

Mission and Charity

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Introduction

I will begin by explaining the intent of the Organizing Commission in placing this conference at the beginning of the program for the Vincentian month. It is a question of building a framework that may be used to connect everything we hear and that we communicate to one another during these four weeks. I offer a picture frame in which the volumes and tones of the material will be drawn and painted by all of us in the context of the following days.

The participants in this Vincentian Month are the Provincial Directors of the Daughters of Charity, in other words, the 80 priests of the Congregation of the Mission, whose present ministry is this service to the Daughters of Charity in their respective provinces.

The history of the Congregation of the Mission and the Company of the Daughters of Charity has been interwoven in spiritual, apostolic and juridical bonds since the origin of both institutions. In almost four centuries of existence, each one has maintained its own identity and autonomy, and written beautiful pages collaboratively, in a book yet unfinished.

There are other Congregations, both masculine and feminine, in the Church who also have the same Founders, but I believe that none among them has the fraternal relationship that exists between the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity. In this, we are unique in consecrated life.

In addition to the Superior General as head of both Companies, I think we can affirm that the Provincial Directors are the persons who have most contributed to this mutual collaboration between the two Congregations. In order that this relationship continues in the future and in the best possible way, this month of formation has been organized.

The focus of this conference will be to begin with a historical perspective, then the present reality of collaboration, with a view to the future. This first

intervention will be completed in a few days when we talk about the mission of the Provincial Director.¹

1. A look at the beginning

If we return to the origin of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity, it is because we recognize the truth in the statement that says, “History is the teacher of life.” Knowledge of the past helps us understand and live the present with a view to the future.²

In the spiritual journey of St. Vincent, there was a progressive discovery of the union which exists between Mission and Charity and consequently, between the Congregation and the Daughters of Charity. Therefore, the title of this presentation. The experiences of Gannes, Folleville, and Châtillon, helped him discover the poor, who were dying of hunger because of their poverty and were condemned due to ignorance of the necessary truths for salvation. The successive foundations of the Confraternities, the Congregation of the Mission, and the Daughters of Charity are different responses to material and spiritual poverty.

These three foundations, seen as a whole, may be considered the beginning of a pastoral and social plan, to be realized through the collaboration of laity, clergy and consecrated women.

These three foundations are destined to have the same end: integral care of the poor, animated by the same spirit, by charity and fundamental humility. This same end and spirit is shared by those who intend to continue the mission of Christ and enables them to take on the same spirit and use the same means.

Focusing on the two Companies, the Founder considered them to be an incarnation of mission and charity: two dimensions of evangelization and humanization, of spiritual and corporal service of the poor, who have a hunger for the Word of God and a hunger for bread. In order to satisfy their dual hunger, the Congregation and the Daughters of Charity exist, “as two branches of the same tree and two hands of the same body.”

¹ There will be other presentations that will relate to and enrich this conference. I am referring to the conferences on the specific nature of the vows of the Daughters of Charity, the unique contribution of St. Vincent and St. Louise in the configuration of the identity and spirituality of the Company, (Fr. Benito Martínez), and the presentation by Sr. Wivine and Sr. Anne on the identity and spirituality of the Daughters of Charity as well as the “communications” of various sisters.

² For a more detailed study on this theme cf. J. Jamet, in *Vincent de Paül animador de la vida comunitaria* (Various authors), pp 267-279, Salamanca 1975; M. Lloret, “Comunicación a la Asamblea General de la Congregación de la Misión,” Rome, 1992; and Miguel Pérez Flores in a work that I have, but I do not know if it has been published

St. Vincent said to the missionaries that in coming to the Congregation they came not only to evangelize the poor but to assist them in their material needs as well. *“To do this is to evangelize in word and action and in the most perfect way, as done by our Lord.”*³ However, in practice, the missionaries prioritized the ministry of the word, while the Daughters of Charity, that of service. St. Vincent recognized and approved it. *“The Daughters of Charity have taken on the order of Providence as a means of doing with their hands what we cannot do with ours in serving the poor.”*⁴

With this conviction, the missionaries also serve the poor when they collaborate in the spiritual animation of the sisters. That is why, from the beginning, St. Vincent designated some missionaries to the care of the Daughters of Charity, and as the Superior General of the two Companies, he designated others to positions of authority, for example, Frs. Portail, (the first Director General), Lambert, and Alméras. In a conference on, “The Relation of the sisters of houses at a distance from superiors in Paris,” he says, *“The Superior of the Daughters of Charity is the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission or his deputy, and therefore he has spiritual jurisdiction over the entire Company and nobody else has, unless the Superior General gives it to him.”*⁵

But not all the missionaries shared the opinions and practices of the Founder. The Rules of the Congregation of the Mission prohibited them from ministering to religious. Based on this fact, Fr. de la Fosse sought to prove that the missionaries should not spend time attending to the sisters. St. Vincent refuted this argument and wrote saying, *“The Daughters of Charity are not religious. If we must direct them, it is according to the plan of God, for the birth of his little Company. God has asked this service of us, and you know, that God uses the same means to give birth to the being of things as to preserving them.”* And the logical conclusion that St. Vincent reaches is that *“we have an obligation to help the sisters advance in virtue so they may dedicate themselves to the exercise of charity.”*⁶

On another occasion, in anticipation of possible objections that could appear in the future, he confronted the missionaries with the following reasons: *“Did not the Son of God come to evangelize the poor? Yes. Did he not want some women to accompany him? Yes. Did he not direct them towards perfection and to the service of the poor? Yes. Well, then, if our Lord did all this for our instruction, are we not doing good in following him? Is it, then, contrary to his way of acting, to attend to these women so that they may assist the poor? Our Lord did*

³ Coste, Conferences to CMs, 608.

⁴ Coste, Correspondence, VIII, 278, Letter 3077.

⁵ Coste, Conferences to DCs, 1207. In the Council of 8 September 1655, St. Vincent affirmed that, “Mlle. LeGras is the head and the soul which animates the entire Company, and may direct the sisters along with the Superior General.”

⁶ Coste, Correspondence, VIII, 277, Letter 3077.

*not come into the world except to evangelize the poor and yet he directed a group of women. What a blessing to find ourselves in the same state as the Son of God, directing, as he did, women who serve him and serve the poor.”*⁷ For the Founder of both Companies that the missionaries devote themselves to the spiritual care of the Daughters of Charity is a logical consequence. That is why he places this ministry along side the missions to the people and the formation of the clergy; all three are different ways of living their vocation of service to the poor.

However, in this collaboration, St. Louise plays a fundamental role. When the Company received its first approbation on 20 November 1646, St. Vincent was named Superior General, but the Company remained under the Archbishop of Paris. St. Louise wrote to St. Vincent, *“Those terms which are so absolute about depending on the Archbishop will be prejudicial to us in the future, by allowing him the freedom to separate us from the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission. Is it not necessary that from our foundation, your Charity be given us as a perpetual director? In the name of God, Father, do not permit anything to happen that would leave room someday for separation of the Company from the direction that God has given us. Rest assured that it would immediately cease to be what it is.”*⁸ A year later, she again wrote to him, insisting on *“the necessity of having the Company remain always and successively under the direction that Divine Providence had given, not only for its spiritual but also for its material well-being. It would be better that the Company disappear completely rather than be under another direction.”*⁹ In the second approbation of 1655, St. Louise, in fact, succeeded in obtaining what she had intended. Someone has said that the Daughters of Charity are what St. Vincent desired and what St. Louise accomplished. The idea even crossed her mind that the two Companies should form one same institution.

That commitment of the Founders to unite the two Companies has an explanation. We know about St. Vincent’s insistence that the Daughters of Charity not be directed by religious. That could lead to the assimilation of certain elements of a religious state, such as, wanting to identify themselves with religious, which in that epoch, meant living in a cloister. If this occurred, as had happened with the Visitation nuns of St. Francis de Sales, *“goodbye to charity and the service of the poor.”*

There is another source of information that is very important and vital to explaining the intimate relationship which exists between the two Congregations. It is the union, integrity and dynamism which proceeds from being animated by

⁷ Coste, Conferences to CMs, 607; cf. Coste, Conferences to CMs, Repetition of Prayer 4 August 1658, 444-446.

⁸ Spiritual Writings, L130D, p.187.

⁹ Spiritual Writings, L199, p. 234.

the same spirit. One same spirit which blossoms primarily from the same way of following Christ, and inspired by the Holy Spirit through St. Vincent; one Christ, Evangelizer and Servant of the Poor, infinite charity and love which has been humbled. This Christ is the Rule of the Mission and of the Daughters of Charity. This is the Christ whom we contemplate in prayer, and translate to the same attitudes in the service of evangelization, and the care of the poor. One same spirit is expressed in virtues characteristic of both Companies.

St. Vincent communicated his faith and his experience, thus motivating the missionaries and the Daughters of Charity, to also take on the spirit of Jesus Christ. The conferences to each group were the principal instruments of those who made use of them. It would be interesting to study the doctrinal similarity of the conferences given to the priests and to the sisters. In the explanation that he gave of the Rules, vows, virtues, prayer and other spiritual and community practices, the similarity is palpable.

It is not only the teachings that are similar; St. Vincent frequently told the sisters: in our Congregation we do this or that, or he gave them examples of different confreres and brothers. The similarities of the vows of the two Companies, their secularity, their status of poverty are aspects which have all been well studied. It is not surprising that even today when the Vincentians speak to the sisters, the latter feel that we are giving them "homemade bread," and when others do the same in harmony with their spirituality, they say "This person seems to be a follower of St. Vincent."

2. After the Founders

On 6 June 1668, the Company obtained the pontifical approbation granted by Cardinal Vendôme, legate of Pope Clement IX, at the request of the first successor of St. Vincent, Fr. René Alméras and the third Superioress General of the Company, Sr. Mathurine Guérin. Through this approbation, the Company ceased being a "Confraternity" and became a secular community dependent on the Pope and not on the Bishops. These two Superiors General wrote the Common Rules of the Company published in 1672. In 1718, Fr. Jean Bonnet published the Statutes that specified the government of the Company, the vows, elections, admission to the Company, the various offices, and so on. And in what concerns the form of government, the Statutes state that the Company is governed by the Superioress General with the Superior General of the Mission.

Fr. Henin wrote the Instruction on the Vows which would be approved and published by the Superior General, Fr. Nicolas Pierron in 1701. This catechism explained to the sisters the obligations they were undertaking in making vows, notably obedience to the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission.

From 1711 to 1736, Fr. Jean Bonnet governed the two companies. Through his efforts the rules proper to the Company were developed: canonical and regular visitations, assemblies every six years to elect a Superioress General, regulations concerning the Director General, Assistant General, Treasurer General, Secretary General and the administration of the goods of the Company.

Throughout the 19th century and up to the time of Vatican Council I, the Company of the Daughters of Charity was the target of many bishops who tried to remove the sisters from the authority of the Superior General, to have them become religious, determine their confessors, do away with the canonical visitations made by the Congregation of the Mission, dispose of the goods of the Company, and so on.

It is in the 20th century that the authority of the Superior General over the Company of the Daughters of Charity was cleared up and strengthened thanks to the Canon Law of 1917 and the evolution of the rule proper to the Company. On 17 October 1946, Pope Pius XII signed the Decree that confirmed this authority as well as being exempt from the bishops. The same thing was granted in approving on 1 June 1954 the first Constitutions adapted to the Code of Canon Law. These first Constitutions had a juridical and religious tone but from another point of view they clarified the fundamental articles.

3. Vatican Council II to today

The greatest expansion of the two Companies took place between the 19th and 20th centuries up until the 1970s. During this time, collaboration between the two Companies expanded in every direction.

The practice followed by our Founders frequently consisted of sending a new community of Daughters of Charity where the Congregation of the Mission was already present or vice versa.¹⁰ The same continues in our day. The origin of many current provinces or the presence of communities in certain places are due to the calls heard by the confreres or sisters already present. Mutual support to one or the other community given during consolidations as well as other difficult circumstances has been exemplary on more than one occasion.

Vatican Council II asked all Congregations to revise their Constitutions. Pope Paul VI, as well as the Sacred Congregation for Religious, by two edicts in 1967 formulated the applicable norms for this revision; this introduced the General Assemblies as the legislative power and highest governing body (previously the Assemblies were only convoked to elect a Superioress General) and added Provincial and Domestic Assemblies. So, in the elaboration of the regulations for these three types of Assemblies and the successive editing of the

¹⁰ Cf. Coste, Conferences to DCs May 1658, p.1049 and 26 August 1658, p. 1121.

new Constitutions (1968, 1974, 1980), the Congregation of the Mission collaborated with the Daughters of Charity in providing them with Vincentians who were experts in Canon Law and Vincentian Doctrine. The present Constitutions were approved on 2 February 1983. They were the result of 12 years of reflection and work of the entire Company, formulated in a model text that perfectly unites maintaining fidelity to the origins and giving attention to the signs of the times. These Constitutions establish the principles and criteria on which the relationship of the Company and the Congregation of the Mission relies on today. We can categorize them on four levels:

a) Government

Faithful to the desires of the Founders, the Company has, as Superior General, the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission who enjoys executive and juridical powers. His mission, above all, consists in assisting the Daughters of Charity in maintaining their identity and keeping alive the spirit of St. Vincent. To achieve this he uses the means he feels are most timely: writings, visitations, conferences.... The Constitutions especially entrust him with all matters concerning the vows; he presides at the General Council and the General Assembly; he provides the legal interpretation of the Constitutions.¹¹ He names the Director General,¹² the Provincial Directors,¹³ the Visitatrixes,¹⁴ Provincial Councillors¹⁵ and confirms the nominations of the Treasurer General,¹⁶ the Provincial Treasurers¹⁷ and Sister Servants.¹⁸

It is from the authority of the Superior General that other members of the Congregation of the Mission such as the Director General and the Provincial Directors derive their authority.

The fact of exercising this authority as the head of two Companies does not make one dependent on the other. The Congregation of the Mission is not the masculine branch of the Company, neither is the Company the feminine branch of the Congregation of the Mission. Each has its own Constitutions that establish its form of governance.

That of the Daughters of Charity states: *“The Superioress General, assisted by the General Council, exercises the immediate government of the Company.”*¹⁹ Constant communication between the two Superiors General allows governance

¹¹ C. 3.27 and 1.14.

¹² C. 3.28.

¹³ C. 3.38.

¹⁴ C. 3.36.

¹⁵ C. 3.39.

¹⁶ C. 3.32.

¹⁷ C. 3.40.

¹⁸ C. 3.45 and S. 35.

¹⁹ C. 1.15; cf. 3.29.

to be exercised without interference nor special difficulties. The distinct personalities of each give a different style to this joint governance. Similar relationships must take place at other levels of governance by the Congregation of the Mission: Director General and the Provincial Directors. I will not stop on this last aspect for we will talk about it specifically the day that I present the role of the Provincial Director. But, it must be stated that on the juridical level both the Superior General, as well as the Director General and the Provincial Directors, have a function of governance – that given them by the particular law of the Company – and which does not limit them to being spiritual directors or counselors. It must be recognized and accepted that the assignments and manner of exercising authority at these levels of governance have evolved, reaffirming more and more its spiritual and pastoral aspects. But the Constitutions and Statutes continue to entrust and ask some confreres for collaboration in government that, while they remain in these positions, they must accept and not neglect.

b) Spiritual level

It is at this level – united with the pastoral level – that there exists and can be perceived the greatest amount of collaboration between the two Companies. Statistics done on this aspect show that – in addition to the Superior General, the Director General and the Provincial Directors – almost one-third of the members of the Congregation of the Mission have a ministry working closely with the sisters. These ministries are varied: annual and monthly retreats, quarterly visits, confessions, spiritual direction, formation collaboration, chaplains, and so on. This collaboration is generally established by common agreement between the Visitatrix, Director and the Sister Servants on one side and the Visitors, local Superiors, and confreres on the other. Thus possible conflicts that could arise are avoided. The Constitutions of the Company state: *Spiritual direction is an effective means of growing in the imitation of Christ. The Daughters of Charity seek that direction preferably from the priests of the Congregation of the Mission, who are in a position to help them fulfill their Vincentian vocation.*²⁰ And Statute 23 affirms: *“The advice of competent persons is sought at the various stages of formation. For spiritual and Vincentian guidance, the priests of the Congregation of the Mission are consulted as far as possible.”*

Moreover, the Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission also state: *“Since the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity share a common heritage, members should willingly give them assistance when asked, especially in the matter of retreats and spiritual direction. They should also show a brotherly spirit of cooperation in those works which have been undertaken together.”*²¹

²⁰ C 2.13 § 2.

²¹ C. 17.

The majority of annual retreats, around 500, given to the Daughters of Charity, are confided to Priests of the Mission. And in areas where there is not a confrere to direct the retreat, it is due more to a lack of confreres than availability. In general, the sisters appreciate this collaboration even if some prefer other modalities. It is for this reason, that the last General Assembly approved this proposition: *“They make an eight-day retreat, determined by the norms established in each province.”* Therefore, each province determines the most advantageous method for attaining the purpose of the practice of annual retreats.

Principally, within the stages of initial formation, the sisters are advised of the practice of spiritual direction with a preference for priests of the Congregation of the Mission. It is this area that there are the most difficulties, either because there are fewer confreres, or because this ministry is not attractive to the confreres or because they do not feel sufficiently prepared to provide this service to the sisters. However, numerous sisters occasionally or at particular times have recourse to the advice of confreres.

This collaboration, at the spiritual level, requires that the priests respect and encourage the Identity of the Company. For this they must know the writings of the Founders, the Constitutions and Statutes of the Daughters of Charity, the *Instruction on the Vows*, the documents derived from each General Assembly, and the *Echoes of the Company*. One call to attention: At present there is much written on religious life. If we do not know what to choose from among all that is available, what is in keeping with the Identity of the Daughters of Charity, we risk having them become “religious.” If the sisters consider that we are more capable of assisting them in remaining faithful to their own charism it is because they feel we know the charism.

c) Pastoral level

Pastoral collaboration between the two Companies is very diverse in methodology and well as intensity. It is not regulated by norms but depends on the country, the works, the number of members, the possibilities and the personal characteristics. Regarding the sisters, there is excellent collaboration on the catechetical level, liturgical celebrations, pastoral care of the sick and elderly, dispensaries, child care and educational centers, direction of lay Vincentian groups, youth ministry and vocations. Special emphasis is given to today’s collaboration in Popular Missions and also within various interprovincial commissions: teaching, youth ministry and vocation ministry.

d) Formation level

In general, the sisters feel that the confreres are more qualified in the area of formation. That is why today they request the collaboration of the confreres with greater insistence.

In several countries where the Congregation of the Mission and the Company have various provinces, there is a combined commission composed of Visitors, Visitatrices, and Directors. The success of this commission varies, as well as the frequency with which it meets. The most frequent is that of interprovincial collaboration in formation, as well as other affairs concerning the two Companies.

The Visitatrixes of Latin America have begun a center of interprovincial formation for the sisters, headquartered in Bogota, Columbia. This depends on the assistance of the Latin American Confederation of Vincentian Provinces of the Congregation of the Mission (CLAPVI) and the Daughters of Charity. This organization furthers collaboration in common pastoral projects and the formation of missionaries, sisters and lay Vincentians. A similar project is planned by the priests and sisters in the Philippines for the continent of Asia. In Spain, there have been 25 Vincentian Study Weeks in Salamanca; a great number of priests, sisters and lay people have participated in them. There are also courses of Vincentian studies for sisters on three levels: an initial course, an intermediate course and an advanced course. The confreres also participate in this last level which lasts for one month. Both for the study weeks or the courses, most of the speakers belong to the Vincentian Family. The publisher CEME has been the best means of spreading Vincentian teaching to Spanish-speaking countries for around 30 years. For this reason, it is the best means of formation of members of the two Companies.

The impetus that our Superior General gives to the Vincentian Family, in the broadest sense of the term, opens new possibilities of collaboration, which will probably be even more useful. Already its fruits are being seen by a greater knowledge and proximity of the different branches of the Vincentian tree at the levels of spiritual direction and formation. But without a doubt, a greater collaboration among all forces will have as a result the possibility of undertaking common works for the service of the poor, works which, without this collaboration, would be impossible. The international secretariats of the Vincentian Marian Youth and MISEVI are two other reasons and motivations for hope in this collaboration.

4. Leave the present to fix your sights on the future

We have just briefly walked through about four centuries of collaboration between the two Companies, united by one same founder and spirit. We have

noted four levels where this collaboration was concretized and manifested. What evaluation can we make today of this long history?

Given that there are both lights and shadows, I believe the result is largely positive for the two Companies. Maybe, however, we can note some difficulties: an excessive centralism and authoritarianism, sometimes interference on the part of certain Superiors General who have not always respected the autonomy of the Company; or of some Visitors who, up until 1955, were also the Directors of the sisters in their respective provinces, or Directors deciding on nominations and destination of the sisters. It is also from the level of authority that we have defended, in certain instances, the juridical status of the Company, its secularity, its exemption, and so on. Finally, it is above all by spiritual direction that we have contributed to the maintenance of unity in the Company, despite its expansion over the five continents.

If all the sisters do not question the authority of the Superior General or of the Directors with respect to the juridical and governmental aspects, there could be some who judge the presence of the missionary priests at three levels of government to be anachronous. Certainly the Company is in a unique situation at the heart of consecrated life, a situation that other congregations do not understand and even less those who live in cultural contexts that are very marked by feminism. But this tendency is not found among the Daughters of Charity. If it were that way the sisters would have changed their proper rule since they have the possibility of doing so at each General Assembly. Some sisters suggest that they participate in the nomination of the Superior General not necessarily by vote but by something similar to the consultations that are used for the nomination of the Director General or Provincial Director.

It is certain that none of these opinions has weakened the respect and esteem towards the Superior General and for us who are his representatives before the Company and the provinces. However, one must remember that exercising a shared and complementary authority, while respecting autonomy, is not always easy. But our long history shows that this is possible and has been advantageous.

At the spiritual level, the sisters recognize the help received from the missionaries to maintain fidelity to the spirit. In their Constitutions and Statutes, they continue to consider us to be the most capable of encouraging them in fidelity to their vocation. In this sense they demand from us a greater formation comprised of a better knowledge of their identity and their spirituality. They desire that the missionaries have a better preparation, be available for spiritual direction and offer them a greater possibility of receiving the sacrament of Reconciliation more frequently.

At the pastoral level it must be said that the sisters have been and are one of the columns which supports many of the pastoral projects of the Congregation of the Mission. In certain cases they reproach us for our lack of trust in them and excessive authoritarianism and paternalism. *Vita Consecrata* expresses the desire that the new awareness that women have of themselves and their just demands help men to revise their mental perceptions.²²

With regard to the level of formation, more particularly that which deals with Vincentian Formation, the sisters acknowledge that they receive an irreplaceable contribution from the missionaries, especially experts on Vincentian teaching, as well as a thrust that enables them to explore and deepen a territory that, for centuries, was the exclusive privilege of the Congregation of the Mission.

Conclusion

In the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, John Paul II recalled the irreplaceable mission that consecrated life continues to have today in the Church and in the world. At the same time he stressed the necessity for each one of the branches of this tree of consecrated life to be faithful to its identity, to its origins and its sacred traditions.

A will and a tradition that go back to the Founders are still present in the person of the Superior General of the two Companies. From this authority of the Superior General fundamentally flows the juridical and spiritual bonds that have existed and still exist between the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity. The bonds are developed and concretized in pastoral collaboration, formation, etc. To deny or forget this history would render us incapable of understanding that which characterizes the mutual relationship of the two Companies. To break with this history would be an impoverishment for one as well as the other and, without a doubt, for the mission confided to the two Companies to serve the poor.

It is probable, since this has been the case up to the present, that changes will continue to evolve concerning the manner of understanding, exercising and expressing this unity and collaboration, accentuating the spirituality, formation or the apostolate. The thrust that the Superiors General are giving to the Vincentian Family opens up new horizons. But we would not be consistent if this impetus brought to the entire Vincentian Family became a detriment to the support and collaboration that has always existed between us, that we consider and have always been considered to be the two most important branches of the Vincentian tree.

²² VC, 57a.

Throughout this conference, the help and collaboration brought by the Congregation of the Mission to the Company have been stressed more than not. This is very understandable given that it is a member of the Congregation that has just spoken to you. That is why I am suggesting that it be a Daughter of Charity who continues this theme as viewed from another perspective. If she notices that the influence and collaboration of the Company toward the Congregation of the Mission was insufficient, personally I believe that in the future it would be necessary to rectify this deficit. We, the missionaries, also need to be energized and enriched but the sisters. Many recognize this already. Often I read in provincial newsletters the sisters' words of gratitude addressed to the Provincial Directors who are completing their terms of office. The Directors always respond by recognizing that they have received from the sisters more than they have given. One confrere, who just began the mission in Central Africa wrote me these words: "What would we do without the help of the sisters!"

The Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity have their own identity and autonomy. That which unites them is a common purpose and spirit. We are the heirs of a secular history of fraternal collaboration. In this history book there are beautiful, unforgettable pages. We must continue to add similar pages.

I said at the beginning of my presentation that this conference would be the backdrop and frame for all that we would experience together during this month of formation. I will conclude by saying that in the present and in the future, the Provincial Director is the member of the Congregation of the Mission who can best enliven and strengthen this unity and collaboration between the two Companies, and not only because of what is involved in his ministry at the level of government, spirituality, ministry and formation, but also because it is the path that can facilitate this everyday help and mutual collaboration between the members of the two Companies on a two-way road. That is what the Director's *Directory* recognizes and demands.²³ It is one of the objectives of this Vincentian Month for Provincial Directors.

We owe these bonds of collaboration and proximity to the struggle led by St. Louise to attain this end. I conclude with a reflection and personal experience that she passed on to us: "*On the octave of the Feast of Corpus Christi, I adored the Blessed Sacrament in the chapel of our venerable Fathers. I begged Our Lord, by the loving union of the Word with man, that both communities might be eternally united to him; that we might remain forever united to the Roman Apostolic Hierarchy by means of the close union of each member of our communities with the poor, in conformity to the Will of God....*"²⁴

²³ Cf. 70-71.

²⁴ *Spiritual Writings*, A.21B, p. 732.

(Translation: Translation Center – Daughters of Charity, Paris)