing the Declaration worked smoothly thanks to the coordinating efforts of Fr. Shelby. We judged that the distribution process can still be improved.

A book on Vincentian spirituality for lay men and women is being prepared by Fr. John Prager. We envision that it will be ready this year. We discussed ways of distributing this book so that it reaches the grassroots.

Fr. Elmer Bauer, Treasurer General of the Congregation of the Mission, made a very interesting presentation about the web page of the Vincentian Family, projecting it and explaining it while online. Each group agreed to send a representative to a two-day meeting (June 30-July 1, 2000) of the persons who will be responsible for the web site of each branch.

Since this was the first meeting in which an official representative from MISEVI participated, we talked about the new International Statutes, approved on April 7, 1999, as well as about how MISEVI functions in the concrete. It provides a program for preparing lay missionaries, finding them an apostolic placement in a foreign country, as well as a community setting, offering them spiritual, moral, and financial support during their time in that country, and providing for their smooth reintegration into their home country upon their return. Several countries have recently manifested interest in setting up national MISEVI groups.

We discussed various instruments for the ongoing formation of the *asesores* (spiritual directors, animators, councillors, etc.) of our Vincentian lay groups. AIC has already published a very rich document on this theme. During the General Assembly of the JMV, a session will be held for the various *asesores* who will be accompanying the young people. In Paris in July 2002 we will hold a Vincentian Month on this theme.

We decided to establish a “virtual” commission, which will meet only by e-mail or over Internet, to help coordinate the various activities of the Vincentian Family. Each branch will name a member of this commission. Its purpose will be to exchange information, concerns, and suggestions with a view toward improving our common activities, especially the service of the poor and the formation of our members.

We discussed the possibility, for the future, of composing a book of prayer for the Vincentian Family, including prayers of St. Vincent himself, modern Vincentian prayers, Vincentian hymns, suggestions for meditating in the spirit of St. Vincent, etc.

We talked at some length about the members of our family who are teaching in continental China and about how positive their experience there has been, especially their contacts with young people. The heads of our various groups will see if members of their branches are interested in volunteering.

We spoke about various programs for the ongoing formation of the lay members of our Vincentian Family in diverse countries. The results of several of these programs have been very positive. A pilot program in Italy has met difficulties.

Besides all the matters on the agenda, we spent much time in informal discussion since we had a full three days together, sharing prayer, meals, and each other's company. The evaluation of the meeting was very positive. We set the dates for our next formal meeting which will be held on February 9-11, 2001. Actually, since there are many common activities during this Jubilee Year, we will see one another somewhat frequently in the meantime.

In our prayer during these three days, we often thought of all the members of our family. Together, we asked the Lord to strengthen the bonds that unite us, with our diverse charisms, so that we might in this Jubilee year help liberate the poor from their bonds.

Your brothers and sisters in St. Vincent,

Patricia Palacios de Nava
President , AIC (founded in 1617)

Yvon Laroche, rsv
Superior General, Religious of
St. Vincent de Paul (founded in 1845)

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.
Superior General, Congregation of the
Mission (founded in 1625)

Eduardo Urdampilleta
Provisional President, Vincentian
Marian Youth (founded in 1847)

Sr. Juana Elizondo, D.C.
Superior General, Daughters of
Charity (founded in 1633)

Charles Shelby, C.M.
Miraculous Medal Association
(founded in 1905)

José Ramón Díaz Torremocha
President, St. Vincent de Paul
Society (founded in 1833)

Marcos Amador
MISEVI (founded in 1999)

March 30, 2000

To the members of the Vincentian Family

Dear brothers and sisters,

May the grace of Our Lord be always with you.

Today, I would like to speak with you about the presence and apostolic commitment of the Vincentian Family in the Moslem world.

Moslems represent more than one billion people throughout the world. They live not only in countries traditionally called Islamic but are also a significant presence in areas with a Christian tradition. Contemporary society is increasingly multicultural and multireligious. This can be a rich experience for us, or it can pose a threat to political stability and to religious groups. The Vincentian Family is present in a large number of countries where Islam is in the majority or where it has many followers.

The Islam that we encounter is simultaneously both unified and diversified. A simple glance at a map will show its sociological and cultural diversity from Morocco to Indonesia. This diversity is also seen within Moslem societies themselves, going so far as to give rise, at times, to grave internal conflicts. In some areas, relations with other religious bodies have taken an aggressive turn. Nevertheless, the violence and intolerance experienced in too many places should not conceal from us the reality of a significant number of believers who live their religion in peace and respect for others.

This Islamic reality, which encompasses not only the religious life of individuals but the whole complex of their social life, cannot leave us indifferent. It is, in fact, one of the most important challenges for the Church and society in many countries. Could our religious communities and societies not find ways to live in peace and collaborate sincerely? Would true religious liberty not be possible in every country? Will the disciples of Christ be able to proclaim the Good News while respecting the consciences of others, and, even more, will they, in their relations with others, live what they proclaim, despite difficulties? Can they expect, at the same time, that the disciples of Mohammed will be increasingly concerned about promoting respectful, fraternal attitudes toward those who do not share their faith?

From July 26 to August 2, 1999, in Fatqa, Lebanon, about one hundred Vincentian confreres and Daughters of Charity, along with several lay members of the Vincentian Family from many countries of the world, took time to discuss these issues. Several specialists in Moslem-Christian relations joined them in their reflections. I invite you to read the texts coming from this meeting; the conferences and individual testimonies have been published in *Vincentiana* (n° 4/5 – July-October 1999).

This Vincentian meeting was the occasion both for a fruitful exchange of experiences and for reflection on the motives underlying our presence and mission among Moslems. It also evoked a greater awareness of St. Vincent's interest in the world of Islam, a world he knew personally. This interest, as many remarked, was based above all else on his sense of the universal mission of a Church that knows no boundaries and from which none can be excluded.

Our Vincentian spirituality can help us see Moslems in a new way, while realistically acknowledging the difficulties, often tragic, unfolding in certain countries. It will be useful for us to refocus on St. Vincent's way of looking at the individual person. A spirit of dialogue is part of his heritage, as well as a spirit of seeking reconciliation between individuals and among human communities. A deep attitude of humility can help us discern patiently and prudently the values that others hold, values sometimes expressed in surprising ways.

Now, as a consequence of this session, I want to encourage the Vincentian Family to move forward energetically in making contact with the followers of Islam and to witness among them to the spirit of the Gospel. I suggest that in the years ahead we engage in a deeper examination of the meaning of the Church's mission among Moslems and become involved in it more actively.

By such study and by simple presence, we can grow in knowledge of Islam and the Church's teaching about interreligious dialogue, especially as it relates to Moslems. It will also be important for us to foster a basic understanding of Islam, especially in our houses of initial formation and in our ongoing formation. The Congregation should also form some experts in Islam and interreligious dialogue.

Above all, we should make it our concern to enter into personal contact with Moslems, working with them in areas common to us, such as the service of the poor, the struggle for justice, and respect for human dignity. Through high-quality meetings, shared life experiences and common work, prejudices will be overcome, and it will become possible to open channels of mutual respect and reconciliation, and to build peace and brotherhood in the human family.

In our work among Christians living among Moslems, I hope that we can offer information and insight into how they might work toward reconciliation among groups and individuals, and that we can contribute toward strengthening the faith of those who live in rather difficult situations by helping them live in a spirit of evangelical openness.

St. Vincent told us that love is inventive. So we should look for concrete ways to go out to men and women who do not share our faith, something which has been a part of our charism from the beginning. For centuries, the Vincentian Family has had a remarkable commitment to education and culture in many countries with an Islamic tradition. I am eager that we would continue this commitment today and broaden it to

promote fraternal dialogue among all believers and people of good will, as the teaching of the Church since the Second Vatican Council invites us to do.

May St. Vincent help us to pursue his work in a spirit of universal brotherhood, and of openness to the action of the Holy Spirit in every human heart!

Your brother in St. Vincent,

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.
Superior General

Appointments and Confirmations by the Superior General

DATE	NAME	OFFICE	PROVINCE
25-01-2000	ESCOBAR Orlando	Vincentiana-Nuntia Editor	General Curia
09-02-2000	SIENĆZAK Bronisław	Visitor (2° mandate)	Poland
09-02-2000	GONZÁLEZ PRIETO, Manuel	Visitor (2° mandate)	Mexico
12-02-2000	ALEGRÍA Gregorio	Visitor (2° mandate)	Puerto Rico
18-02-2000	PEDROZA PÉREZ Jorge	Vice-Visitor	Mozambique
28-02-2000	OLIVEIRA Luiz Carlos de	Director D.C.	Amazonia
29-02-2000	GAY Gregory	Visitor	Central America
15-03-2000	CAUSSE Pierre	Director D.C.	Lyon
21-03-2000	ALVES DOS SANTOS Ari	Visitor	Fortaleza
06-04-2000	PERALTA Serafín	Director D.C.	Philippines
07-04-2000	STASIOWSKI Marcin	Director D.C.	Kraków
07-04-2000	LUBELSKI Tadeusz	Director D.C.	Chełmno-Poznan
12-04-2000	BASTIAENSEN Adrián	Director D.C.	Dominican Republic
12-04-2000	PEREZ Alain	Director D.C.	Switzerland
28-04-2000	FREIRE QUNTERO Manuel	Director D.C.	Seville
28-04-2000	DÍEZ LLAMAZARES Eblerino	Director D.C. (2° mandate)	Gijón
28-04-2000	ÁLVAREZ Sagredo, Félix	Visitor (2° mandate)	Madrid
29-04-2000	KUZHIKATTUCHALIL Michael	Director D.C.	Northern India

On The Formation of Formators
**(A study document used in the General Council to implement some of the
recommendations of the General Assembly of 1998)**

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.

Importance of This Theme

There is little need to recall the prominent place that our recent community documents have given to formation. Our Constitutions and Statutes (77-95), as well as all of the recent General Assemblies, note how crucial it is. The letter addressed to the confreres by the General Assembly of 1992 states the following:

Community renewal itself requires an integral formation, initial and ongoing, of its members. The principle of this formation is: "following Christ, the evangelizer of the poor." Therefore, we commit ourselves to an energetic program of integral formation in which each confrere will be responsible and accountable regarding formation for the mission. We also commit ourselves to preparing with care true animators of Vincentian communities.

Of course, if formation is important, then formation of the formators is essential. It is all the more imperative in provinces where the number of young candidates is large.

The General Assembly of 1998 dedicated several paragraphs to the theme "Formation of Our Own Formators":

1) Because formation is so important and decisive a means for personal and community renewal, each province should show a special concern to provide the best possible preparation for its future formators. In particular, it should work to secure adequate financial support for the integral formation of its members.

2) The provinces should have a sense of their co-responsibility for formation and be open to interprovincial cooperation by:

- a) encouraging and facilitating the mobility of their formators,*
- b) sharing their economic resources,*
- c) welcoming confreres from other provinces who need specialized training in formation.*

3) The Superior General and his council should study the possibility of creating in one or more places:

- a) an international center for the formation of our formators,*
- b) an itinerant team of formators who would offer their services to*

formators in different provinces.

These programs should train the participants in Vincentian spirituality, teaching methods, and multicultural sensitivity so they might work effectively in different parts of the world.

In the light of the document of the Assembly and many subsequent discussions in the General Council, we have decided to make the formation of our formators one of our principal objectives for the next six years.

The Present Day Situation — Three Formation Elements

Formation work has been an essential ministry of the Congregation from its inception. To continue forming our own members well, each province must select, support, and train formators who can prepare the future of the province. The confreres chosen must be integral men — not simply academically inclined, nor merely congenial, nor just spiritual. They should be whole, mature, and dedicated to the Congregation and its mission of service to the poor.

In the past, many provinces of Europe and North America, which were at that time rich in vocations, gave much attention to the formation of formators. Often this took the form of providing prospective formators with a *specific academic formation*. Many, for instance, came to Rome to obtain licentiates and doctorates in dogma, moral, canon law, scripture, Church history, philosophy, etc. Today, many of the "newer," rapidly growing provinces in Asia, Africa, and Latin America find themselves in the same position. Each year we see 20-25 confreres, many now from the southern hemisphere, residing at the Collegio Leoniano and studying at the Roman universities. Other confreres receive similar academic preparation at other centers on the various continents.

But today we are also conscious that, besides specialized preparation in an ecclesiastical field, those responsible for formation will profit greatly from formation *in formation skills*. For example, it is very helpful if they have some training in giving spiritual direction, in working with groups, in knowing some of the fundamentals of psychology, etc.

We have become increasingly aware too that, besides specific academic preparation and the acquisition of formation skills, formators for the Congregation of the Mission also need a specifically *Vincentian formation*. Participation in a CIF program can play some role in this, but further Vincentian formation for formators would surely be helpful. The principal formator need not be an expert in any particular aspect of our Vincentian heritage, since he can call upon others to help, but he should have a rich Vincentian background.

In summary, it is evident today that, if they are to be adequately prepared, formators

need, among other things:

1. specific academic formation, particularly if they are to be teachers on the level of the major seminary;
2. specific training in formation skills, so that they might be able to aid individuals and groups in their developmental process;
3. specific Vincentian formation, so that they might be equipped to transmit the rich heritage of our Congregation.

The last two types of specific formation are especially important for directors of the internal seminary and directors of students. Specific academic preparation is also necessary if a formation director is at the same time a seminary professor.

The goal of all this is that the formator might be experientially rooted in the mystery of God's love, might be deeply immersed in the charism of St. Vincent, and might become a wise guide for others on the spiritual journey.

Responsibility For Forming The Formators

In this matter, as in so many others, the primary responsibility for his own formation lies with the confrere himself. Only through his initiative, cooperation with others, and diligence, will his formation be truly rich.

Still, his province can, and indeed must, aid him significantly. He must be given the time, resources, and accompaniment that will enable him to engage actively in a formation process. A great number of provinces are quite generous in offering formation opportunities to the formators.

It goes without saying that the person chosen to be a formator should already be living the different aspects of our Vincentian life in an integrated, generous way. Programs for "forming the former" presume a mature subject.

Some Models For Forming The Formators

Below I offer three models for forming the formators. The various provinces might find one or another of these to be suitable for their purposes, depending on their widely diverse circumstances.

Each of the models that I propose contains the three formation elements described above. The models are distinguished from one another by the response to this question: Which of the three elements provides the context for the others?

1. *The academic specialization model*

This is the model which was used most frequently in the past and which is still used, to a significant extent, in the present. Following this model, a confrere is sent to study a specific academic subject, like dogmatic theology, or scripture, or canon law, and then is also asked to be the director of students. As is evident, such a confrere returns to his province with academic qualifications (though this does not always make him a good teacher) but his grasp of formation skills and his knowledge of our Vincentian heritage might be quite limited.

If this model is to work, therefore, the prospective director of the internal seminary or student director should also have the opportunity to take part in a formation institute, like those described below, where he will receive some skill-training in assisting others toward personal integration, spiritual direction, working with groups, etc.

Such a confrere should also have some opportunity for participating in a program that focuses specifically on our Vincentian heritage, as noted below.

2. *The formation skills model*

On almost all the continents there are well-established centers for forming the formators. These often have titles like "The Institute for Religious Formation" or "The Interdisciplinary Center for Seminary Formators." Such programs commonly offer courses in spiritual direction, teaching others to pray, psycho-spiritual integration, the psychology of young people, religious life today, priestly spirituality, discernment, working with groups, and sexual integration. Sometimes these programs have varying emphases. Some focus more on the scriptural background and history of Christian spirituality. Others focus more on formation tools and psycho-sexual development. As is evident, such programs do not concentrate on the particular charism of any individual institute since members of various institutes come to participate in them. They may, however, be influenced by the spirituality or tradition of the institute that sponsors the program (some, for instance, emphasize Ignatian discernment, etc.).

These programs vary in length. The Rulla Institute sponsored at the Gregorian University in Rome, for instance, lasts for three or four years; the same university also offers an annual four-month program for formators. The Institute of Religious Formation at St. Louis University in the United States is basically a one-year program. The Institute for the Formation of Educators of the Clergy (IFEC), organized by the French bishops in collaboration with the Sulpicians, offers a year-long program for the formation of formators and for new spiritual directors. The Institut Catholique in Paris offers a two-year program. The Salesianum in Rome offers a program of similar length, as does the Teresianum. There are comparable institutes in Ireland, Peru, Colombia, etc.

Programs like these are very helpful to future directors of the internal seminary and

directors of students since so much of their ministry will consist in assisting others in personal formation.

If a prospective formator were to engage in such a program for one or two years, then it would also be very useful if he were to supplement this specific type of formation (in formation skills) with further formation in our Vincentian heritage. Participation in a session of CIF in Paris would be of help in this regard, at least as a starter.

Naturally, if a confrere engaging in a program emphasizing formation skills will also be a teacher on the major seminary level he will need some specific academic formation. This can be obtained in any number of centers on all the continents.

3. *The Vincentian heritage model*

As noted by the General Assembly of 1998 this is an area of weakness within the Congregation since, other than CIF, there are at present no "international centers" for doing studies in our Vincentian heritage. Such studies would be of great help to directors of the internal seminary and directors of students. Could we think creatively about some way in which a confrere could engage in a concentrated one-year program that would sharpen his knowledge of and focus on our Vincentian heritage? At a *tempo forte* session of the General Council on March 15-19, 1999, we approved a number of proposals which we hope will be helpful in this regard. These are explained in the next section of this article.

If a focus on Vincentian heritage is the primary element in an overall program for forming a particular director, then it will also be good for him to supplement this with a program that would furnish him with formation skills, particularly something that would help with the theory and practice of spiritual direction, the psychology of young people, teaching others to pray, etc. The courses mentioned above in the second model might be helpful.

As also mentioned above, if a particular director of the internal seminary or student director is also asked to be a teacher in the major seminary, then it will be necessary for him to have some specific academic preparation.

In Search of Better "Formation of The Formators" — Some decisions made in the General Council of March 15-19, 1999

Since there already exist, on the various continents, many institutes that provide academic formation and preparation in formation skills, we judged, in the General Council, that our own particular responsibility lies in providing programs for the specifically Vincentian formation of our formators.

For discussion purposes, we found it helpful to distinguish five realities:

A. *CIF*

The International Formation Center: St. Vincent de Paul (CIF) is already providing a very valuable service in regard to specifically Vincentian formation. "The Vincentian Ongoing Formation Program" at the Center is open to all confreres between the ages of 35 and 50 and can be very useful in providing a basic foundation for those who will be forming our own. More than 200 members of the Congregation have participated in the program and have evaluated it most positively. Following the outline of our Constitutions and Statutes, this program provides a time of study and reflection on the purpose and nature of the Congregation, its apostolic life, community life, prayer, vows, etc. Recently we have received a number of proposals to provide a shorter program for confreres over the age of 50 which would also focus on our Vincentian heritage. After much dialogue with the CIF team in Paris, we decided on March 18 to sponsor three one-month programs for this age group in 2000-2001, one in English, one in French, and one in Spanish (sessions for other language groups may follow).

B. *An "International Institute for Specialists in Vincentian Studies"*

It is very important that the Congregation have some specialists in our Vincentian history and heritage (a role fulfilled in the past and present by confreres like André Dodin, Raymond Chalumeau, José María Román, Luigi Mezzadri, and John Rybolt).

In order to meet this objective, we examined a concrete hypothesis:

1. An "International Institute for Specialized Vincentian Studies" would be centered in Paris.
2. Its duration would depend on the background and objectives of the participant, but one year would be minimal.
3. Presuming that the number of participants will be small, any number would be acceptable. In other words, the program would be offered if there is one confrere focusing on advanced Vincentian studies, as well as if there were five.
4. The method would be guided research. A mentor would meet regularly with the confrere-students. The confrere-students would do the rest of the work on their own.
5. A mentor would be assigned in collaboration with the CIF team and the participant, and a contract would be designed.
6. Before beginning, a detailed syllabus for a one-year program would be drawn up. Much would depend on the confrere-student's previous training.

7. The costs would be handled as with the present CIF program. These would entail mainly room and board in Paris, plus some other expenses. Scholarships could be sought.
8. The program would be offered to all the Visitors, who could send interested confreres to take part.

This hypothesis was approved. The concrete program is now being designed in dialogue with the CIF team and will be offered soon.

C. *Regional Centers for the formation of formators*

On March 18, we also decided to ask CLAPVI, ASPAC, and COVIAM to organize regional centers for the specifically Vincentian formation of our own formators.

How might one envision the structure of such "centers"? That would be up to the Visitors' Conferences. But, as a possible model, one might foresee something like this:

- a. All the formators (present and prospective) of that particular region would gather once a year,
- b. during the summer (i.e., the time of the long vacation in the northern or southern hemisphere),
- c. for two or three weeks.
- d. Someone (or a committee) would be responsible for organizing the program of Vincentian formation over that period of time. This program would involve: 1) study, 2) sharing of experiences and concerns as formators, 3) their community life and prayer together during that period.
- e. This program would be offered every summer, but the topics treated and the concerns discussed would change each summer so that the same formators could participate in an ongoing way in these sessions (as, for example, the topics change every year for the Salamanca Week in Spain).

Since the circumstances for the Visitors' Conferences in North America and in Europe (CEVIM) are so different, we decided to consult further with the Visitors of those regions in order to determine what formula they would recommend for improving the formation of their formators.

D. *The use of Internet in aiding our formators*

On March 18 we also decided to ask SIEV, beginning in September 1999, to guarantee the posting of an article once very two weeks on our web page in three languages (if possible), for the use of formators. The use of the WWW and our page in the service of formation suggests many possibilities which have yet to be explored.

E. *A Vincentian Month for the formation of those who offer formative assistance to the various groups in our Vincentian Family*

On March 18 we decided to co-sponsor, along with the Daughters of Charity, a Vincentian Month in the year 2002 for the "asesores nacionales" (spiritual directors, councillors, chaplains) of the various Vincentian lay groups (AIC, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, the Vincentian Marian Youth Groups). The participants will be Vincentians, Daughters of Charity, and lay spiritual advisors.

I often look back with much affection and gratitude on all those confreres who helped me prepare for ministry in the Congregation. They were very dedicated and, using the methods of their time, made a significant impact on me. Are there any among us who cannot say much the same about the confreres who were our formators? As we look to the future, our responsibility is clear: we must make a concerted effort to continue to provide our students with good formators.

Being a Vincentian, Being a Formator

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.

Our Constitutions define the purpose of the Congregation of the Mission not as a particular concrete work, such as giving popular missions, or staffing seminaries, or laboring in missions *ad gentes*, but as a way, a pilgrimage, a journey: the following of Christ as the Evangelizer of the Poor. Our lives, both as individuals and as a corporate body, should have that guiding purpose. This purpose, the first article of the Constitutions adds, has three *realizations*; that is to say, the Congregation is fully alive when its members:

- 1° *make every effort to put on the spirit of Christ himself (CR I, 3) in order to acquire a holiness appropriate to their vocation (CR XII, 13);*
- 2° *work at evangelizing the poor, especially the more abandoned;*
- 3° help the clergy and laity in their formation and lead them to a fuller participation in the evangelizing of the poor.

In the past I have written about each of these realizations of the purpose of the Congregation. In this article I offer some further reflections on the third. Following a methodology I have often employed, I will proceed as follows:

- I. Formation in the life and writings of St. Vincent
- II. The changing context and some challenging contemporary calls
- III. The Vincentian today as formator

I. Formation in The Life And Writings of St. Vincent

Historians have often highlighted St. Vincent's organizational skills. He did not, however, merely organize; he *formed* the groups and persons that he assembled. In fact, the letters, documents, and conferences in the fourteen volumes of his extant works are, for the most part, aimed at the formation of those whom Vincent had gathered together in the service of the poor.

Below, I list, with a few brief comments, some of his principal formational activities.[fo1]

- * The sons of Monsieur Comet

In 1595, Vincent went to Dax to study at the Collège des Cordeliers. While studying reading, writing, grammar, and Latin in preparation for beginning his studies in theology, he caught the attention of Monsieur de Comet, a lawyer at the Presidial Court in Dax, who invited Vincent into his home as a tutor for his children. Thus, at the remarkably young age of 14 or 15, Vincent began, in a sense, his career as a teacher and formator.

* The Academy in Buzet

Two years later he went to Toulouse to begin his studies in theology, remaining there for seven years. When his finances ran low, he took up teaching in a small academy for boys in Buzet, a village about 21 miles from Toulouse. He earned the reputation of being an excellent teacher and because of his popularity was able to transfer the school to Toulouse itself where he continued to instruct boys until he finished his studies.

* Clichy

During his 16 months as pastor at Clichy, in 1612-13, Vincent became very aware of the need to offer more adequate training to candidates for the priesthood. He opened a school where he began to form a dozen youngsters who wanted to become priests. Among these was his future faithful companion, Antoine Portail. At this early date, Vincent's interest in the formation of the clergy is already evident.

* The De Gondi household

Around 1613 the De Gondis hired Vincent as the tutor for their son Pierre. Vincent had full responsibility for his intellectual, moral, and religious formation. He was also in charge of the household staff and gave them religious instruction. In addition, he taught catechism and evangelized the peasant farmers on the De Gondi estates. At the same time, he became spiritual director of Madame De Gondi. In a sermon, given probably in this period, he spoke of the "infinite usefulness"[fo2] of the catechism in forming others.

* Folleville

We all know the story of the bedside conversion of a peasant in 1617 that had such an influence on Vincent's future. Vincent always regarded the sermon he gave the next day, January 25, 1617, as the first sermon of the mission. What is important to note in this context is that the popular missions preached by Vincent and his newly founded community were a *formative* experience. Catechesis, or basic Christian instruction, played a very significant role in the course of all the popular missions. In fact, late in his life, Vincent wrote to a Priest of the Mission: "I have been deeply saddened by the fact that, instead of giving the regular catechism instruction in the evening, you have given sermons during your mission. This should not be done: (1) because the person who preaches in the morning might have difficulty with that second sermon; (2) because the people have greater need of this catechetical instruction and derive greater profit from it; (3) because, in giving this catechetical

instruction, it seems there is, in a certain sense, greater reason to honor the manner Our Lord Jesus Christ used to teach and to convert the world; (4) because it is our custom, and Our Lord has been pleased to bestow immense blessings on this exercise, which offers a greater means to practice humility." [fo3]

Vincent insisted that there be two catechetical sessions each day during the missions, one around midday ("le petit catéchisme") and another in the evening ("le grand catéchisme").[fo4]

* Châtillon-les-Dombes

Later in 1617, Bérulle asked Vincent to accept the parish in Châtillon because the negligence and scandalous lives of the local clergy were paving the way for conversions to Protestantism. Seeing the poverty of the local people, Vincent formed the first group of Ladies of Charity. Many other groups followed. Throughout his life Vincent accompanied these groups as their principal formator, writing rules for them[fo5] and addressing them individually or communally on numerous occasions.

* The Visitation Nuns

Shortly before his death, Francis de Sales asked Vincent to take over the direction of the Visitation nuns. From 1622 on, he gave regular conferences at their monastery and was one of the principal counselors of Jane Frances de Chantal. Unfortunately, we have no copies of Vincent's talks to the Visitation nuns.

* The Congregation of the Mission

Vincent also gave regular conferences to the members of the Congregation of the Mission. These were one of the principal means for the ongoing formation of the community from its foundation in 1625 until Vincent's death in 1660. They have become, along with the Common Rules he composed, one of the principal sources for the heritage of the Congregation through the centuries.

* The Daughters of Charity

From 1633 on, Vincent also gave frequent conferences to the Daughters as part of their formation. Many of these were transcribed in one way or another. They form one of the principal fonts for understanding the life, mission, and spirituality of the community. The principal elements in the Common Rules of the Daughters also come from Vincent's pen, though they were finally edited, approved, and published by his successor, René Alméras, in 1672. Vincent often talked to the Daughters of Charity about the need to teach the catechism. [fo6] He encouraged them to open schools for poor girls. Numerous such "little schools" were opened in France during his and Louise's lifetimes, [fo7] as well as one in Poland.

* The formation of the diocesan clergy

I have written elsewhere at length on this subject. [fo8] Vincent's work for the reform of the clergy included retreats for ordinands, the Tuesday Conferences, retreats for priests, and seminaries. His influence on diocesan priests and on future bishops in France was enormous. He founded 20 seminaries. He took part in the Council of Conscience for a decade, advising the king on the selection of bishops. Many of the great spiritual leaders of the time took part in the Tuesday Conferences which he organized. Abelly states that more than 12,000 ordinands made their retreats at St. Lazare during Vincent's lifetime. Numerous others made post-ordination retreats there and in other houses of the Congregation.

* Spiritual Direction

Above, I mentioned Madame De Gondi and Jane Frances de Chantal. One must immediately add, of course, Louise de Marillac. There were many others. A large number of Vincent's letters are, basically, spiritual direction for his priests, brothers, sisters, and friends.

II. The Changing Context And Some Challenging Contemporary Calls

Much has changed since St. Vincent's time, but the call for help in formation is as persistent today as it was in his day. If anything, it is even more so. Here in Rome in recent years I have heard no call more frequently. These appeals have their own contemporary flavor. Significant modern day factors have given them a new context and content.

1. The expanding Church in Asia, Africa, and Latin America

During the pontificate of Paul VI, the face of the Church changed significantly. For the first time, she found the majority of her members living in the southern hemisphere. At the dawn of the third millennium, the areas of her most rapid growth are in Asia, Africa and Latin America. This is what Walbert Buhlmann calls "the coming of the third Church." [fo9] It is really only in the 20th century, as Karl Rahner often pointed out, that the Catholic Church is a "world-Church." [fo10] Most religious communities experience this change dramatically. Vocations are sparse in the United States and Western Europe, where formerly they had been plentiful. They are numerous in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, where formerly they had been small in number.

The many letters that cross my desk include numerous appeals from the southern hemisphere for help in formation. Bishops and provincial superiors write that, even more than lacking financial resources, they lack well-trained, mature personnel for forming their many candidates. Sometimes they plea eloquently: "If you could only help us for five to ten years, while we form our formators, the future will be well prepared!"

2. Crises among the clergy in the "old" Churches

Many Congregations and dioceses in the northern hemisphere experienced a period of robust growth in vocations in the middle years of the 20th century. Numbers began to decline in the mid-60's and, some attest, are leveling out at present. In many of our provinces priests and brothers are not only fewer in number today than they were in the 60's, but also significantly older. On the positive side, the phenomenon of diminishing vocations to the priesthood and brotherhood has been accompanied by the emerging role of the laity in the Church. On the negative side, the personal impact on confreres has been heavy and at times discouraging. They may legitimately feel: "There are fewer of us, our median age is much higher, and there is even more to do!"

With the diminishing number of candidates for the priesthood, many seminaries closed. Entire seminary faculties were dispersed, sometimes without sufficient planning for how their gifts might best be used. Some felt themselves discarded, disillusioned.

On top of that, there have been scandals. Newspaper headlines have told, sometimes in great detail, the sad stories of priests involved in pedophilia and of bishops hiding a mistress or a child. In some countries, journals express fears about the number of "gays" entering dioceses and communities today.

As is evident, discouragement and concerns revolving around sexuality and celibacy - as well as around other issues like simplicity of life within a consumer society - provide huge challenges not only for initial formation today, but also for ongoing formation.

As a Congregation with a long and rich heritage in the formation of the clergy, the contemporary situation presents us with a formidable challenge.

3. A renewed interest in the "Vincentian Family"

Over the last five years the many groups that share in the charism of Vincent de Paul have become increasingly conscious of being members of a "family." From the international to the local level, we have begun to meet much more frequently, to collaborate in projects among the poor, to pray with one another, and to discuss others ways in which we can be more closely united, while preserving the distinctive characteristics of each group. In this context, the call for mutual assistance in formation has rung out loud and clear. The Vincentian General Assembly of 1998 addressed this issue specifically, asking each province or group of provinces to respond to the many appeals from the different branches of the Vincentian Family for assistance in formation. The Assembly spoke of collaborating in the initial and ongoing formation of members of the wider family, of offering them spiritual assistance, of establishing a formation team that would focus on common elements in the formation of the members of our various groups and would promote gatherings for deepening Vincentian spirituality and strengthening a sense of family. It also encouraged us to open our existing ongoing formation programs to other members of the family, when this is possible. [fo11]

At the meeting in January 1999 the heads of some of the principal branches of the Vincentian

Family spoke of a number of formation projects:

- a. a book that would articulate the foundation stones of Vincentian spirituality as lived out by lay men and women and would concretize these from the experience of the laity;
- b. the use of Internet as a formation tool;
- c. a document prepared by AIC for the spiritual advisors of their groups, one of whose principal roles is formation;
- d. a pilot project undertaken by the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in Italy for the Vincentian formation of lay leaders.

Few calls are as loud as the call for formation coming from the various branches of our family: AIC, the Daughters of Charity, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, the youth groups, the Miraculous Medal Association, and many others.

4. The rapid growth of the Vincentian Marian Youth groups

These groups now number about 200,000 members in 40 countries. The spread of the groups in recent years has been striking. On February 2, 1999, the Holy See approved the first set of International Statutes for the JMV. In August of 2000, in Rome, they will hold their first General Assembly, with delegates coming from all the continents.

In some countries, such as Spain, these groups have a very well developed formation program. Other countries are struggling to create one. But on all sides, the call for formation is eloquent.

One of the offshoots of the JMV has been MISEVI, whose International Statutes were approved by the Holy See on April 7, 1999. MISEVI prepares lay Vincentian missionaries for work in the missions *ad gentes*. It offers them formation, an apostolic placement, a community setting, spiritual and material support, and assistance in reinsertion into their homeland upon their return from the mission. As is evident, the initial and ongoing formation of its members is a new and considerable challenge.

5. Changes in methodology

Today we emphasize a new methodology that is adapted to the person of the oppressed,

[fo12] where the educator and those being educated learn mutually, where teachers not only evangelize but are evangelized by the poor. Contemporary documents note that persons must not only be the *objects* of formation, they must be *subjects* within the formation process.

Today too we speak of the need to assist the poor in "self-promotion." The *Final Document* from the recent General Assembly of Delegates for AIC, held in Querétaro, Mexico, November 17-23, 1998, speaks of assisting others "to become multiplying agents" of actions aimed at transforming social structures.

Finally, papal documents in recent years have continually highlighted the need for inculturation. A deepened understanding of anthropology and of the values and disvalues within the various cultures that interface with the gospels allows Christianity not only to purify cultures by performing its prophetic role in denouncing the evil that has roots therein, but also to be enriched by cultures, finding new ways in which genuine human and Christian values can be expressed.

III. The Vincentian as Formator - Ten Characteristics

When we look at the life and works of St. Vincent and at the recent documents of the Congregation, it is evident that being a formator is not incidental to our vocation; rather, it is very much at its heart. That is why our Constitutions place formation work right in the very first paragraph, which describes the purpose of the Congregation of the Mission: "This purpose is realized when the members, individually and communally, ... 3E help the clergy and laity in their formation and lead them to a fuller participation in the evangelizing of the poor." In writing this paragraph the members of the General Assembly of 1980 were quite aware that they were expanding the statement of purpose which St. Vincent had written in the Common Rules in 1658: "... 3E to help seminarians and priests to grow in knowledge and virtue, so that they can be effective in their ministry." In the wake of Vatican II, with a heightened consciousness of the mission of the laity and of the need for developing a variety of lay ministries, the Assembly saw this new statement of our purpose as an organic development of St. Vincent's original founding insight. He himself had wanted to gather young and old, rich and poor, clergy and laity, men and women "to lead them to a fuller participation in the evangelization of the poor."

Reflecting on the Vincentian as formator, one might be tempted to focus only on two themes: our role in the formation of the diocesan clergy and our role in the formation of our own candidates. Both these works are extremely important. St. Vincent saw formation of the diocesan clergy as crucial for the reform of the Church and for the ongoing evangelization of the poor, especially in rural areas. He saw the second, formation of our own, as indispensable

if the Company is to be fully alive. But it is not only those who engage in those two works who are formators; our Constitutions call *all* Vincentians to be formators as a realization of the purpose of the Congregation.

Notice that the motivation of our Constitutions is very clear: "to lead them to a fuller participation in the evangelization of the poor." One of our goals as formators, therefore, is to mobilize the huge energies of this enormous family, with its millions of members. The Lord calls us to be an army, so to speak, in the service of the poor, battling to break down the structures that oppress them, offering them relief in their present distress and seeking with them to eradicate the causes of their poverty.

If we are to prepare all Vincentians to be *formators*, this will make new demands on our own programs of initial and ongoing formation and also on other works. Looking to the future, one hopes that our own Vincentian seminarians will learn to catechize and preach well, skills necessary not only for the work of the mission, but also for formation ministry. One hopes that the seminaries we sponsor for the training of diocesan clergy will help them acquire the skills needed for re-evangelization, which is so necessary in so many dioceses. One hopes to form priests who, as "Vincentian alumni," will be able to animate truly missionary parishes where an evangelizing and catechetical process is ongoing and where outreach to the poorest of the poor is an integral part of the preaching of the gospel. One hopes that we will sponsor pastoral institutes or centers for lay formation that train lay men and women to become "multiplying agents" of their faith, hope, and charity. One hopes that our Vincentian Family's schools and universities, which train more than a half million students, will be places where the poor will always find a seat, where there are outreach programs to the most abandoned in the local community, and where the social teaching of the Church is an important part of the curriculum. One hopes too that our family will continue to sponsor health-care and social institutions like hospitals, clinics, rehabilitation centers, and centers for the basic formation of women and children (offering formation in nutrition, reading, home care).

Let me suggest ten characteristics of the Vincentian as formator. Today, "to help the clergy and laity in their formation and lead them to a fuller participation in evangelizing the poor," the Vincentian, as formator, must be:

1. *Deeply rooted in the person of Jesus*

This seems so obvious, but there is nothing more important. In our context, all formation leads toward "putting on the Lord Jesus Christ." [fo13] The formator must not simply know *about* Christ; he must have personal experience of the Lord himself. It is only the person who is genuinely filled with the Spirit of the Lord who is able to communicate that Spirit to others.

2. Fully immersed in the Vincentian charism

St. Vincent has given us a wonderful gift. Our charism remains strikingly relevant today as the forms of poverty multiply and the gap between the rich and the poor grows continually wider. The formator must know Vincent himself, the history of the Congregation, our spirituality, our mission, our foundational works, our concrete and effective love for the poor. It is these elements especially that the formation process aims at transmitting to future servants of the poor.

3. In contact with the world of the poor

If we are to form others and lead them to a fuller participation in evangelizing the poor, we must ourselves know the poor and their world. The good formator has reaped before he sows, he has been evangelized by the poor. He has experiential knowledge of the most abandoned. He has heard their stories and been shaped by them. His personal experience of the Lord is not an abstract one; rather, he knows Christ especially as he reveals himself in the person of the poor.

These first three characteristics might seem immediately evident, but they are too important to be presupposed. The formator must know Christ. He must know Vincent. He must know the poor.

4. Capable of being a guide on the spiritual journey

Not everyone who makes the spiritual journey is a good guide. A guide needs experience and training to sharpen his natural gifts. He knows the paths wayfarers tread in the course of the journey: the high roads, the low roads, the pitfalls, the traps. Good guides have fallen and risen many times. They know how to reanimate those who are discouraged and to temper with experienced counsel the impatience of the overzealous. The best guides walk *with* those they are forming, at times quickening the pace, at times slowing it down, at times pausing for rest.

5. A good listener

St. Vincent would be quick to say that every formator must be humble. Is there any virtue about which he talked more frequently? The wise formator reaps before he sows. He listens to his students' needs. He allows himself to be evangelized and changed by them.

Many a good formator has found himself saying: "I think I got more out of teaching this course than my students did!" One hopes that both students and formators are mutually transformed in the process.

6. A good communicator, skilled in using contemporary means for engaging others in the formation process

After listening, the formator must also speak. His language, however, need not be exclusively verbal, especially today. In a visual age, it is very important that the formator use modern means of communication. Such means engage the various senses of the students and draw them more fully into the learning process. Today films, music, computer presentations, and a variety of other audio-visual aids are ready at hand for the formator.

Pedagogy is both a science and an art. It is crucial that we engage the students themselves in the learning process so that they become active agents in their own formation. They themselves, after all, have the primary responsibility for their own formation. One hopes that they become "multiplying agents," able to pass on to others the gifts that they have received. In order to achieve these goals, the good formator must know how to work not just with individuals, but with groups. He must be able to stimulate the students to help one another in the formation process.

7. Knowledgeable about the social teaching of the Church

Recently I wrote at length on this subject. [fo15] While the Church has proclaimed her social teaching eloquently for more than 100 years, it remains largely unknown for many, even most, believers. This social teaching has particular importance for our Vincentian Family, since it focuses especially on the most needy. In fact, it is the foundation for the Church's "preferential option for the poor." I suggest that all Vincentian formation programs should impart a healthy dose of this teaching. It should be well-packaged, so that students can learn it and then transmit it to others.

8. In dialogue with the life of his students and with lay life

Every teacher should know his audience. The Vincentian formator relates with many varied groups: priests, brothers, sisters, lay men and women. Since there are millions of members in our lay groups, it is imperative that we have a concrete sense of their daily lives. This requires much dialogue. Since so much of our heritage has been formulated within the community circles of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity, we face the challenge today of translating what St. Vincent said into contemporary language and applying it to lay men and women, married and single, living in their own homes, often with

their own families, and working in the "marketplace."

9. In touch with the various groups in our Vincentian Family

These groups have a common heritage but at the same time distinctive charisms. It is important that we appreciate both the common and the distinctive elements within our family tradition. We have a long healthy history in this regard with much cooperation among the members of the Congregation of the Mission, the Daughters of Charity, AIC (formerly the Ladies of Charity), the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, the Miraculous Medal Association, the Vincentian Marian Youth groups and, most recently, MISEVI. Besides these, many other groups share in our tradition. In recent years we have had increasing contact with the Religious of St. Vincent de Paul, the Federation of Sisters of Charity in France, Germany, Austria, Italy, and India, the Charity Federation in the United States, and numerous others.

10. Truly missionary

The true missionary has a global point of view. He knows that beyond the surrounding mountains lie other towns and villages where the gospel must be preached. He knows, as he views the ocean, that its waves break on other continents, on other shores, where the poor also live and labor. St. Vincent himself, in an age where travel was difficult and communication was limited, looked beyond France both to the East and the West and to the North and the South. By the time of his death, his family was already quite international. Today, with rapid transportation and almost instantaneous communication, it is even more imperative that our formation process draws us toward a global vision. Even as I write, it is heartening to see how quickly members of our family in distant countries are responding to the crisis in Kosovo.

St. Vincent was a wonderful formator. People gathered around him eagerly and were captivated by the vision he communicated. My hope is that we, his followers, can revitalize the formation ministry that he has handed on to us. One might describe being a Vincentian in many ways. Being a Vincentian means following Christ the Evangelizer of the poor. It means being a missionary. It means living in simplicity, humility, meekness, mortification, and zeal.

The thesis of this article is that being a Vincentian also means being a formator. Besides our own ministry in preaching the gospel to the abandoned, we are called to "help the clergy and laity in their formation and lead them to a fuller participation in the evangelization of the poor."

The Structure of Vincentian Studies and Animation

*Emeric Amyot d'Inville, C.M.
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The 1980 General Assembly had requested "*that each Province, or group of Provinces, should have an its own organisation for the promotion of basic studies and their propagation (St. Vincent, St. Louise, the History of the Congregation, etc.). An organisation on the international level will have as its objective the coordination of these efforts and the dissemination of the results.*" There is, at the moment, a great riches at this level in the Congregation, but it is rather poorly recognised and, frequently, each organisation works independently, without involvement in a sustained contact with the others.

In an effort to improve the situation, SIEV has contacted the various Visitors to find out and come to a better understanding of all the organisations of Vincentian Studies and animation in the Congregation. The structures referred to have been indicated to us in answer to a questionnaire prepared by us. In the following pages we give a brief presentation of each of these organisations concluding with SIEV itself, so that everybody can be informed of what is available at this level of study, and the existing possibilities.

We also hope that, once they have succeeded in becoming mutually better informed, all the organisations will, beyond the differences of language and culture, find a means of rich collaboration in the future. We hope, besides, that this exchange of information about the aims and realities of the groups will stimulate the creativity of each on in this field for a better service to the Congregation and to the whole Vincentian Family.

Herewith the structures researched and described in these pages.

1. CLAPVI. Latin American Conference of Vincentian Provinces .
2. CEVCO. Commission of Vincentian Studies of Colombia.
3. CAVI. Vincentian Animation Centre (Peru).
4. CAVIM. Vincentian Animation and Missionary Centre (Chile).
5. VSI. Vincentian Studies Institute (USA).
6. MEGVIS. Central European Vincentian Studies Group.
7. GRAV. Research and Vincentian Animation Group (France).
8. Gav. Vincentian Animation Group (Italy).
9. Vincentian Studies Week (Salamanca)
10. SIEV. International Secretariat for Vincentian Studies.

It should be understood that the list does not include the centres or sessions of ongoing formation such as "CIF" which, of course, provide an excellent work of formation, but are not quite what we are dealing with in the present instance. They might be the object of a future disquisition. We have, however, included the "Salamanca Study Weeks," mainly because of their importance as a source of bibliography.

I. CLAPVI

Latin American Conference of Vincentian Provinces.

- 1. Address.** Carrera 30A, No. 24-81; Barrio Gran America; Santafé de Bogotá; Colombia.
- 2. Description.** Founded on 24 September 1971, it offers a permanent service of orientation and coordination of Vincentian studies and activities. It provides for those affiliated to it solutions of their common problems, mutual help, and reinforcement of Vincentian unity and fraternity. CLAPVI is made up of provincials, vice-provincials and delegate members working in Latin America.
- 3. Objectives.** The general objective is to actualise the charism of St. Vincent in all our activities in the historic context of the present time in Latin America. The specific objectives leading to the above are:
 - a) interior renewal of all members,
 - b) bringing our apostolic activities into harmony with the ends of the Congregation as defined in our Constitutions and Statutes,
 - c) pursuit of common strands of formation and action,
 - d) exchange of experiences in the various sectors of our pastoral activity, vocational work and in our formation,
 - e) defining the common criteria governing the interpretation and application of the regulations of the Church and General Curia in the context of the Latin America situation,
 - f) creation of a communitarian consciousness of the Latin American scene,
 - g) developing inter-provincial collaboration,
 - h) promoting contacts between provinces, to which other Communities and Lay Associations could be invited.
- 4. Membership.** Full members are those incorporated members of provinces, vice-provinces and the "delegates" mentioned above. "Represented" members are the Visitors and Vice-Visitors of Latin American origin, plus the members of the Community who represent the delegates or their substitutes, as well as the Executive Secretary of the Conference; besides these, whenever the General Assembly of CLAPVI coincides with the General Assembly of the Congregation, the Latin

American Delegates of the latter, qualify as participants with the right to contribute and vote.

CLAPVI is administered, on the one hand, by its *own General Assembly*, which convenes ordinarily every three years, or when matters of great import so demand and, on the other hand, by the *Executive Council* which meets once in between the ordinary General Assembly.

5. Activities. Between 1974 and 1979, six interprovincial sessions of spiritual renewal were organised, each of between four and six weeks duration. Since 1980, there were 22 interprovincial meetings lasting ten days, open in general to the whole Vincentian Family. These took place in different areas of Latin America. In all cases, there was a deepening of our appreciation of doctrine, while real brotherly contact was also the goal. In the meeting in Mexico (1994) there was an additional period of ten days devoted to missionary work in two parishes comprising 45 different locations. In these missions, 80 members of the Vincentian Family took part.

6. Publication. The periodical *CLAPVI* first launched in 1973, has reached its 99th edition. Its content is ecclesiastical, Vincentian, and Latin American, aiming at the unity of the Congregation among the Latin American Provinces. The editor of this publication is the Executive Secretary of CLAPVI, always working in harmony with the Executive Council and relying on the participation of the General Curia and the Latin American Provinces.

II. CEVCO

Commission of Vincentian Studies of Colombia

1. Address. Seminario Mayor Villa Paúl; Calle 15 No. 19A-96; Funza (Cundinamarca); Colombia.

2. Description. This organisation, which has had many different names and titles down through the years, was founded in 1977. It consists of a group of CM of Colombia, whose object is a deeper study of the personality, writings and spirituality of St. Vincent, with a view also of spreading information about their findings.

3. Objectives. It proposes:

- a) a study of St. Vincent and his historical influence in the light of the reality of the present era, and of the Magisterium of the Church, this being the appropriate manner of imbuing us with his spirit (cf., C 50),
- b) to help the promotion of our apostolic mission in the province on the basis of our charism and in union with the Visitors,
- c) pass on the results of our investigations to the Vincentian Family, and even beyond.

4. Membership. First the Visitor, the main source of animation in the province, secondly those members of the Province of Colombia who will have sought in writing to be accepted and wish to participate in the Commission. At the moment, there are 10 members.

5. Activities.

- a) work on projects (long- and short-term) geared towards the achievement of our objectives, b) a yearly meeting aimed at divulging the results of our labours,
- c) to publish the results of our studies and take responsibility for the addition of "Cuadernos Vicentinos," or in the collection called "CVI,"
- d) at stated times, to promote the work of Congresses and Meetings with the object of spreading the Vincentian charism.

A Congress is a gathering of representatives of the Vincentian Family to seek, together and in the light of St Vincent, those doctrinal criteria which promote the apostolate by means of our experiences and tightening of paternal links.

A Meeting is a gathering of confreres and Daughters of Charity for studying and deepening of views on specific subjects, especially those of common interest.

The organising of these gatherings takes place in a rotating fashion _ first year, study in CEVCO, second year, the Congress, and third year, the Meeting.

III. CAVI

Vincentian Animation Centre, Peru.

1. Address. Jr. Martir Olaya No. 280; Apartado 18-0466; Lima 18; Peru.

2. Description. CAVI was set up in 1988 by the Visitor of the Province of Peru and his council with a view to promoting Vincentian spirituality through a number of activities, both permanent and occasional.

3. Objectives.

- a) promote ongoing formation in the realm of Vincentian spirituality of the members of the province, as well as among other Vincentian movements and Congregations,
- b) to supply the above-mentioned with material for formation,
- c) to lay down criteria for Vincentian spirituality and the pastoral missionary sphere,
- d) to foster integration of the Vincentian Family.

4. Membership. All those belonging to Vincentian Congregations and Movements, all represented by a Commission called by the Visitors, plus two members of the Provincial Council, the Director and ex-Director of CAVI.

5. Activities.

- a) monthly days on Vincentian spirituality,
- b) annual week of Vincentian studies,
- c) retreats for Vincentian laity (four per year),
- d) annual meeting of members,
- f) annual days for Vincentian acolytes,
- g) the Vincentian Union of Peru, made up of delegates from the Vincentian Congregations and Organisations working in the country. They organise the Feast of St. Vincent each year.

6. Publications. Various occasional publications, also Liturgical Manual for the Acolyte Movement, AIC Volunteers for Peace, Witness of Jesus (leaflets for the Sacrament of Confirmation), Mary the Way, and Prayer, Peace Rosary, etc.

IV.CAVIM

Vincentian Animation and Missionary Centre.

1. Address. Casilla 14673; Correo 21; Alameda; Bernard O'Higgins 1632; Santiago; Chili.

2. Description. CAVIM was set up on 20 February 1998 by the Province of Chili. Its aim is to inspire coordination and to organise activity at the level of spirituality and missionary endeavour in the province noted for its work in rural and marginal conditions.

3. Objectives.

- a) inspire the missionary life and apostolate of our members, in keeping with the Provincial Plan,
- b) contribute to the organisation of activities aimed at deepening the spirituality and celebration of the Vincentian Family,
- c) help towards a progressive formation of lay people in our work,
- d) correlate and develop the missions, under the aegis of the provincial.

4. Membership. The centre is directed by a Commission of members of the province meeting every two months.

5. Activities.

- a) inspiration and motivation of members of the Province,
- b) organisation of the principal feasts of the family of St. Vincent,
- c) support of works of the province through the formation of lay missionaries,
- d) in the future, to work for and in coordination with the other members of the Vincentian Family.

6. **Publication.** For the moment, a simple leaflet in the Provincial Bulletin.

V. VSI

Vincentian Studies Institute, USA.

1. **Address.** 1123 North Kenmore Avenue; Chicago IL 60614-3594; USA.
2. **Description.** Founded 1979, its mission is to promote a living interest in our Vincentian heritage. Its co-patrons are the 10 Provincials of the CM and DC in the US
3. **Objectives.**
 - a) to encourage, support, and coordinate fundamental research into the level of Vincentian life, spirituality and history,
 - b) to participate in the fruits resulting from the regular publication of the magazine *Vincentian Heritage*, or similar types of publications; also by such means as seminars, workshops and weekends,
 - c) to promote a lively interest in the Vincentian heritage in the Vincentian Family, so as to develop and strengthen its integration into today's life, ministry and collaboration in the Community.
4. **Membership.** Composed of confreres, Daughters of Charity and one lay person who is responsible for the publications.
5. **Activities.**
 - a) Publish *Vincentian Heritage* as above; also annual pamphlets and other books,
 - b) Set up National symposia,
 - c) Through contact with our own DePaul University Library in Chicago, it maintains a department of Vincentian Heritage to provide books, cards, posters and other Vincentian objects of art.
6. **Publications.** Bi-annual publication of *Vincentian Heritage*.

VI. MEGVIS

Central European Vincentian Studies Group.

1. **Address.** Vinzenz 1; Von Paul Gymnasium; D-54591; Prüm;, Germany.
2. **Description.** It was set up by the Vincentian Provinces of the Low Countries and Germany in order to develop studies in the Vincentian area.
3. **Objectives**

- a) to study Vincentian activities, especially in Central Europe,
- b) study Vincentian ideas and their application in the German-speaking world,
- c) study the history and experience of our Communities in regions of former Communist domination.

4. Membership. It consists of CM confreres in the low Countries, Austria, Hungary and Slovakia; also DC's and members of the Federation of Sisters of Charity of the above countries, and Society of St. Vincent de Paul members (and those of AIC), in the same countries.

5. Activities. An annual two-day get-together, comprised of about 70 members of the Vincentian Family, held in the first week of Easter at Innsbruck, Salzburg, Augsburg, or Untermachtal.

6. Publications. The magazine *MEGVIS* and several other books.

VII. GRAV

Research and Vincentian Animation Group, France.

1. Address. 95 Rue de Sèvres; 75006 Paris; France.

2. Description. Founded in 1993 it has taken up the task of the Interprovincial Council of the Provinces of Paris and Toulouse. Composed of confreres and DC's, it is open to the other members of the Vincentian Family and meets twice yearly.

3. Objectives. The essential aim is to promote the Vincentian Spiritual experience in its well- springs, its literary expression, and its realisation in the French language. The following are its means of articulating its purpose:

- a) research to bring the work of St. Vincent and his heirs to bear in the domain of history, doctrine and spirituality,
- 1) to produce and spread Vincentian productions in the French language; to make known our publications, and to promote others which are in the pipeline. For this, modern methods are used (e.g., videos, discs, CD-ROM, etc.)

4. Membership. Fourteen permanent members, i.e., the Visitors of the two Provinces, plus 9 confreres and 3 DC's. In addition, the office is made up of three confreres and one DC.

5. Activities.

- a) mutual exchange of information as to the work in progress,
- b) welcoming proposed work of research (realisation, canonization of St. Perboyre, letters of Blessed Clet).

VIII. GAV

Vincentian Animation Group, Italy.

- 1. Address.** At present, it is that of the President, Fr. Biagio Falco; Ex Convento Cappuccini; 85025 Melfi (Potenza); Italy.
- 2. Description.** Founded in 1974, it is the Italian Foundation for Vincentian Animation and Studies. It consists of the three CM Provinces, the five DC Provinces, the Sisters of Charity of St. Jeanne Antide Thouret, the AIC and the Marian Youth of that country.
- 3. Objectives.** Its idea is to inspire the Italian communities and provinces through meetings, colloques pertaining to the Vincentian "School" by means of studies, books, articles, and "special issues" of magazines, and information about initiatives and publications of a historic character in the Vincentian field.
- 4. Membership.** Made up of the various representatives of the groups mentioned above.
- 5. Activities.**
 - a) conferences or study days on Vincentian history and spirituality, open to all the Vincentian Family,
 - b) Vincentian Family retreats,
 - c) Vincentian "Journeys," i.e., meetings covering four or five days, devoted to study, prayer and living together fraternally,
 - d) preparation of material useful for formation and propaganda (booklets, pictures, tapes, etc.).
- 6. Publications.** Of special issues of magazines, such as *Annali della Missione*, and *Missione Vincentiana*.

IX.

Vincentian Studies Week, Salamanca, Spain.

- 1. Address.** PP Paúles; Carretera de Madrid 14; 7900 Santa María de Tormes; Spain.
- 2. Description.** The Vincentian Studies of Salamanca Weeks started in 1972. They are not, strictly speaking, an organisation. They are rather annual week-long formation activities. However, given their important contribution to the reflection and animation of the Community and the many books edited as a result, they are entitled to their place here.

The "Weeks" are organised by the C.M. Province of Salamanca, with the participation of all the provinces of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters

of Charity of Spain which support the as a means of ongoing formation for their members.

3. Objectives.

- a) distribution and deepening of Vincentian studies,
- b) ongoing formation of confreres, Daughters of Charity and Vincentian laity,

4. Membership. A confrere is the organiser of the "Weeks," together with a delegate of the Provincial of the Daughters of Charity. The Weeks are opened to all CM's, DC's and Spanish Vincentian laity.

5. Activities. Since 1972, with the exception of two years, they have been held regularly.

6. Publications. The conferences and discussions are published by CEME, the publication house of our confreres of Salamanca. This has provided a total of 23 books on the subject of our spirituality and charism.

X. SIEV

International Secretariat for Vincentian Studies.

1. Address. Curia Generalizia CM; Via dei Capasso, 30; 00164 Roma; Italy.

2. Description. SIEV is an international organization of Vincentian studies and animation, under the patronage of the General Curia. It was founded after the General Assembly of 1980, which had suggested the setting up of an international body to coordinate interprovincial and provincial bodies working on the above subject, so as to propagate their research. It holds an annual meeting.

3. Objectives. To animate, inform and promote all that is involved in Vincentian Studies. It is conjoined with all Vincentian and DC organisations.

In earlier years, it aimed at promoting St. Vincent on a theoretic level, whereas more recently a more pastoral dimension has been added, with emphasis on the practical application of our charism. In this connection, we refer to the setting up of a "Vincentian Month" dealing with popular missions.

4. Membership. SIEV is made up of 6 CM personnel, guaranteeing a fair representation of all language groups. An executive secretary is the driving force. The members are nominated by the Superior General for a six-year period, renewable for a further three years. One of the members is the Delegate of the General Curia.

There are also correspondents in various provinces, or groups of provinces, who form a link between SIEV and the individual provinces, informing them of what is happening on the level of Vincentian studies in the local or regional sphere.

5. Activities.

- a) concentrates on Vincentian studies existing at present, and promotes new ones,
- b) provides practical materials for Vincentian formation, i.e., a Vincentian library of French, English and Spanish language materials for the development of our students,
- c) organises colloques or sessions of formation in the Vincentian mould at an international level, like the "Vincentian Months" or the forthcoming "Session on Islam,"
- d) sponsors the publication of a Vincentian Bibliography as complete as possible, part of which is about to be published in our CD Rom and Internet in all languages,
- e) sponsors the publication of Vincentian texts as above,
- f) sets up archives of Vincentian pictures, etc.,
- g) collects documents of the Holy See in relation to the Vincentian Family from the year 1876 up to our time.

6. Publications. It publishes articles or gives its patronage to special issues of *Vincentiana*.

(Translated by Andrew Spelman, CM)

International Secretariat Of Vincentian Studies (S.I.E.V.)

STATUTES

- 1.1 To respond to the Postulate voted by the General Assembly of 1980: *"It is proposed that each Province or group of Provinces have its own organization for the promotion of basic studies and for making them known (St. Vincent, St. Louise, the history of the Companies, etc.). An organization on the international level will have as its goal the coordination of these efforts and the communication of their results,"* the Superior General and his Council instituted an international organism called: International Secretariat of Vincentian Studies (S.I.E.V.)
- 1.2 The head office is established in Rome, at the General Curia, Via dei Capasso, 30.
- 2.1 SIEV has as its objective to animate, inform and promote everything regarding Vincentian studies. It is in contact with the provincial and interprovincial organisms of the Congregation of the Mission and with the entire Vincentian Family.
- 2.2. To realize this objective, SIEV:
 - 2.2.1 assures information and communication through the CM publications;
 - 2.2.2 takes stock of the existing Vincentian studies;
 - 2.2.3 promotes new studies of all types;
 - 2.2.4 provides concrete work tools for Vincentian formation;
 - 2.2.5 invites specialists to meet in symposiums to put together the results of their research;
 - 2.2.6 fosters the publication of a complete Vincentian bibliography;
 - 2.2.7 awakens interest in arranging and utilizing provincial archives, with a view to the history of the provinces;
 - 2.2.8 pursues historical studies on the Congregation and invites the provinces to publish their own annals;
 - 2.2.9 proposes to the General Council the establishment of international months of Vincentian studies.
- 3.1. **Members**
 - 3.1.1 SIEV is made up of a number of confreres which cannot be more than 10 nor less than 5. A representative of the General Council will also be part of the group.

- 3.1.2 The members are selected because of their Vincentian competence, while assuring representation of the languages.
- 3. 1.3 They are named by the Superior General and his Council, after agreement with the respective Visitors.
- 3. 1.4 They are named for 6 years, renewable for 3 years.
- 3.2. **Executive Secretary**
 - 3.2.1. SIEV is directed by an Executive Secretary.
 - 3.2.2. He is named by the Superior General and his Council, after having consulted the members of SIEV.
 - 3.2.3. His mandate is for 3 years, twice renewable.
 - 3.2.4. His functions are:
 - 3.2.4.1 to call meetings and preside over them;
 - 3.2.4.2 to furnish the Superior General and his Council with an annual report of the activities of SIEV;
 - 3.2.4.3 to get in touch with the organisms of Vincentian study and animation;
 - 3.2.4.4 to keep and classify the archives of SIEV.
- 3.3. **Meetings**
 - 3.3.1 The members of SIEV meet once a year. If necessary, they can arrange additional meetings.
 - 3.3.2 All the members of SIEV are obliged to assist at all meetings.
- 4.1 **Budget**
 - 4.1.1. SIEV has its own budget, managed by the Executive Secretary in agreement with the Econome General.
- 4.2. At each annual meeting the Executive Secretary presents the accounts of the past year to the Superior General and his Council.
- 4.3 The projected budget, studied by all the members of SIEV, is presented to and approved by the Superior General and his Council.
- 4.4 Resources are assured by the Econome General and the provinces, under the conditions determined by the Superior General and his Council. They must cover the expenses of the SIEV meetings and the cost of the Secretariat's functioning.

Rome, October 22, 1999

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.
Superior General

Information Sheet on the work and decisions of SIEV

n° 4 - October 1999

The members of SIEV, Frs. Jean-Yves Ducourneau, John Prager, Kazimierz Stelmach, Julio Suescun, Roberto Lovera, Executive Secretary, and José María Nieto, delegate from the Curia, held their annual meeting in Rome, at the General Curia, on 7-8 October 1999. The Superior General, Fr. Robert Maloney, also participated in part of the meeting.

The Statutes of SIEV were reexamined in order to determine if its structure and the service it is called on to carry out for the Congregation are up-to-date. Some modifications to the Statutes were suggested. The corrected text was approved by the Superior General and his council and will be published in *Vincentiana* so that it can be known by everyone.

One of the major aspects studied while the Statutes were being examined was the way to maintain ties and guarantee exchange of information with the Vincentian studies organisms present in the various provinces or regions of the world. Actually, SIEV is aware of the existence of around ten such organisms and wants to maintain close ties with them so as to know each one's projects in order to coordinate them as much as possible and not duplicate the initiatives of SIEV with those of the other organisms.

During the meeting the results of the Symposium on Islam which took place in Beirut, Lebanon in the summer of 1999 were also studied. Some 50 confreres and Daughters of Charity from many provinces participated. In addition, there were confreres and Daughters of Charity from the Province of the Orient and some lay Vincentians working in Lebanon. The texts of the talks and of many testimonies were recently published in an issue of *Vincentiana*. This year a document, addressed to all the members of the Congregation, will be published by the Superior General and his council on relations with Islam.

With the collaboration of SIEV, a Vincentian Month for the Directors of the Daughters of Charity is in preparation. It will take place in July 2001 in Paris. Also under study for 2002 is a Vincentian Month for the Advisors (Chaplains) to the Vincentian Groups. The commission charged with its preparation will soon be named.

SIEV has abandoned the project of creating a CD ROM with Vincentian texts because actually there are already available several CDs made by individual confreres or Publishing Houses of the Congregation. For its part, SIEV will collaborate fully with whoever might need help in this field.

For the same reason, the project to prepare a computerized archive of images of Vincentian subjects has also been shelved.

Under study is a close collaboration for the development of the web site. Fr. John Freund is principally in charge (web master) and looks after the English language pages, Fr. Philippe Lamblin the French language, while Fr. Julio Suescun, a member of SIEV, handles the Spanish language. The web page could become one of the continuously updated instruments for Vincentian formation.

In preparation for the 2nd centenary of the birth of St. John Gabriel Perboyre (2002), SIEV will personally contact all the Visitors and many confreres involved in Vincentian historical studies in order to find a certain number of confreres available to study particular aspects of the saint's figure and work. If there is a good response, each one will be asked to develop the topic selected by December 2001 and it will be assessed whether to publish the results or bring them to the awareness of all in a conference. This research could become very useful material for a future critical historical biography. No information has reached us from the invitation addressed to the Visitors last year to encourage some university students to choose as the theme of their own thesis the life and work of Perboyre.

The 2nd centenary of the birth and the 25th anniversary of the canonization of St. Justin de Jacobis fall in 2000. The Province of Naples took care of publishing one volume which groups together the six notebooks of the Saint's Diary. The official presentation of the book was held on 10 February 2000 in the presence of the Superior General. The publication of other volumes with de Jacobis' letters and homilies is planned. Also, the magazine *Vincentiana* is preparing a special issue dedicated to our sainted confrere.

SIEV encourages the Visitors of the older provinces to take to heart the study of the province's history. It would be good if more recently erected provinces began gathering carefully the "chronicle" of the most significant events so that they might serve as a basis for future historical studies.

Thanks to the work of Fr. Rolando Delagoza and Fr. Kazimierz Stelmach the collection of the Holy See's documents regarding the Vincentian Family from 1876 to the present is being completed. Once all the material has been gathered, it will be decided how to put it at the disposition of all those who might be interested.

The next meeting of SIEV is scheduled for 26-27 October 2000 in Rome.

Roberto Lovera, C.M.
Executive Secretary of SIEV

International Formation Center: St. Vincent De Paul (Cif)

STATUTES

1. Identity:

The International Formation Center: St. Vincent de Paul (CIF) is a work established by the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission with his council to offer programs in Vincentian formation. The programs of the Center are geared primarily toward members of the Congregation of the Mission, but members of other groups sharing in the Vincentian charism will, from time to time, be accepted as participants. The CIF has its seat at the Maison-Mère of the Congregation of the Mission in Paris.

2. Administration and Finances:

The responsibility for CIF rests with the Superior General. With the aid of his council, he reviews and evaluates its programs, examines and approves its budgets and calendar. The Superior General appoints an intermediary between himself and the directors of CIF. The daily administration of the program, however, is the responsibility of its directors.

The CIF is financially self-supporting, through the contributions of provinces and others who send participants to its various programs.

3. Directors:

A team consisting of one Director and one or more Assistant Directors, ordinarily members of the Congregation of the Mission, exercises local responsibility for the Center and its programs. The Superior General appoints and terminates the team members. Their terms last three-years and are renewable.

The directors, during the time of their mandate, remain juridically members of their respective provinces. It is up to their Visitors to assign them to a house in their own province so that they might enjoy their rights and be subject to the obligations that their own Visitors specify. The Visitors, however, release them to the General Curia, and the Superior General assigns them to live in the Maison-Mère. The personal poverty of the team members will take into account the norms of their own provinces and the arrangements of their respective Visitors.

4. Relationship to the Maison-Mère:

A written contract, approved by the Superior General and signed by the Superior of the Maison-Mère and the Director, governs the mutual relationships between the Maison-Mère and the CIF. This contract is reviewed and renewed for each calendar year.

Approved by the General Council
24 May 1999

Vincentian Ongoing Formation Program

DESCRIPTION

1. Mission:

The International Formation Center: St. Vincent de Paul (CIF) offers a program of ongoing Vincentian formation for members of the Congregation of the Mission, destined to help them carry out the objective of following Christ the Evangelizer of the Poor. The Center also proposes to promote mutual knowledge among members of the Congregation of the Mission and with other members of the Vincentian Family, the unity of the Congregation of the Mission, an international perspective, and interprovincial collaboration.

The Vincentian Ongoing Formation Program is geared primarily toward members of the Congregation of the Mission, but members of other groups sharing in the Vincentian charism will, from time to time, be accepted as participants.

2. Program Design:

The Vincentian Ongoing Formation Program includes the following components: academic disciplines, personal study, research, teaching, the development of the vocation and ministry of the participants, liturgical celebrations, time for prayer and a retreat, the experience of community life, and visits to Vincentian sites. The program lasts for a period of fourteen (14) weeks.

3. Admission:

Participants are accepted into the program by the CIF Directors in collaboration with the Visitors and the General Council. The age limit for the participants is generally 35 to 50, with at least five years of active ministry since ordination (for priests, deacons) or vows (for brothers). Those participants whom their respective Visitors send as participants should have the qualities and experience to allow them to benefit from the program.

4. Finances:

Individual provinces assume responsibility for the expenses of the participants. These expenses are primarily room, board, and program expenses. Program expenses include the support of the Directors and the purchase and replacement of necessary equipment. The program is financially self-supporting in that it does not regularly receive subsidies from the Congregation of the Mission to carry on its works.

5. Evaluations and Reports:

The Directors provide for regular evaluation of the program by the participants. The results of these evaluations are given to the Superior General at the conclusion of each session. The Directors do not give grade reports, because of the nature of the program, nor do they provide written reports on individual participants, unless their Visitors request them.

Approved by the General Council
24 May 1999

Role and tasks of Advisors to AIC Groups and Associations (*)

March 1999

Marina Costa, in charge of Formation (AIC)

Anna Rovetta, Coordinator of the Vincentian Family Team (AIC)

(*) **Editor's note.** We are publishing in its entirety, with the due permission, the AIC booklet developed and published under the same title in Brussels in March 1999. It will be useful for the confreres and all who exercise this service of "advisors" to the AIC. At the same time, it could enlighten those who carry out this same task for the other Lay Associations of the Vincentian Family or even for other lay groups and associations. The second part of this study, "Presentation of the International Association of Charities," which is of a more specific nature, has already been published, for the most part, in other places (Cf. *Vincentiana*, July-October 1995, pp. 247-253; General Curia, *The Vincentian Family*, Rome, December 1995, pp. 4-10; *Vincentiana*, July-October 1998, n° 4/5, pp. 291-298). Nevertheless, we believe it opportune to publish it here because it is an integral part of the study and because it updates and systemizes the preceding document. In this way, we will also facilitate access to the document as a whole for those interested and avoid them having recourse to the publications cited above which, sometimes, might not be within easy reach.

January 25, 1999

To the Advisors working with AIC and its many groups.

My very dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am delighted to see the publication of this document setting out the role of Advisors who help members of the International Association of Charity. There are many people offering this service: Priests of the Congregation of the Mission, Daughters of Charity, other priests and sisters, and many lay people. The document uses two words to define their role: their mission consists of 1) formation and 2) animation.

Today I wish to encourage all of you who are advisors as you work at carrying out both aspects of your mission

1. There is no call that I have heard more frequently in recent years than the call for formation. Even though the members of AIC are responsible for their own formation a good “counselor” or “formator” has an essential role to play. We all learn from other people. A good guide can use his or her knowledge to open up for us new horizons. Recently I visited a museum in Rome and thanks to the enthusiastic young lady who was our guide, I learnt more in an hour and a half than I would have learnt from a week’s research in a library. She knew how to help others in their formation.
2. These days we often define the term “leader” as “formator” or “animator.” This last word literally means that such persons have a “soul” (anima) and that they can communicate this “soul” to others. The word “soul” also signifies breath, life and spirit. This document urges the Advisor to breathe life into the group, into its meetings and into its work. We can hope that every AIC group that has received a good formation will be “spirit”-filled

I encourage all who receive this document to come together and study it. Coming together in a town where there are AIC groups or in a region, or even at national level, could be a very effective means of helping you to fulfil your role to the full. In another letter I am asking the Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission and the Visitatrices of the Daughters of Charity to collaborate in organising such meetings.

An advisor is, to use the terminology of AIC’s guidelines 1998-2002, a “multiplying agent.” He or she takes the time to help others to grow in the life of the Spirit and in the ability to provide better service for the poor.

I pray that the seeds sown by AIC’s advisors may bear abundant fruit in the lives of the association’s members. This is surely a role which is close to the heart of St. Vincent. I ask him to bless all of you who engage in it so generously.

Your brother in St. Vincent

Robert P. Maloney C.M.
Superior General
Congregation of the Mission and Company of the Daughters of Charity

Introduction

Today we have to recognise a new and very clear sign of the times: the existence of the Church of the Laity, those people who are going to be the great protagonists of evangelisation.

Fired with this conviction, and together with those in charge of international groups belonging to the Vincentian Family, Fr. Robert P. Maloney has convoked several international meetings to which other branches of the Family have gradually been integrated. In the course of these meetings, AIC, convinced that effective animation from ecclesiastical Advisors can bring about a radical change in the way of practising charity, found it necessary to define more clearly the task of formation with regard to teams of Vincentian lay people.

The role of Advisor was one of the principal themes discussed at several meetings held not only in AIC but also at gatherings of Priests of the Mission and Daughters of Charity who realise that the liberating leadership of Advisors represents a real *“apprenticeship process which gives rise to dialogue, formation of a right and critical conscience, the development of self-confidence and personal responsibility.....the teams can become agents of social transformation.”*¹

One of the commitments stated in the Final Document of the 39th General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission, is connected with the cooperation in the work of formation. This document states that in our times, the different branches of the Vincentian Family, conscious of their common heritage to serve the poor, *“can nourish one another in their efforts at formation. At the same time each group in the family has understood Vincent from its own experience and so has a unique wisdom about him to hand down to its own members...The Congregation of the Mission desires to collaborate in common formation projects, while respecting the autonomy of the different branches as they go about forming their own.”*²

With regard to formation work within the Vincentian Family, the members of the Congregation of the Mission commit themselves to:

Helping the different teams in their formation by:

- a) *collaborating in the initial and ongoing formation of their members;*
- b) *helping to revitalise groups that are weak and offering spiritual assistance to those that are alive and active;*
- c) *establishing a formation team from both the Congregation of the Mission and the wider family to design the elements of a common formation programme and promote gatherings for the purpose of deepening Vincentian spirituality and strengthening the sense of belonging to the Vincentian Family;*

¹ PALÚ Lauro, C.M., “Future Paths for the Vincentian Laity” - Vincentian Formation Week, Salamanca, August 1998

² Final Document of the 39th General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission, Rome, 6th-30th July 1998

d) opening our existing programmes for ongoing formation to the other members of the Vincentian Family where possible.³

The different branches have contributed to these efforts to provide a common formation program and AIC, in keeping with the commitment of its lay members and conscious of the impact a Advisor could have on the teams, has committed itself to drawing up this document which it regards as a working tool and material for reflection. This document is also meant as a contribution to a new step towards the transformation of the lives of our brothers and sisters who suffer poverty and exclusion.

This document is addressed to the Advisors of AIC groups and it comes just at the time when interaction between the different branches of the Vincentian Family has been specially promoted “with a renewed sense of enthusiasm and vitality;” motivated by Fr. Maloney who, with truly prophetic intuition, has realised the impact that joint action can have on the lives of the most deprived. This document also comes on the eve of the Third Millennium, the Jubilee Year 2000, which presents us as members of the Vincentian Family, with challenges that we must face together in the clear knowledge that, as Fr. Maloney says, *the jubilee was established to be a time of joy for the poor.*”

Patricia P. de Nava
International President of AIC

³ Ibid

Role and tasks of ecclesiastical advisors in the associations and AIC groups

1. The advisors to associations and AIC groups

The role of advisors to AIC groups, be these priests, sisters or volunteers appointed to this work, has always been a very important one and in recent years it has been the subject of conferences and of articles in different reviews. Several of these articles have been used in the compilation of this present document and we are grateful to the authors for their contribution to our work. (See bibliography). Our special thanks go to Fr. Lauro Palú, C.M. for his advice, his help and his valuable collaboration.

ADVISORS ACCORDING TO THE MIND OF ST. VINCENT

St. Vincent believed in the laity and had great confidence in them but he demanded of them a response to their vocation of developing the charitable work of the Church. He showed his faith in the laity by founding various associations. He delegated to lay people responsibility for directing these associations and the rules that he drew up when founding the first confraternity clearly define the role of a good Advisor. *“The confraternity should be composed of lay people and it should be autonomous with its own specific form of governing body elected by all the members.”* (Cf. Rule for the Charities at Châtillon les Dombes, November/December 1617, V. 575-577). The members are to be responsible for organising the works of the Confraternity as laid down in Chapter X, 571. *“Those in charge will have complete responsibility for directing each confraternity.”*

In the rule that was drawn up for Châtillon and for subsequent Charities, the advisors are presented as “animators.” Their responsibility is to maintain the original concept and spirit of a confraternity: these men and women Advisors are not to concern themselves with organisational matters or the carrying out of the various tasks because the confraternity is an autonomous body. The role that St. Vincent decided on for the advisors to the confraternities founded by him, was originally limited to that of being “animators” according to these confraternities.

Vincent de Paul, the model advisor for lay people, was a man who paid attention to the laity and was quite prepared to receive from them, not only enlightenment about the spirituality of the confraternity, but was also ready to be influenced by them on fundamental aspects of it.

It was lay people who first suggested to him the idea of making the first foundation and over the years his own spiritual outlook was enriched and influenced by the manner in which the ladies he directed lived their faith. St. Louise is an example of this and so, too,

are the Daughters of Charity: the work that they developed for the poor contributed largely to St. Vincent's integration of the corporal-material element into his ideas on the integral evangelisation of the poor.

THE ADVISORS AND THE RULES FOR THE WORKS FOUNDED BY ST. VINCENT

St. Vincent's ideas about the role of the advisors is reflected in the rules of the Congregation of the Mission, the Company of the Daughters of Charity and in the statutes and international rules of AIC.

The Congregation of the Mission and the Company of the Daughters of Charity have a constitutional mandate to animate Vincentian movements, a mandate which is only one aspect of their particular vocation and fidelity to St. Vincent.

The Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation of the Mission prescribe that the members should, with regard to lay movements, *devote themselves to motivating and suitably preparing lay people for pastoral ministries* (C. 15), *that they should collaborate with them* (S. 3) and that they should have particular concern for lay associations founded by St. Vincent, such as AIC volunteers, or those inspired by his spirit such as the St. Vincent de Paul Conferences, the Vincentian Marian Youth Movement and the Association of the Miraculous Medal (C. 49 & 2).

This gives added weight to the reason why the missionaries are motivated to take an interest in Vincentian associations, for *"as such, they have a right to our presence and support"* (S. 7). This is an obvious right, and consequently a duty incumbent on the missionaries.

As for the Daughters of Charity, their Constitutions and Statutes state that they must support *"those who strive for the recognition of the rights of every individual."* (S. 4) and do *"all they can to promote and encourage leadership among the laity who are responsible for Vincentian groups"* as a witness to their fidelity to their origins, that is to say, to their founders (S. 5).

The international Statutes of AIC do not give a very explicit definition of the functions of an Advisor. In January 1971 the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission invested the International President of AIC with the "direction" of the association, something which until then had been the prerogative of the Vincentian priests. After this the directors became "advisors" or chaplains.

Article 4 of the International Statutes states that AIC "offers its members the social, civic and spiritual formation and information necessary to adapt their action to meet concrete needs." All the statutes and rules of national associations reiterate the members' right to this formation, a right which presupposes a duty on the part of others who are in positions of responsibility at various levels, and particularly the advisors.

Article 3 of the Bylaws specifies that at international level “*a priest, Advisor, is appointed by the Holy See, after several names have been put forward by AIC, with the consent of the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission. His mandate is for three years, renewable for a further three-year period.*”

Article 8 states : “*The Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, successor of St. Vincent de Paul, and the Mother General of the Daughters of Charity are invited to meetings of the Assembly of Delegates, with a consultative voice,. In this way AIC shows its fidelity to the spirit of its founder.*”

Article 14 goes on to add: “*The Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, successor of St. Vincent de Paul, and the Mother General of the Daughters of Charity, are invited to meetings of the Executive Board, with consultative voice. They may be represented by a person of their choice.*”

THE ADVISORS⁴ IN A VINCENTIAN LAY ASSOCIATION

The word “assistant” comes from the Latin and signifies “*being seated beside someone.*” The assistant, or advisor, is someone who accompanies and who must be sitting with his brothers and sisters to help them discern God’s will and, above all, to help them fulfil it in solidarity with others.

The Advisor has a duty to help the Vincentian volunteers to remain faithful to the Vincentian charism and to the specific identity of each group or association.

The mission of the Advisor, whether priest, Daughter of Charity, or lay person, is to form and animate groups and associations.

1. Formation

Liberating leadership is based, primarily, on the essential and fruitful convictions that the Pope reminds us about in “Christifideles Laici” (n° 63), when he says: “*One cannot offer a true and effective formation to others if the individual has not taken on or developed a personal responsibility for formation; this, in fact, is essentially a “formation of self.” We have to remain faithful to the conviction that each of us is both the author and the object of formation.*”

Formation is wide-ranging and includes, among other areas, spirituality, the Vincentian perspective, pastoral and social preparation and the development of a political conscience.

- The Advisor is requested to collaborate in a special way in the area of Vincentian formation. Other aspects of formation can be catered for by other people or through specific and occasional activities.

⁴ The advisors (priest or sister)

- In formation work with Vincentian groups or associations, the Advisors must strive to bring lay people to be leaders in this task so that they, too, will be prepared to be both promoters and workers in the apostolate. This would be of particular benefit to those groups and associations that do not have the help of a priest or a sister.
- In the work of formation the Advisors should be helped by lay people themselves, by other interested groups or by experts from outside.⁵

It must be made clear that the work of formation does not mean just giving a talk or a spiritual reflection at the beginning of a meeting, or saying Mass, but it is more a question of helping the group to make the connection between theory and practice by evaluating its actions and decisions in the light of St. Vincent's teaching. This type of accompaniment requires constant work which the chaplain does by collaborating and actively participating in the periodic meetings of the group that he is leading and through maintaining contact with the members of the group in their daily lives and apostolic activities.

2. Animation

To “animate” means to make an association come alive, to encourage it to be dynamic and creative, to encourage it to grow and develop, and to help it engage in reflection and research.

For this purpose, the quality of the relationships and interaction between the group and its advisor is an extremely important factor.

The relationship that exists between the group and its Advisor should reflect “*an ecclesiology of the people of God*” where we are all regarded as equal in spite of each one having different tasks to perform. We must all actively participate in helping the group to grow: in this way we will be helping each other as we move forward together.

So it is clear that there are both Advisors, and those in charge of the groups and associations. There should be no confusion about the function of each: those in charge of groups or associations are responsible for the planning, the carrying out and evaluation of what is done by the group. The Advisor's function is to animate, assist, clarify and accompany the group. Both have to be concerned with the all-round formation of the members.

In his talk during the Vincentian Formation Week in Salamanca, Fr. Santiago Azcárate Gorri C.M. said that through working for the integral formation of the group the chaplains can have a decisive influence on it. Effective results will be achieved by “deepening people's knowledge of the faith and reinforcing some ways of acting as communities, by praying, celebrating and working together in the common mission of evangelisation according to the Vincentian tradition. The chaplain's task is not to replace or to standardise the richly diverse Vincentian Family but to offer its members and those who come within the scope of his ministry the possibility of a serious Christian initiation which

⁵ PALÚ Lauro C.M. Synthesis of the working groups of advisors present at the AIC International Assembly 1998, Querétaro, Mexico

will produce a faith community where prayer, liturgy, celebration and commitment are united, leading to a deeper level of the evangelising service of the poor.”

It is absolutely essential that the Advisors should have a thorough knowledge of the association. They should know its history, its problems, its aims, its mystique, its internal dynamism, its identity, its spirit ... its potential and also its particular limitations. It is evidently not enough to have a theoretical knowledge of these, though this is essential; the Advisors must have concrete experience such as pastoral work among the poor and a sensitive knowledge of their suffering and of their spiritual and material needs. It is only from practical experience of evangelising the poor that the Advisors will have the sensitivity they need in order to direct lay movements.

3. Implementing the Advisor's functions

The duties of an Advisor:

- *To take part in meetings of the different Councils* (at all levels) in order to help the members make suggestions and help to find an answer to problems; they are not to take over the responsibility invested in the lay people who are in charge, but should support these people and form them so that they may fulfil their duties in the best possible way.
- *To maintain contact with the Visitor or Visitatrices*, especially when Advisors are needed for local and regional groups.
- *To help set up local teams.*
- *To promote the works, projects and formation initiatives, in collaboration with other branches of the Vincentian family.*
- *To give the volunteers support and encouragement in maintaining contact with the civil and Church authorities.*⁶

Some new aspects of an Advisor's work with Vincentian groups:

- They have to help the members to *become aware that they belong to a large, international family.*
- With this in mind, the Advisors will try to offer a common *formation programme to the different groups within the Family but they will also devote time to the formation of each specific group.*
- They have to help the members of these movements to be open to the *missionary aspect* of the Vincentian charism.⁷

Some special circumstances that apply to the Daughters of Charity

We are aware that in reality the Daughters of Charity often have to fulfil several different roles at the same time when working with the teams. It is quite possible, therefore,

⁶ PALÚ Lauro C.M. Synthesis of the Working Groups of Advisors attending the AIC International Assembly 1998, Querétaro, Mexico.

⁷ Ibid

that some Daughters of Charity would not define the role of Advisor in exactly the same way as we have done. Indeed it very often happens that sisters develop some tasks in the field and also collaborate with the volunteers in practical activities such as home visiting, project leadership, social centers, etc.

Sometimes a Daughter of Charity is Advisor for a team and at the same time she participates in their work. In such circumstances the Daughter of Charity will be acting as Advisor at times and on other occasions she will be working with the volunteers and collaborating with the service they give.

As we said earlier, sharing specific experiences can be extraordinarily enriching for both the volunteers and the sister, and this enhances the sister's role as Advisor because she is animating the volunteers by being a strong witness and example.

On the other hand, it may happen that the team has an Advisor and that the Daughters of Charity collaborate in the service. So there are two possible situations :

- The group has an Advisor who is a Priest of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity work with the volunteers on a project and are involved in the organisation of specific works for the poor. In this situation the sisters can work very closely with the Advisor and serve as the connecting link for volunteers with regard to specific works and particularly with the animation and evaluation of the work in the light of St. Vincent's teaching.
- The group has an Advisor and who is not a Vincentian though a priest. In this situation the Daughter of Charity has the very important role of affirming and spreading the spirit of St. Vincent and of helping the volunteers to preserve their identity. Even though she does not have the specific role of Advisor, she can make a very useful contribution to the formation of the volunteers by giving a different input and animating the group in a way that is Vincentian.

In every situation the Daughters of Charity have the very important task of *helping the volunteers to develop a sense of responsibility and autonomy*, for these are essential in every group and in every form of service.

There is a very real danger that the group may become too dependent on the Daughters of Charity and this could have serious consequences for the functioning of the group and its service of the poor.

Some interesting experiences in the animation of Vincentian Lay Movements

- In some countries there are occasions when *animation takes place at a national level for all the Vincentian Lay Movements*.
- In other countries there are “*National Coordinating Teams*” consisting of the Visitor, the Visitatrice, and those in charge of the various branches of the Vincentian Family.
- Sometimes the Provincial Director of the Daughters of Charity is also chaplain to the volunteers so he can take advantage of his visits to the sisters' communities to maintain contacts and support AIC teams or other branches of the family. Some Directors include in the formation programme for Seminary Sisters and Young Sisters

information about Vincentian lay movements and they promote knowledge of these groups and contact with them.

- In certain countries the Advisors help to promote *formation meetings at regional or national level; meetings that are primarily for young people in the different branches of the family.*
- Some countries organise *formation courses or schools* to provide various aspects of formation for the laity (spirituality, Vincentian spirit, apostolate, catechesis, social action, etc.).

4. The relationship and the interaction between the group and its Advisor.

We present here, in form of a comparison, some guidelines for working together. These guidelines are taken from several documents and especially from “Profile of an Advisor” published in the review *CLAPVI*, n° 90-91, January-June 1996.

Guidelines for advancing together

PROFILE OF AN ADVISOR	CORRESPONDING ATTITUDES OF THE VOLUNTEERS
2. The ecclesial aspect	
<p>The Advisor as a member of the Church, Christ's Body, is at the service of others.</p> <p>With his brothers and sisters in the Church which is the people of God, he follows Christ, the Evangeliser of the Poor.</p>	<p>The volunteers would like the Advisor to help them to live their vocation of service in union with the universal Church and bring them to understand that within this communion, each individual action acquires a universal value.</p> <p>Helped by the Advisor, the volunteers commit themselves to deepening their knowledge of the word of God so that the service they offer may be steeped in the spirit of the Gospel.</p>
II. The Vincentian Aspect	
<p>The Advisor is animated by the Vincentian spirit and, together with the associations, will not lose sight of these three guidelines:</p> <p>To be conscious that he or she has been called to render the Gospel effective among the poor;</p> <p>To be continually growing in the missionary spirit which grasps what God is saying through events;</p> <p>To be mindful of his or her role and that of the association he or she is accompanying.</p>	<p>The volunteers would like the Advisor to be particularly concerned about helping them in implementing these three guidelines:</p> <p>To be conscious of the fact that they are called to see the face of Christ in the poor;</p> <p>To pay constant attention to the signs of the times and thus be on the alert so as to understand, by the light of faith, what God is asking of us in the different social and historic circumstances in which we find ourselves;</p> <p>To make sure that the group is living a life based on the Vincentian spirit that inspires all the actions of its members.</p>

III. What st. Vincent, who was a good advisor of the laity, teaches us

The Advisor must be like St. Vincent and know lay people and believe in their potential.

He must work and collaborate with lay people and use to advantage their particular identity.

He must have the same mind as the Church regarding the role of the laity and allow lay people to exercise their appropriate functions.

He must know how to value each person.

He must be careful to update his thinking.

The volunteers must get to know the other branches of the Vincentian Family, their history and special identity.

To achieve a good collaborative relationship, the volunteers must not accept to be dependent on the Advisor nor expect him to solve the group's problems by himself; they have to learn to be responsible for their own spiritual formation whenever this is necessary.

They must regard formation and evaluation as indispensable means for knowing whether they are fulfilling their role in accordance with the Vincentian spirit.

Together with the Advisor, the group must be able to discover and bring to light the gifts and capabilities of each of the members in order to allow each volunteer to develop personally and the poor to reach self-achievement.

The volunteers would like the advisor to help the group to adapt to what the Church puts forward as new aspects of working with the poor; not to hold on to old ways of working or to accept uncritically new currents of spirituality that are might not be in keeping with the Vincentian spirit.

IV. Characteristics of the advisor and Of the vincentian laity

The Advisor should act in accordance with the evangelising praxis of the Church.

He should have a good knowledge of the Church's social teaching and Vincentian spirituality.

Motivated by the Advisor, the volunteers should genuinely live in accordance with their Christian faith so as to hand this on to those who are materially and spiritually poor.

The volunteers ask their Advisors not simply to teach a doctrine but to

<p>He should know about the associations and how they differ from other Vincentian groups.</p> <p>He should be pleased to be doing this work.</p> <p>He should promote solidarity among the members of the association.</p> <p>The Advisors should clearly understand the values of women and promote respect for their rights.</p> <p>The Advisors should concern themselves with providing the formation that is necessary in order to guarantee the autonomy of the group and its continuity.</p>	<p>communicate a spirit, a spark, and increased awareness.</p> <p>Conscious of their own special charisma, the volunteers will strengthen their bonds of interaction with the other branches of the Vincentian Family.</p> <p>The volunteer should be able to communicate her joy to others and be able to pass on a message of hope.</p> <p>The volunteers ask the Advisor to promote solidarity within the group and with the other branches of the Vincentian Family as well as collaboration with other associations.</p> <p>The volunteers must be aware of their rights as women and should promote their rights and organising abilities in the service of charity.</p> <p>While respecting their Advisors, the volunteers should exercise their autonomy and independence; they should ensure the continuity of the group even if the priest or sister who founded the association is no longer there.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">The Advisors and the Vincentian volunteers should create bonds of respect, friendship and brotherly love which help to ensure that they give a better service to their deprived sisters and brothers</p>	

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CHARITIES

II. Historical survey of AIC

1. THE AIC'S HISTORY.

The first "Charities", which were the forerunners of the present AIC associations, were founded in France by St. Vincent de Paul in 1617.

They date back to 1617, the year when St. Vincent was indignant about the situation of the poor people in his parish at Châtillon–les–Dombes, and this indignation gave rise to the first "Charities" where he brought together a group of ladies, the first volunteers, in order to remedy the serious needs of the deprived by helping them materially and spiritually.

AIC is the oldest lay women's association

More than three hundred years have gone by since those valiant women, the first volunteers recruited by St. Vincent, began to take care of the poor sick in a concerned and organised way. Thanks to the confidence that St. Vincent had in them, these women took on a very important role in the exercise of charity, being particularly concerned about those human beings who, because they were born poor and women, were ignored, ill-treated and despised.

AIC had an international character right from the time of St. Vincent de Paul

St. Vincent was not a person to be put off by distance and he extended his ministry to other countries where there was dire poverty, such as Italy, Poland and Madagascar. Nothing could stop him, neither language problems, the distances involved, or different cultures and customs.

Moreover, to maintain communication among the various Charities, St. Vincent wrote a considerable number of letters and even launched the publication *Relations*, a bulletin which is not unlike the one we have today. This was already something more than just organising charity, it involved organising communication and this was one of the outstanding characteristics of our founder.

The Company of Charity is updated according to the directives of the Second Vatican Council and in 1971 takes the name International Association of Charities (AIC).

In 1971, the delegates from 22 associations gathered in Rome, Italy, for the first International Council, voted for the new statute and adopted the name AIC, International Association of Charities. In deciding to retain in this new name the word "Charities" the members wished to mark their direct descent from the work created by St. Vincent and their fidelity to the prophetic teaching of their founder.

1971 was a turning point for the association. We were animated by a new spirit which was confirmed and deepened at every regional and international meeting where we rediscover the source of the Vincentian spirit and gain new strength.

For more information on this subject, consult AIC documents:

- *The Charities of St. Vincent de Paul*
- *AIC from its origins to our own times.*

2. THE STRUCTURE OF AIC

The works undertaken by AIC require an internal structure, *an organising body*, comprising:

The Assembly of Delegates, made up of representatives of the member associations.

The Executive Board, composed of the President, the Vice-Presidents, and AIC members from the different regions: it is responsible for the management and administration of AIC and is fully empowered to implement decisions taken by the Assembly of Delegates. It meets once a year. The Executive Board is assisted by a Permanent Committee.

The Holy See appoints an ecclesiastical Advisor, with the approval of the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission. *The Ecclesiastical Advisor and a Daughter of Charity representing the Mother General* take part in the meetings of the Executive Board and have a consultative voice.

The International Secretariat is the communications core of AIC. Information from national associations and from outside bodies is received at the Secretariat which then passes on information and reports and serves as the contact point for the different member associations.

The services that AIC offers all its members are aimed at giving support to the associations and the volunteer helpers with regard to their commitment to the service of the poor. Within this framework different functions have been specified and developed and these will be carried out by specific commissions or services, by experts, or by members of the Executive Board. These functions or services are: the Bulletin, Study and Research, Finance, Formation, Projects, Public Relations, Representations.

Animation at regional level: in order to facilitate the animation and the formation of the volunteers, the national associations are grouped according to regions and each region has a regional animator.

AIC regions are: Africa-Madagascar, Latin America, Asia, Europe-Near East and the United States.

AIC documents: a large number of documents have been published by AIC in recent years. They deal with reflection, formation, organisation, working methods, and the presentation of the association.

The International Bulletin is published in the three official languages of AIC: French, English and Spanish, and it is translated into Italian, Portuguese and German.

For further information on this subject consult AIC documents:

- *Statutes and By Laws.*

3. THE CHARISM OF AIC

Our spirituality is based on the teachings of St. Vincent with Jesus as the centre and the driving force of all our action: we are more deeply committed to a preferential option for the poor which is fundamental to Christianity. “*Acting together against the different forms of poverty*” is the basic project that St. Vincent confided to the first volunteers at Châtillon-les-Dombes in 1617. Its relevance for all time in the history of the association stems from the fact that it unites in one single project love of God and love of the poor: this is the most evangelical form of charity there is.

This project, which we will see from the copious correspondence of St. Vincent with those responsible for the Charities was present right from the time of the first foundation, has been able to survive over the centuries and withstand different regimes and changes in society thanks to its dynamic power; it does not look back nostalgically to the past or look towards an utopia and this is due to the ease with which it can adapt to needs and institutions, to its realistic attitude in being attentive to modifications and changes.

It is precisely the originality and the specific nature of this fundamental project that allows the members of AIC, even in our times, to use it as the basic point of reference all over the world: it is a means of achieving unity.

The Basic Document “*Acting together against the different forms of poverty*” has an important part to play in reinforcing this approach. It is a superb working instrument and basis for reflection and it expresses for all the members of the association the fundamental, common project.

For further information on this subject, see AIC documents:

- *Basic Document “Acting together against the different forms of poverty.”*
- *AIC Volunteers today (simplified text).*

4. CURRENT POLICIES OF AIC ⁸

The way that our charism has evolved, our identity and our mission, our vision of a future society that is just, shows solidarity and is welcoming; all these things have

⁸ de NAVA Patricia, “Presentation of the AIC,” Minutes of the AIC Assembly of Delegates 1998, Querétaro, Mexico.

contributed to the emergence of some lines of action that point to the current policy of our association. We realise that the word “policy” does not express exactly what we want to say: it is more a question of teaching, something more profound than policy, something that has very strong spiritual roots. But let us use the word “policy” as it is easier to understand.

1. Policy of updating the mission of the Charities

Ever since it was founded AIC has based its policy on two unchanging principles: the first is a commitment to remain faithful to our mission and to the designs of our Founder; the second is a commitment to continual renewal so as to respond, in a better way, to the needs of our times. These two policy directions are complementary and closely linked, for St. Vincent himself taught that we have to concentrate attention on new needs and be creative enough to find the most adequate ways of responding to them; in this way we will be looking for the genuine good of the poor at every moment in history.

This path of renewal during the years 70’s–80’s, brought the association to move from a position of giving *assistance* to one of *promotion* and finally, during the 1990 Assembly in Assisi, to adopt the concept of *self-promotion*.

The notion of self-promotion arises from the conviction that nobody can promote the welfare of the poor if these people are not prepared to take responsibility for their own lives. Our role in this process is not to take over from the poor in making decisions that affect their lives but to stimulate and support them to find out how they can become autonomous, until such times as they become the active agents of their own social and human promotion.

This commitment was developed still further when we were able to move from self-promotion on a personal level to self-promotion for communities. We found valuable allies for this endeavor in the women of those communities that take an active part in the projects and who often become AIC volunteers; they, in their turn, are committed to self-promotion within their own communities.

For further information on this topic see AIC documents:

- *Why self-promotion? (reflection on the roots of self-promotion)*
- *Self-promotion (practical guide).*

2. Policy of cultural transformation

After noting several obstacles that the volunteers encounter in their daily work, things that prevent them from defending the rights of the most deprived, AIC went on to question whether it was right for them to make these people want to work at self-promotion since this desire was destined to come up against the reality of a society that curbs their progress and marginalises them, excluding them from participating in civic life. We realize that our initiatives could end in failure if we did not, at the same time, use a different way of working within society in order to change its outlook.

This conviction has led to the development of another policy, that of cultural transformation.

Cultural transformation demands a radical change of outlook, the transformation of concepts that are deeply rooted in public opinion, in tradition and inner attitudes: working on the culture demands, first of all, the elimination of these prejudices, fears, selfishness and the undervaluing of the least able in society and those who are different, all of which seriously undermine the dignity of others. Cultural transformation will not come about solely with the eradication of these negative elements. We need to create a new mentality which is more open, more respectful of others, one that shows more solidarity and can recognise and defend the right of all people to direct their own lives.

The promotion of this culture of solidarity and self-promotion can be achieved in time through these means: sensitising society, circulating new ideas by the testimony we give, by word and by written documents, by intelligent use of the mass media, by pressure exerted on structures, and above all, by effective personal testimony.

For Christians, the most effective way of changing a culture is by proclaiming the Gospel and witnessing to its spirit. Evangelising a culture means developing within it the values that the Gospel proclaims, that is to say justice, solidarity, love and respect so as to then penetrate the culture's mentality and achieve one of our objectives which is to change the way society thinks at all these levels.

For more information on this subject, see AIC documents

- *Why solidarity? (reflections on the basis of solidarity)*
- *Solidarity (a practical guide)*
- *Promoting justice: why and how should we do this? (defending Human Rights in the face of different forms of poverty).*

3. Policy of formation

For many years now, formation has been one of the most important operational procedures for AIC. This formation has not only to be on the spiritual level, it has to be technical and concrete: only an ongoing and focused formation will teach us how to:

- free ourselves from being slaves to habit, like regarding misery as a fact of life and not as intolerable injustice;
- cultivate in ourselves the capacity to wonder and be non-conformist with regard to any form of injustice whatsoever;
- confront each new situation with intellectual curiosity to analyze the reality in depth in order to detect any changes and thus understand the causes of injustices and measure their consequences;
- have a spirit of discernment in order to evaluate the reality without conforming to it, with an objective and critical outlook, and acting without prejudice or pessimism and combat a fatalistic attitude in order to confront those who are against our way of thinking: we have to start by changing our own attitudes, our methods without being afraid of novelty, but welcoming it with enthusiasm and hope.

4. Policy of extension and the creation of new AIC groups

At the present time AIC is established in many European countries, in Latin America, North America, Asia, Africa and Madagascar. It totals 45 associations and several groups are being set up: there are 250,000 volunteers who are all committed to living according to the necessities of their times, the fundamental project of Vincent de Paul, our founder: **“Acting together against the different forms of poverty.”**

AIC is deeply concerned about poverty in the world and it plans to set up new groups in countries where there are no associations up to now. This will be achieved with the invaluable help of the Daughters of Charity and the Priests of the Mission, whose support is the key factor in this project.

For more information on this subject, see AIC documents

- *AIC-Europe*
- *AIC- Latin America*
- *AIC- USA*

5. Policy of creating networks

AIC is conscious of being a worldwide network of solidarity interaction struggling against the different forms of poverty. To achieve concrete results AIC:

- is an umbrella organisation for the associations which in the different countries develop the same kind of activities and share the same global objective: the struggle against poverty and exclusion;
- forms a network for the exchange and dissemination of information and formation;
- organises meetings and exchanges between the volunteers of different countries, by means of seminars, formation visits, etc.;
- sends news of the volunteers' grassroots work to international organizations;
- works in partnership with other networks to exert pressure on decisions-makers;
- constitutes a network of projects since it ensures the interaction of projects carried out by its members: exchanging ideas and experiences is a very effective way of showing the enrichment that comes from interaction and the proliferation of initiatives. With a view to obtaining these results AIC forms its volunteers according to the model of **working in project forms**.

For more information on this subject, see AIC documents:

- *Working under project form*
- *Working in network and partnership*
- *Ongoing Projects*

Another important network for us is that of **interaction within the Vincentian Family**

This interaction has been intensified in recent years through regular meetings of those in charge of the different branches at an international level and by common strategies for action. This closer relationship will bring us to live a more Vincentian life and one that

is closer to our roots: the fundamental project of Vincent de Paul who founded us so that we would work in collaboration with one another.

For more information on this subject see AIC documents:

- *The role and the tasks of an Advisor (Part 1 of this document)*
- *The Vincentian Family: the four international branches*
-

6. Policy of representation

The awareness that we are a worldwide network for social action within a reality where the problems caused by poverty are increasing every day has strengthened the conviction always held by AIC that we must play a part in international life.

One of our objectives is to see that the work and concerns of our volunteers at the grassroots level are brought to the notice of international organisations so that pressure can be exerted and the poor defended; this is the role we have to play in international life.

To make its policy more effective AIC represents its associations at the level of Governmental and non-Governmental organizations. We have consultative status at UNESCO, at ECOSOC (United Nations Social and Economic Council) and at the Council of Europe. At a supranational level, AIC is part of other networks fighting against poverty and sharing information.

AIC has another role: that of making its members more keenly aware of the importance of their collaboration in local public life and in the struggle against the causes of poverty; it provides its members with information and opportunities to participate in important worldwide events such as the preparatory work for the *Copenhagen Social Summit*, *International Year for the Elimination of Poverty*, the *Decade for the Elimination of Poverty* as well as the major initiatives of UNESCO.

For further information on this subject see AIC document:

- *Action on the structures (information sheets included with the international bulletin n° 69,70,71)*

7. Policy on insertion within the Church

Finally, we have to mention the AIC policy with regard to the position taken by the Church: from the XVII century to our own times the Church has given us guidelines on how to better direct our efforts.

AIC is an International Catholic Organization (ICO) and as such has links with several Pontifical Councils that work for the eradication of poverty:

- The Pontifical Council Cor Unum, the Pontifical Council for the Laity, the Pontifical Council for the Family, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, the Pontifical Council for Culture.

We are participating in the preparatory work for the *1999 International Year of Charity and the Jubilee Year 2000*; we have been working on these themes in recent years and some of them constitute the essential basis of our current lines of action.

5. AIC ADOPTS COMMON OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES

AIC is a living organisation that is in a constant state of evolution; this evolution is marked by a process of integral progress which is developing both in the sphere of its influence and in the quality of its projects and action plans which try to be constructive, Vincentian and evangelical, adapted to the rapid changes in our world on the eve of the third millennium.

At the present time the Association is directing its works in the light of the operational guidelines that are voted by the Assembly every four years. These operational guidelines point to an evolution that is in accordance with the signs of the times and the specific work performed at base level.

The three Operational Guidelines approved by the 1998 Assembly in Santiago de Querétaro, Mexico, are as follows:

- *To be a transforming force within the association*
- *To be a transforming force with regard to different forms of poverty*
- *To be a transforming force in society.*

For further information on this subject, see AIC documents:

- Operational lines 1998-2002 ⁹
- Minutes of AIC Assembly of Delegates 1998

⁹ The operational guidelines, even if they continue to be valid, need to be constantly updated; that is why every four years new operational lines are voted on at the Assembly of Delegates. The next Assembly will be in 2002.

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On Uniting Action And Contemplation

– A Key to Understanding Vincent de Paul –

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

There are many keys in a large house. On the key ring you may find those to the front and back doors, to the cellar, perhaps to a seldom used den, or even to a money box or a liquor cabinet. Each gives us some entree to the owner's living space and to his person. So it is with the lives of great men and women. Historians often suggest various keys to their personality or their vision and, from that point of view, attempt to interpret their life and works.

Vincent de Paul is no exception. Abelly, his first biographer,¹ focused on the imitation of Christ as the key element in Vincent's spiritual journey.² Collet followed suit as did most other biographers until the 20th century.³ In this century, after the appearance of Pierre Coste's definitive edition of Vincent's works, some highlighted Vincent's sense of being priest⁴ or spiritual director⁵ as the key. Others studied the influence of spiritual masters upon Vincent, finding the key in gifts he received from Benedict of Canfield, Pierre de Bérulle, Francis de Sales, and André Duval.⁶ For André Dodin the key was Vincent's spiritual experience, his faith, and his practical wisdom.⁷

Some have maintained that doing the will of God⁸ or abandonment to providence⁹ are the keys to understanding Vincent. He listened for God's will mediated through events and persons and responded to what he heard. He followed providence step by step in his life, never trampling on its heels.¹⁰

¹For an account of Vincent's many biographers, cf. Luigi Mezzadri, *La sete e la sorgente* (Rome: CLV Edizioni Vincenziane, 1992) I, 103ff.

²Cf. Louis Abelly, *Vie de Vincent de Paul*, (Florentin Lambert, Paris: 1664) Book I, 78. Later, in a 1667 edition, Abelly identified two keys to understanding Vincent: the imitation of Christ and conformity to God's will.

³Pierre Collet, *La Vie de Saint Vincent de Paul* (Nancy: Chez A. Leseure, 1748) 95, 138-139.

⁴Cf. Joseph Leonard, *St. Vincent de Paul, A Guide for Priests* (London: Burns, Oates, and Washbourne, 1932); also, Jacques Delarue *L'Idéal Missionnaire du Prêtre d'après Saint Vincent de Paul* (Paris: Librairie Vincentienne et Missionnaire, 1946); Jozef Parafiniuk *L'Insegnamento di S. Vincenzo De' Paoli sul Sacerdozio alla Luce del Vaticano II* (Rome: Angelicum, 1990).

⁵Cf. Abbé Arnaud d'Henel, *Saint Vincent de Paul, "Directeur de Conscience"* (Paris: Pierre Téqui, 1925).

⁶Mezzadri, *ibid.*, 35ff.

⁷Cf. André Dodin, *St Vincent de Paul et la charité* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1960) 64ff.

⁸Cf. Józef Kapuściak, *Il Compimento della Volontà di Dio Come Principio Unificatore Fra Azione e Preghiera in San Vincenzo de' Paoli* (Roma: Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1982).

⁹Cf. Victoriano C. Torres, *Devotion to Divine Providence and Sensitivity to the Spirit in Vincentian Apostolic Spirituality* (Rome: Teresianum, 1987).

¹⁰SV I, 68-69.

A common sense approach sees the poor as the key.¹¹ Vincent is famous precisely because of dedicating his whole life to the service of the most abandoned. It was the poor who drew him out of himself. It was in them that he found God and discovered the path on which he would walk for the rest of his life.¹²

The attentive reader might himself find other very useful, sometimes even neglected, keys. Vincent emphasizes simplicity as the "virtue I love the most."¹³ He calls it "my gospel."¹⁴ Could we not reasonably say that this is one of the most revelatory keys?

All these keys help open up our understanding of Vincent de Paul. Some, naturally, are more useful than others. But each offers insight. Each reveals a facet of his rich personality.

Today I suggest another key which I find very helpful: Vincent's capacity to unite action and contemplation. This key seems to me particularly useful today when we speak so much about apostolic spirituality. Even as I suggest it, I am conscious of a number of limitations:

1. Like all the other keys, it provides only *one* way of analyzing Vincent. It must be used in complementarity with other keys.
2. It is not a key that one finds in a first reading of Vincent (in contrast, for example, with the poor or simplicity); it is discovered only on a second level of reflection.
3. By no means is this a newly discovered key. Others have noticed it before,¹⁵ even if today one might find a bit of rust on this key.

Granted all this, let me offer a few reflections on this very useful and perhaps somewhat neglected key for understanding Vincent's spirituality.

¹¹Cf. José María Ibáñez, *San Vicente de Paúl y los Pobres de su Tiempo* (Salamanca, 1977) 271; John Prager, "The Poor as the Starting Point for Vincentian Studies: A Liberation Hermeneutic" in *Vincentiana* 2 (1991), 140-145.

¹²But contrary to this approach, Henri Bremond, in his classical work *Histoire Littéraire du sentiment religieux en France depuis la fin des guerres de religion jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris, Bloud et Gay (1921-1933), Vol III, Chapter 4), writes: "Let us be on our guard, however, against taking the cause for the effect. It is not the love of his fellow-men which led him to sanctity; it is rather sanctity which rendered him really and efficaciously charitable; it is not the poor who gave him to God, but God, on the contrary, who gave him to the poor." Bremond's chapter can be found in *Letters of St. Vincent de Paul*, translated and edited by Joseph Leonard (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd, 1937) 1-30; cf., for the quotation cited here, 20-21.

¹³SV I, 284.

¹⁴SV IX, 606.

¹⁵Cf. José María López Maside, *Unión con Dios y Servicio de los Pobres — Experiencia y Doctrina en los Escritos de San Vicente de Paúl* (Rome: 1984); Carlo Braga, "La vita spirituale della 'Missione'" in *Vincentiana* 4 (1981) 293-305; John Prager, "Reflections on the Renewal of Vincentian Spirituality" in *Vincentiana* 5/6 (1981) 366-383; Józef Kapuściak, "Unità fra azione e preghiera e S. Vincenzo de' Paoli" in *Vincentiana* 1 (1983) 68-73.

Vincent as a Man of Action

A. *His Activities*

Few saints have been as active as Vincent de Paul. Even if one highlights only his principal accomplishments, the list is impressive.

In 1617, struck by the need to organize practical works of charity in Châtillon, he founded "the Charities" (later known as the Ladies of Charity and now called AIC). These spread rapidly throughout France and afterwards throughout the world, counting today more than 260,000 members. During his lifetime he wrote the statutes for numerous "Charities" that sprang into existence throughout France.

In 1625, he founded the Congregation of the Mission. By the time of his death, the Congregation had spread to Poland, Italy, Algeria, Madagascar, Ireland, Scotland, the Hebrides, and the Orkneys. During his lifetime the house at St. Lazare alone gave more than a thousand missions. He acted as Superior General of the Congregation until his death, holding regular council meetings, writing its rules, conducting general assemblies, and resolving a host of foundational questions like obtaining the approval of the Congregation by the Holy See, deciding whether the confreres should make vows, determining which ones should be pronounced and what should be their content.

In 1633, along with Louise de Marillac, he founded the Daughters of Charity. With Louise at his side, he acted as Superior General, guiding the frequent councils, drafting a rule, and working out the rather revolutionary juridical base that would make the Company such a powerful apostolic force in the years to come. In his lifetime, more than 60 houses sprang up in both France and Poland. The Company later became one of the largest congregations the Church had ever seen.

In the process of guiding the groups that he founded, Vincent carried on an enormous correspondence, writing more than 30,000 letters, of which only about 10% have been preserved. He gave frequent conferences to both the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters. Only a small number of these are extant, and even these are merely copiers' accounts of what he said. He also gave conferences to the Visitation nuns who had been entrusted to his care by Francis de Sales in 1622; none of these has been passed down to us.

From 1628 on he became more and more involved in the reform of the clergy, organizing retreats for ordinands, the Tuesday conferences, and retreats for priests. Abelly tells us that more than 12,000 ordinands made their retreat at St. Lazare. In the last 25 years of this life he took up the founding of seminaries for diocesan priests, a work he sometimes described as "almost equal"¹⁶ and at other times as "equal" to that of the missions.¹⁷ He established 20!

¹⁶CR XI, 12.

¹⁷SV V, 489; VII, 561.

In 1638, he took up the work of the foundlings, more than 300 of whom were abandoned each year on the streets of Paris. Eventually he assigned a number of Daughters of Charity to the work and had 13 houses built to receive the children. When this work was endangered in 1647, he saved it by making an eloquent appeal to the Ladies of Charity to regard the foundlings as their children.¹⁸

Beginning in 1639 Vincent began organizing campaigns for the relief of those suffering from war, plague, and famine. One of Vincent's assistants, Br. Mathieu Regnard, made 53 trips, crossing enemy lines in disguise, carrying money from Vincent for the relief of those in war zones.¹⁹

From 1643 to 1652 he served on the Council of Conscience, an elite administrative body that advised the king in regard to the selection of bishops. At the same time he was the friend and often the counsellor of many of the great spiritual leaders of the day.

In 1652, as poverty enveloped Paris, Vincent, at the age of 72, organized massive relief programs, providing soup twice a day for thousands of poor people at St. 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

So striking were Vincent's activities that the preacher at his funeral, Henri de Maupas du Tour, stated: "He just about transformed the face of the Church."²¹

B. Principles Grounding Those Activities

Many principles guided Vincent's activities, but two especially lay at their ground.²²

1. He listened to God's voice in events and people.

Many have pointed out the importance of events for Vincent. In fact, it is commonplace to talk about the "experience of Gannes-Folleville" and the "experience of Châtillon." His conversion is not narrated in terms of a dramatic experience of

¹⁸SV XIII, 801.

¹⁹Dodin, *op. cit.*, p. 45, states that Br. Mathieu carried 25 to 30 thousand *livres* a trip!

²⁰For many interesting details on St. 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).

²¹This text is cited by André Dodin in *St. Vincent de Paul et la charité*, *op. cit.*, 103: "Il a presque changé la face de l'Église." The text of de Maupas' funeral discourse is available on the CD-ROM, prepared by Claude Lautissier, containing various Vincentian writings.

²²Cf. Giuseppe L. Coluccia, *Spiritualità Vincenziana Spiritualità Dell'Azione* (Roma: M. Spada, 1978) 231-243; cf. also Antonio Gomes Pereira, "Espiritalidade da Ação" in *Semana de Estudos Vicentinos, CLAPVI* (Curitiba: Gráfica Vicentina Ltda., 1981) 215-233; John Ranasingh *St. Vincent de Paul and the Spirituality of Work* (Rome: Teresianum, 1983); J.-B. Boudignon *Saint Vincent de Paul, Model des Hommes d'Action et d'Oeuvres* (Paris, 1886); J. Herrera *Teología de la Acción y Mística de la Caridad* (Madrid, 1960).

grace occurring during prayer, but rather in terms of his realizing that God was speaking to him through tragic human situations: the miserable lot of the country poor, the abysmal education of the clergy, the abandoning of infants on the streets of Paris, the ravaging wars in the provinces.

Vincent also heard God's voice in persons. The peasant at Gannes, who made a startling deathbed confession to Vincent, became for him the voice of God calling him to found the Congregation of the Mission. The concerns expressed by the Bishop of Beauvais in 1628 were God's call to Vincent launching him on a lifetime of practical projects for the reform of the clergy.

2. *He followed providence step by step.*

"Grace has its moments" St. Vincent liked to say.²³ He was deeply convinced that God loves us, that he is father and mother²⁴ to us, and that he walks with us step by step.²⁵

There are few themes that Vincent talks about more frequently than providence. He tells Louise de Marillac in 1634: "Follow the order of providence. Oh! How good it is to let ourselves be guided by it!"²⁶ At times, speaking of following God's providence, he urges others to moderate their indiscreet zeal. He tells Philippe Le Vacher: "The good that God wishes to be done comes about almost by itself, without our thinking about it. That is the way the Congregation was born, that the missions and the retreats to ordinands began, that the Company of the Daughters of Charity came into being.... *Mon Dieu!* Monsieur, how I desire that you would moderate your ardor and weigh things maturely on the scale of the sanctuary before resolving them!"²⁷ But at other times, in the name of the same providence, he urges confreres to act. In 1655 he tells Etienne Blatiron, the superior in Rome: "Do not stop pursuing our business, with confidence that it is God's good pleasure... Success in matters like this is often due to the patience and vigilance that one exercises... The works of God have their moment. His providence does them then, and not sooner or later... Let us wait patiently, but let us act...."²⁸

St. Vincent sums up his esteem for God's providence in a lovely statement to Jean Barreau: "We cannot better assure our eternal happiness than by living and dying in the service of the poor, in the arms of providence, and with genuine renouncement of ourselves in order to follow Jesus Christ."²⁹

²³SV II, 453.

²⁴Cf., SV V, 534; VI, 444; VIII, 55, 256.

²⁵Cf., SV II, 226; VII, 216.

²⁶SV I, 241.

²⁷SV IV, 122-123.

²⁸SV V, 396.

²⁹SV III, 392.

Vincent as a contemplative

It is easy to forget that many of his contemporaries regarded Vincent as a contemplative. Abelly writes that "his spirit was continually attentive to the presence of God."³⁰ He adds that a priest who knew Vincent well recalled seeing him contemplating for hours on end a crucifix held in his hands. If one is tempted to doubt the objectivity of Abelly's account, it may be helpful to examine Vincent's own words which, especially in unguarded moments, give us a glimpse of his heart.

In a conference to the Daughters of Charity, he tells the sisters that while contemplation is a gift from God, it is the normal issue of the spiritual life. He states that we engage in mental prayer and affective prayer by our own choice, but that we engage in contemplation only when we are grasped by God. It is very clear from his conferences that he regarded some of the Daughters of Charity as contemplatives. He encouraged them to become other St. Teresa's.³¹ On July 24, 1660, when he spoke about the virtues of Louise de Marillac, he rejoiced at a sister's description of Louise: "As soon as she was alone, she was in a state of prayer."³²

The naturalness with which Vincent speaks about contemplation is an indication that he himself was at ease in this world. Sometimes the thoughts that he expresses spontaneously give the same indication. A tiny note, found in his own handwriting, states: "What then compares to the beauty of God, the source of all beauty and of the perfection of his creatures? Do not the flowers, the birds, the stars, the moon, and the sun borrow their attraction and their beauty from him?"³³ Once, having been in a room lined with mirrors and seeing the movement of a fly reflected everywhere, he commented: "If men have found a way to see everything that happens, even to the smallest movement of a tiny insect, how much more must we believe that we are always in the sight of the divine mirror of God's all-seeing vision."³⁴

Vincent is eloquent at times when he talks about how he sees God. In explaining the first chapter of the Common Rules to the members of the Congregation of the Mission on December 13, 1658, he muses: "Oh, if we had an eye sufficiently piercing to penetrate a little into the infinity of his excellence, O my God, O my brothers, what exalted sentiments of God should we not take away from it! We should say with St. Paul that eyes have not seen, nor ears heard, nor the mind of man conceived anything like it. God is an abyss of sweetness, sovereign and eternally glorious Being, an infinite Good embracing all that is good. Everything in him is incomprehensible."³⁵

³⁰Abelly, *op. cit.*, Book III, Chap. VI, 49.

³¹SV IX, 420-424.

³²SV X, 728.

³³SV XIII, 143.

³⁴SV XI, 409.

³⁵SV XII, 110.

In speaking to his community of priests and brothers just a year and a half before his death, Vincent states:

*The memory of the Divine Presence grows in the mind little by little and by his grace becomes habitual with us. We become, as it were, enlivened by this Divine Presence. My brothers, how many persons there are even in the world who almost never lose their sense of God's presence.*³⁶

A Contemporary Problem

In the period before Vatican II and the subsequent revision of our own Constitutions, many expressed a concern about the Congregation's becoming "religious" or "monastic." Today, our revised Constitutions make it very clear that, according to the oft-repeated teaching of St. Vincent, we are "secular"³⁷; our vows are "non-religious."³⁸ The recent *Instruction on Stability, Chastity, Poverty, and Obedience in the Congregation of the Mission* puts a similar emphasis on the secularity³⁹ of the Congregation and the non-religious nature of its vows.⁴⁰

In contrast to the past, the crucial problem at present is hardly a tendency toward monasticism. Now, more than three decades after Vatican II and the initial draft of our new Constitutions, a much more frequent temptation is hyperactivity and overwork. This problem was not unknown in St. Vincent's time. A Jesuit, who was working with the confreres, wrote to St. Vincent upon the death of Germain de Montevit: "Your men are flexible and docile about everything, except the advice they are given to take a little bit of rest. They believe that their bodies are not made of flesh, or that their life is supposed to last only a year."⁴¹

Two present-day factors aggravate the situation.

- In some parts of the world, particularly in Western Europe and the United States, the decline in vocations has resulted in fewer priests' trying to sustain long-existing works with the diminishing energies of advancing years. The seriousness of this situation led a North American bishop to state: "I cannot, and will not, ask our priests to do any more than they are presently doing in their

³⁶SV XII, 163-164.

³⁷C 3, § 2.

³⁸C 55 § 1.

³⁹Cf., Chapter I, III B.

⁴⁰Cf., Chapter VII, I.

⁴¹SV II, 24.

ministry. Most are terribly overworked and trying valiantly to serve impossible pastoral demands day after day."⁴²

- Not only in Western Europe and North America, but in many other areas of the world, society places great emphasis on immediate gratification. With rapid means of transportation and communication, the promise of instantaneous results continually entices us. In fact, we often get such results. Contemporary society moves along at a frenetic pace. Many business, many movements, many groups call out to us: "Don't miss the train – it is pulling out!" So we hurry to catch it. But we discover, often only by painful experience, that most of life's difficulties are not quickly resolved nor are its deepest values rapidly assimilated.

On Uniting Action and Contemplation as Vincentians

In spite of the problem described above, all of us have noted, with some joy, a renewed interest in spirituality today.⁴³ Some of its manifestations are wonderfully healthy. Others tend toward the bizarre.⁴⁴ But one thing is clear. There exists a hunger, "a profound and authentic desire of 20th century humanity for wholeness in the midst of fragmentation, for community in the face of isolation and loneliness, for liberating transcendence, for meaning in life, for values that endure."⁴⁵

Our members too yearn for wholeness, for meaning, for transcendence. The Congregation must try to satisfy this longing. I suggest that there is nothing more valuable that we can do for our candidates and our members than to hold up before their eyes (and our own!) a captivating vision; an ultimate concern that will help them to integrate life and give it away as a gift; a deep, vibrant, holistic, apostolic spirituality.

All genuine spirituality, both Christian and non-Christian, has a transcendent thrust. A contemporary theologian describes spirituality as "the experience of consciously striving to integrate one's life in terms not of isolation and self-absorption, but in self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives."⁴⁶ Almost all theologians agree on the main characteristics included in this definition: progressive, consciously pursued, personal integration, through self-transcendence, within and

⁴²Cardinal Roger Mahony, "Ways of Responding to the Priesthood Shortage" in *Origins* 28 (October 29, 1998; # 20) 360. There has been much recent writing on the need to provide priests with the opportunity to "retire with dignity." Cf. *America*, May 16, 1998 and September 26, 1998.

⁴³Cf. *Final Document*, General Assembly of 1998, I, 2.

⁴⁴Cf. Meredith B. McGuire, "Mapping Contemporary American Spirituality: A Sociological Perspective" in *Christian Spirituality Bulletin* (Vol. 5, No. 1; Spring 1997) 1-8; cf. also, John A. Coleman, S.J., "Exploding Spiritualities: Their Social Causes, Social Location and Social Divide" in *ibid.* 9-15.

⁴⁵Cf. Sandra Schneiders, "Spirituality in the Academy," in *Theological Studies* 50 (1989) 696.

⁴⁶Sandra Schneiders, "Spirituality in the Academy," in *Theological Studies* 50 (1989) 684; cf. also, 676-697; cf. also, by the same author, "Theology and Spirituality: Strangers, Rivals, or Partners?" in *Horizons* 13 (1986) 266; cf. also, Michael Downey, "Christian Spirituality: Changing Currents, Perspectives, Challenges" in *America* (Vol. 172; April 2, 1994) 8-12.

toward a horizon of ultimate concern. In the Christian context, of course, *the* driving force, *the* horizon of ultimate concern is God's love revealed in the person of Jesus.

Below I offer five foundation stones for a Vincentian apostolic spirituality that unites action and contemplation.

1. *Our Vincentian spirituality is deeply incarnational, rooted in the enfleshed humanity of Jesus.*

This seems so obvious, but there is nothing more important that can be said. One might surely ask: does not all Christian spirituality focus on the person of Jesus? It should. But it is very clear historically that apostolic societies have had a special role in calling and re-calling the Church to make the humanity of Jesus, his *enfleshedness*, the center.

Christocentrism was at the core of the spiritual renewal initiated by the founders of the original, revolutionary Societies of Apostolic Life, especially in the 17th century. Bérulle is famous for his abstract, mystical Christology, focusing on the states of the incarnation of Jesus, his adoration of the Father, his self-emptying.⁴⁷ Much more concretely, Vincent rallies priests, sisters, brothers, lay men and women to follow Christ the missionary, the servant, the evangelizer of the poor. John Eudes focuses on the heart of Jesus, brimming over with pastoral love. All of them captured the deepest sense of the gospels, which ring with this conviction: Jesus is the absolute center. "I am the way, the truth, and the life," Jesus says. "No one comes to the Father except through me."⁴⁸ "I am the vine."⁴⁹ "I am the gate."⁵⁰ "I am the shepherd."⁵¹ "I am the light."⁵² "I am the true bread come down from heaven. The one who feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood will live forever."⁵³ ⁵⁴

In a letter written on May 1, 1635 to his close companion Antoine Portail, Vincent expresses his focus clearly:

⁴⁷Raymond Deville, *L'École Française de Spiritualité* (Paris: Desclee, 1987) esp. 105ff.; *Bérulle and the French School*, edited with an introduction by William M. Thompson (New York: Paulist Press, 1989) esp. 35ff.; cf. also, Michel Dupuy, "Le Christ de Bérulle" in *Vincentiana* XXX (1986, No. 3-4) 240-252; Benito Martínez, "El Cristo de Santa Luisa" in *ibid.*, 280-309; Luigi Mezzadri, "Jésus-Christ, figure du Prêtre-Missionnaire, dans l'oeuvre de Monsieur Vincent" in *ibid.*, 323-356; Giuseppe Toscani, "Il Cristo di S. Vincenzo" in *ibid.*, 357-405; Yves Krumenacker, *L'École française de Spiritualité* (Paris: Cerf, 1998).

⁴⁸Jn 14:6.

⁴⁹Jn 15:6.

⁵⁰Jn 10:9.

⁵¹Jn 10:11.

⁵²Jn 8:12.

⁵³Jn 6:51.

⁵⁴As a prayer crystallizing this kind of spirituality, I have often been struck by the wonderful words attributed to the missionary, St. Patrick:

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

*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 like Jesus Christ, we must live like Jesus Christ.*⁵⁵

Different apostolic societies may focus on various aspects of Jesus' humanity – Christ the teacher, Christ the preacher, Christ the healer – but Jesus himself, fully enfleshed, is always the absolute center.

In short, the focus of a Vincentian apostolic spirituality must be the humanity of Jesus the missionary of the Father, the Evangelizer of the Poor – in his union with his Father, in his personal integrity, in his zeal for the mission that he received, in his deep human love especially for the most abandoned, in his desire to form other evangelizers, in his passion for the truth, in his ability to bridge the poles of anger and gentleness, in his hunger and thirst for justice. Jesus comes from the Father and goes to the Father. He is fully immersed in the mission he receives from the Father. He is united with the Father in contemplation, spending whole nights in prayer. He is united with his brothers and sisters, whose human flesh he shares, giving himself to them even to death.

2. *Our holiness, our being grasped by God, is intrinsically bound up with our apostolic mission.*

Let me immediately make some precisions.

First, we share this trait with many apostolic societies and with a number of other groups as well. All apostolic societies have this characteristic as a key element in their spirituality. It is especially through the apostolic mission defined by our constitutions,⁵⁶ through our contact with the most abandoned, that we seek to love and serve the Lord. The 25th chapter of Matthew's gospel is a pillar in our spirituality: "When I was hungry you gave me to eat. When I was thirsty you gave me to drink." When I was ignorant you took me into your school. When I was sick you healed me in your hospital. When I was a prisoner you came to visit me in jail. Of course, as this text suggests, the apostolates of various apostolic societies differ significantly from one another. They focus on preaching, teaching, health-care, seminary education, foreign missions, retreat work, human promotion, advocacy for justice, and probably many other objectives. But it is precisely through seeing and loving Christ in the person of those served that the members of apostolic societies seek genuine union with the Lord. For us Vincentians those we serve are described principally in articles 1-18 of our Constitutions and 1-12 of our Statutes.

⁵⁵SV I, 295.

⁵⁶Cf. Canon 731, § 1.

Secondly, today in an era when the Church proclaims again and again her preferential option for the poor, those relegated to the margins of society stand more and more at the center of the mission of the Church as a whole. Contemporary ecclesiology and spirituality accent seeing Christ in the poor and the poor in Christ, as did St. Vincent. Consequently, our Vincentian spirituality immerses us more and more deeply in the mission of the Church today.

Thirdly, in an era where the rights and dignity of the human person have come to be increasingly emphasized, we are conscious that in giving our lives to the service of the poor, we must take into account their own desires, their own hopes, their own values, and their own real needs. They themselves must become agents of their own human and spiritual promotion. So a contemporary Vincentian spirituality demands that in our contact with the poor we "reap before we sow," that we listen more than we speak, that we accompany more than we take charge, that we allow ourselves to be evangelized by those we serve.⁵⁷

3. *Our Vincentian prayer has its own particular dynamic, flowing from and leading to action.*

We are called to be contemplatives in action and apostles in prayer.⁵⁸ Like St. Vincent, the founders of almost all apostolic societies were incredibly active men and women. But were there any among them who were not also known by their contemporaries as persons of deep prayer?

Prayer and action go hand in hand in a healthy Vincentian spirituality. Divorced from action, prayer can turn escapist. It can lose itself in fantasy. It can create illusions of holiness. Conversely, service divorced from prayer can become shallow. It can have a "driven" quality to it. It can become an addiction, an intoxicating lure. It can so dominate a person's psychology that his or her sense of worth depends on being busy.

An apostolic spirituality is at its best when it holds prayer and action in tension with one another. The person who loves God "with the sweat of his brow and the strength of his arms"⁵⁹ knows how to distinguish between beautiful theoretical thoughts about an abstract God and real personal contact with the living Lord contemplated and served in his suffering people.

In our own spiritual tradition mental prayer plays an extremely important role. Few things received more emphasis in St. Vincent's conferences and writings. Speaking about mental prayer⁶⁰ to the missionaries, he states:

⁵⁷C 12, 3°.

⁵⁸C 42.

⁵⁹SV XI, 40.

⁶⁰Vincent's word here is *oraison*; cf. my article "Mental Prayer, Yesterday and Today: The Vincentian Tradition" in *He Hears the Cry of the Poor* (New York: New City Press, 1995) 78-79.

*Give me a man of prayer and he will be capable of everything. He may say with the apostle, "I can do all things in him who strengthens me." The Congregation will last as long as it faithfully carries out the practice of prayer, which is like an impregnable rampart shielding the missionaries from all manner of attack.*⁶¹

To encourage his sons and daughters to meditate, Vincent used many of the similes commonly found in the spiritual writers of his day. He tells them that prayer is for the soul what food is for the body.⁶² It is a "fountain of youth" by which we are invigorated.⁶³ It is a mirror in which we see all our blotches and begin to adorn ourselves in order to be pleasing to God.⁶⁴ It is refreshment in the midst of difficult daily work in the service of the poor.⁶⁵ He tells the missionaries that it is a sermon that we preach to ourselves.⁶⁶ It is a resource book where the preacher can find the eternal truths that he shares with God's people.⁶⁷ It is a gentle dew that refreshes the soul every morning, he tells the Daughters of Charity.⁶⁸

Vincent also had a deep appreciation for symbols.⁶⁹ He encouraged others to focus on the crucifix in order to meditate on the passion.⁷⁰ He recommended the use of images. He suggested books to aid in prayer.⁷¹ Though he recommended a method, he was quite free about its use.

One thing is very clear. Vincent felt that the vitality of the Congregation of the Mission depended on our fidelity to daily mental prayer. He minced no words about it: if we are unfaithful to it, he stated, the Company will disappear. It is my conviction that this is as true in our day as it was in St. Vincent's: faithful daily, meditative prayer is essential to the ongoing renewal of the Congregation.

⁶¹SV XI, 83.

⁶²SV IX, 416.

⁶³SV IX, 217.

⁶⁴SV IX, 417.

⁶⁵SV IX, 416.

⁶⁶SV XI, 84.

⁶⁷SV VII, 156.

⁶⁸SV IX, 402.

⁶⁹Vincent, of course, was also very concerned about liturgical prayer. He noted that priests often celebrated Mass badly and that they hardly knew how to hear confessions. As part of the retreats for ordinands, he prescribed that they receive instruction on celebrating the liturgy very well. But, within this positive context, he was still very much a man of his time. His emphasis, like that of his era, was on the exact observance of rubrics. There was little stress on liturgy as "communal celebration," with the active participation of all the faithful.

⁷⁰SV IX, 32, 217; X, 569; cf. also, IV, 139, 590; I, 134; cf. X, 569: "Is it not a good meditation to have the thought of the passion and death of Our Lord always in one's heart?"

⁷¹Among the latter, he was especially fond of the *Imitation of Christ*, Francis de Sales' *Introduction to a Devout Life* and *Treatise on the Love of God*, Busée's meditations, and Louis of Granada's *The Sinner's Guide*, *Memorial of the Christian Life*, and his *Catechism*, as well as Jean Souffrand's *L'Année Chrétienne*.

4. *Our growth in God's life also flows from the bonds of deep charity forged with our own brothers in the community.*

Here too, let me immediately make some precisions.

First, we are members of an apostolic *society*. Therefore, some form of common life is, by definition, an essential element in our identity.⁷² Though community life may take many different shapes in diverse cultures, an integral part of our basic spirituality is the commitment to build up a fellowship of faith and love *with* those who have pledged to pursue the same apostolic purpose. But if commitment to community is essential, then this must involve using clear, concrete means to foster it and sustain it. Especially important among these are healthy initial formation, well-structured ongoing formation, symbolic acts of initiation and incorporation, clearly defined times when the members pray together, share the Eucharist, eat together, relax in one another's company, and have fun together. Community life aims at forming deep bonds of charity among us. Few things are worse in community than a street angel who is a house devil. A genuine Vincentian spirituality involves each member's taking concrete steps toward building a supportive community that seeks to draw all toward the holiness of charity.

Secondly, our community life is *for the mission*. This is by no means to say that life together is unimportant. Not only is it important, it is essential. Moreover, one of the strongest lamentations that I hear today from young priests, brothers, and sisters is that they do not find the community support that they had been hoping for. Still, even as I emphasize the importance of community living and the need to create structures for sustaining it, let me add that, in apostolic societies, these structures should always preserve their flexibility. They should not be so flexible that they cave in, but they should be supple enough to allow us to respond to the urgent needs of those we serve. St. Vincent often used to express this concept to the Daughters of Charity by saying that they should be free to "leave God for God." If the poor arrive even during prayer, we should feel free to leave the conversation that we are having with the Lord in prayer in order to converse with the Lord in the person of the poor.

Thirdly, today we engage in participative community planning on a local level.⁷³ A key element in contemporary spirituality is fidelity to such plans. In the past, fidelity was often measured by observance of a universally legislated rule with an order of day that was much the same throughout the world. Today, fidelity can be measured by a member's observance of the covenant that he or she has made with the other members of the house. The covenant, of course, embraces not only our common commitment to an apostolic mission, but also our pledge to support one another in life together and in prayer.

⁷²*Constitutions* 3, 19-27; cf. also, Canons 731, § 1 and 740.

⁷³C 27; S 16.

5. *Our freedom to go wherever the Lord calls us demands from Vincentians simplicity of life, humility in listening, and detachment from whatever might hold us back.*

I will try to illustrate this in a number of ways.

Our Vincentian spirituality must involve availability and mobility.⁷⁴ Almost all apostolic societies had their origins in a need that cried out and that their founders heard. The societies were the advance troops going out to meet that need. With the obedience characteristic of the times, members went from place to place quickly, willingly, and joyfully. They often set out for far off countries with little hope of ever returning to their native lands. Jesus' call resounded in their ears: "Go into the whole world and preach the good news to every creature" (Mk 16:15). Today as the Church repeatedly calls us to a new evangelization – new in its ardor, new in its methods, new in its expression – availability and mobility are all the more important. This means that the Congregation must have the courage to relinquish works which others can carry on, even longstanding ones, in order to be free to meet more pressing needs. Individuals too must live simply, without multiplying personal "needs." Only then will they have the freedom to go wherever the Lord calls. The more attached one is to things, places, and particular persons, the harder it is to be mobile.

Secondly, like many Societies of Apostolic Life, the Congregation of the Mission is exempt from the jurisdiction of local ordinaries except in those matters expressly provided for in the law. This leaves room for great flexibility and creativity, particularly in regard to life together and government. It seems to me very important that we appropriate this liberty and use it creatively in pursuing our apostolic ends and in developing ways of deepening community life and prayer. Particularly in provinces which are in crisis or even appear to be dying, this liberty should move us to act with boldness, to experiment, to try new means for revivifying works that seem *in extremis*. But creativity comes not just from within. The "good ideas" we have are gifts from the Lord, usually mediated to us by those we serve, by our brothers and sisters in community, by the larger Church community, by contemporary society, by what we read, or by the Lord in prayer. It is crucial that we listen well to the many voices that surround us and that we be detached from our own favorite ideas.

Thirdly, in order to be truly free as Vincentians, we must embrace concrete forms of asceticism as an important element in our spirituality. A contemporary asceticism must be a "functional asceticism" to use Karl Rahner's phrase.⁷⁵ We live celibacy in order to be "free for the Lord," in order to go wherever in the world the Lord sends us as missionaries and in order to give ourselves single-mindedly to a life of union with the Lord in prayer and in the service of others, especially the poor. We use material goods in a new way, seeing them as an extension of our own persons. We share them with the poor and enter into solidarity with them by sharing their lot. We

⁷⁴C 12, 5°.

⁷⁵Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations* VIII, 208.

are truly free if we do not always *have to be* working, but are able to rest peacefully in the presence of the Lord. We must be willing to renounce anything that holds us back from these goals.

Fourthly, as an apostolic society, the Congregation shares in the liberty of the charismatic element in the Church. We do not belong to the Church's hierarchical structure. In fact, we enjoy considerable autonomy not only because we are exempt but also because a large number of the canons regulating the life of religious institutes do not apply to us. Much is to be determined freely by our own proper law. St. Vincent's famous words, as he sent out the first Daughters of Charity, ring with liberty:

They shall keep in mind that they are not in a religious order, since that state is not compatible with the duties of their vocation. They have:

- *for monastery only the houses of the sick and the place where the Superioress resides,*
- *for cell a rented room,*
- *for chapel the parish church,*
- *for cloister the streets of the city,*
- *for enclosure obedience, going only to the homes of the sick or places necessary for their service,*
- *for grill the fear of God,*
- *for veil holy modesty.*⁷⁶

Fifth, our prayer too should be characterized by the same simplicity, humility, and detachment. Listening lies at the heart of prayer, as does availability. The missionary longs to know where the Lord wants to send him and to hear what the Lord wants him to say. Matthew's gospel⁷⁷ warns us not to multiply words as we pray. The challenge in missionary prayer is to stand before the Lord with great detachment, saying simply: "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening."⁷⁸

A final word. I am convinced that nothing is more important for the Congregation of the Mission as we face the future than a profound spirituality that unites action and contemplation. Of course, the heightening of such a spirituality depends on all of us. The task we face as missionaries is to promote life, principally the life of the Spirit. Our greatest challenge in the Third Millennium will be to breathe out the Lord's Spirit so that it excites others, enlivens them, and helps them see the world with a compelling vision and live in it with practical love. The great temptation for the members of Societies of Apostolic Life like our own is to be so caught up in our works that we lose contact with the energizing vision, the driving force that animates those works. Of course our works are extremely important. We must love

⁷⁶SV X, 661.

⁷⁷Mt 6:7.

⁷⁸1 Sm 3:10.

God "with the sweat of our brows and the strength of our arms."⁷⁹ But our works must flow from our "experience of God, of his Spirit, of his freedom, bursting out of the very heart of human existence and *really experienced*."⁸⁰ In other words, our spirituality must be fully alive. A deeply incarnational love of Christ must *impel* us, as Paul puts it to the Corinthians.⁸¹ If we are really to *live* in the Third Millennium, then a profound spirituality must root us, so that all those whom we serve see that God is entering their lives through our ministry. Do we presence God? When we are laboring in the midst of the poor, do the needy sense that God is touching them? Do they recognize us as God-people? If the life of the Spirit is fully alive in us as the Third Millennium dawns, then the Congregation of the Mission will surely be a striking sign in the world that the Kingdom of God is at hand.

⁷⁹SV XI, 40.

⁸⁰Karl Rahner, "The Spirituality of the Church of the Future" in *Theological Investigations* XX, 149; cf. also, Theodore Wiesner "Experiencing God in the Poor" in *Vincentiana* 3 (1988) 328-336.

⁸¹2 Cor 5:14.