

FEATURE

Solidarity, Union, and the New Evangelization

Economic Solidarity

An Ongoing Challenge for the Congregation of the Mission

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We have often discussed this theme together. Recently, convinced of its importance, we decided to author this article jointly. It sketches a vision which we judge to be crucial for the future vitality of the worldwide Congregation of the Mission and it offers practical steps toward making that vision a reality.

Today people often talk about globalization, weighing its positive and negative aspects. But, no matter how one assesses its pros and cons, there is no escaping globalization as a reality. As communication and transportation have become more and more rapid, it has become a part of life. A recession in Europe and the United States affects billions of people on all continents. Combat in Iraq and Afghanistan creates waves that break on every shore. A change in the price of oil in Saudi Arabia or Venezuela causes rising gasoline prices worldwide.

For us as members of the Congregation of the Mission, globalization is one of the signs of the times which call the Congregation to “a continual state of renewal”¹. We are more and more conscious that, while the Congregation is divided into provinces, it is international. Today too, we acknowledge increasingly that we are part of a larger Vincentian Family, which is part of a universal Church that exists as a leaven within a global human community.

¹ *Constitutions*, 2.

The theme of this article is Economic Solidarity². After some general introductory considerations, it will focus only the Congregation of the Mission, though, as we trust will be evident, these reflections are applicable to other congregations and to the Church as a whole. The article will offer: 1) some background about solidarity, 2) a description of a number of initiatives within the Congregation to promote economic solidarity, and 3) ten possibilities for the future.

I.

BACKGROUND

1. An ancient theme in a new context

While the language of solidarity is new, the theme itself has been central to Christianity since Jesus himself. In the limited space of this article, it is impossible to develop this point at length, even from the limited point of view of economic solidarity.

To put it briefly, the Book of the Acts describes a community where the members, like Jesus and his disciples³, hold all things in common⁴. The Fathers of the Church continually evoked the need for solidarity, especially with the poor. St. Basil, in particular, attacked the theme courageously in his homilies. He states that anyone who is eager to love his neighbor as himself, in accordance with God's commandment, "must possess no more than his neighbor"⁵. During a time of famine, he exhorted the faithful with passionate words "not to be crueler than beasts... by taking over what people possess in common or by grabbing what belongs to all"⁶.

² As this article was being completed, Cardinal Peter Turkson, President of the Pontifical Council for Peace and Justice, stated publicly that he might need to change the way he talks about the Church's social teaching, since the Pontifical Council for Peace and Justice has been surprised to find that terms commonly used in church documents are misunderstood or misinterpreted "in certain circles". He said, for instance, that the popes' teachings on the theme of "social justice" have sometimes been mistakenly connected to "socialism" and "communism". As a result, he indicated, the popes are mistakenly seen as promoting socialist or big-government solutions to social problems. In that context, he noted that the council has also learned that words like "social" and "solidarity" are dismissed by some persons for their perceived connection with communist regimes such as the Soviet Union.

³ Cf. John 13:29.

⁴ Acts 2:42 and 4:34.

⁵ *Hom. in divites*: PG 31, 281b.

⁶ *Hom. tempore famis*: PG 31, 325a.

St. Vincent was quite aware of this theme. He tells the members of the Congregation that, after the example of the first Christians, all our goods are common property⁷ and that no one should use anything as if it were his own⁸. The Congregation's Fundamental Statute on Poverty (1659) spells out in detail how the Vincentian vow of poverty is to be lived. The General Assembly of 1980, interpreting that document for today, emphasizes once again "the communal dimension of our poverty"⁹. Following suit, our 1984 Constitutions state that we live within "a true community of goods" and "hold all our goods in common"¹⁰.

2. Solidarity in the writings of John Paul II

Echoing themes from Vatican II¹¹ and from Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio*¹², Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* developed the topic of solidarity at length. The pope stated that solidarity should be the Christian response to increasing interdependence in the world: "This then (solidarity) is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a *firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good*; that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all"¹³.

John Paul asked us to look beneath poverty to examine its roots, especially the decisions of human beings that flow from "real forms of idolatry". He expresses a special concern about the "all-consuming desire for profit" and "the thirst for power, with the intention of imposing one's will upon others". It is "the concrete acts of individuals [which] introduce these [unjust] structures, consolidate them and make them difficult to remove"¹⁴.

He calls these unjust structures "structures of violence" that bring suffering and death to the poor. These become embodied in unjust laws, power-based economic relationships, the arms trade, inequitable treaties, artificial boundaries, oppressive governments, and numerous

⁷ *Common Rules*, III, 3; henceforth CR.

⁸ CR III, 5.

⁹ 36th General Assembly of the CM (1980), "Interpretation of the Fundamental Statute on Poverty", (A) 5.

¹⁰ Cf. C 32; 25, 4^o; 148, 149, 154.

¹¹ Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 9, 26, 38, 42, 54, 68, 84, 86, and especially 90-91.

¹² Cf. *Populorum Progressio*, 65.

¹³ *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, December 30, 1987, 38.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 36-37.

other more subtle obstacles to harmonious societal relationships. Such unjust societal structures keep the poor poor.

To respond to these structures, John Paul II urges that solidarity be built on national and international levels as well as on the individual level¹⁵.

In his later years, John Paul became acutely aware of the process of globalization and the unprecedented growth in telecommunications and economic and financial connections within the global community. He saw the possibilities for genuine communication that globalization was bringing, but he was also aware of its many dangers, especially the increasing inequality between the rich and the poor. "The challenge", he wrote, "is to ensure a globalization in solidarity, a globalization without marginalization"¹⁶.

3. Solidarity in the writing of Benedict XVI

Benedict XVI returned to this theme repeatedly and forcefully in *Caritas in Veritate*. Speaking of economic solidarity, he wrote: "Through support for economically poor countries by means of financial plans inspired by solidarity – so that these countries can take steps to satisfy their own citizens' demand for consumer goods and for development – not only can true economic growth be generated, but a contribution can be made towards sustaining the productive capacities of rich countries that risk being compromised by the crisis"¹⁷.

He emphasizes the need for solidarity within the Church: "*Feed the hungry* (cf. Mt 25:35.37.42) is an ethical imperative for the universal Church, as she responds to the teachings of her Founder, the Lord Jesus, concerning solidarity and the sharing of goods"¹⁸. Referring to the writings of John Paul II, he states: "In the global era, economic activity cannot prescind from gratuitousness, which fosters and disseminates solidarity and responsibility for justice and the common good among the different economic players. It is clearly a specific and profound form of economic democracy. Solidarity is first and foremost a sense of responsibility on the part of everyone with regard to everyone"¹⁹.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁶ JOHN PAUL II, *Peace Message* (January 1, 1998), 3.

¹⁷ *Caritas in Veritate*, June 29, 2009, 27; cf. also 11, 13, 19, 21, 25, 28, 35, 36, 38, 39, 41, 42, 43, 44, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 53, 54, 58, 59, 60, 61, 67, 73, 78.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

4. Solidarity in the Congregation of the Mission

By promoting worldwide solidarity in our own life and works, the Congregation is attempting to foster the positive aspects of globalization within our life as a community, even as we teach and preach the social teaching of the Church.

In recent years the Congregation has been focusing on various aspects of solidarity:

- Solidarity in Mission
- Solidarity in Personnel
- Solidarity in Common Life
- Solidarity in Spirituality and Prayer
- Solidarity in Economic Resources

Much has already happened in this regard. Actually, the process began a good while ago, before the word *solidarity* became popular. The Constitutions and Statutes of 1984 offered a renewed focus on our common mission to the poorest of the poor²⁰. They called confreres to be willing to go anywhere in the world²¹. They asked Provinces to assist one another mutually in foreign missions²². They recognized the unequal distribution of the world's goods²³ and called Provinces to share their temporal goods with one another so that those who have more help those in need²⁴. Subsequent General Assemblies repeated these same themes.

Over the last two decades, there has been increasing solidarity in *mission*, as is evident in older missions like Madagascar, where a number of provinces collaborate, and in the new international missions like the Solomon Islands, where several provinces staff the seminary.

Worldwide, there has also been greater solidarity in *personnel*, with many confreres serving in provinces other than their own, particularly in formation and in the foreign missions, but also in many other works. A number of provinces have confreres working in many other countries.

Our solidarity in mission has made new demands on us in regard to *common life*²⁵, since, increasingly, confreres from different cultures

²⁰ C 1, 2°.

²¹ C 12, 5°.

²² S 5, 1°.

²³ C 12, 2°.

²⁴ C 152, § 1.

²⁵ The document *Fraternal Life in Community* (25) states: "Thus community becomes a 'Schola Amoris', a School of Love, for young people and for adults

and languages are living side by side. One day at table in Paris a few years ago, we noticed that all eight of us were from different countries. Among us, we counted 24 languages which we used in our work.

In recent years, too, the Congregation has been promoting greater solidarity in regard to our *spirituality and prayer*²⁶. Formators on the different continents now meet regularly. Workshops are offered on the five virtues, the four vows, and other aspects of our spirituality. CIF (the International Center of Formation) has brought together confreres from a wide variety of cultural settings to live together, pray together, and study together, focusing especially on the Constitutions. Many of the sources of our spirituality, especially the writings of St. Vincent, are now translated into various languages and are therefore available to confreres throughout the world.

II.

INITIATIVES TOWARD ECONOMIC SOLIDARITY

Over the last sixteen years, with the help of the Franz Foundation, the Congregation has taken some very significant steps in the direction of economic solidarity. One of the goals of the Franz Foundation, which Fr. Lou Franz has talked about at CIF, is to help bring about a “relative, not absolute, economic equality” among the provinces, so that all “will have sufficient funds to address the urgent needs of the poor in their geographic areas”. Fr. Franz added: “...in a world more and more concerned with the vast gulf that separates the haves from the have-nots, this disparity needs to be addressed if the Congregation is to become a prophetic witness... Sharing one’s money gives a credibility to one’s actions that is unmistakable”.

Over the past year, the Franz Foundation and the Congregation of the Mission have been formulating ways in which their relationship might be not just that of donor and receiver, but more and more a partnership to assist the Superior General in fostering economic solidarity among the provinces of the Congregation.

A striking sign of the times within the Congregation of the Mission is that some provinces with diminishing personnel have significant economic means, while others with increasing personnel have few financial resources. By fostering economic solidarity among ourselves,

– a school in which all learn to love God, to love the brothers and sisters with whom they live, and to love humanity, which is in great need of God’s mercy and of fraternal solidarity”.

²⁶ Likewise, *Fraternal Life in Community* (16) speaks of “fraternal solidarity in prayer”.

the Congregation, which encourages us to preach and teach the social doctrine of the Church and its preferential option for the poor²⁷, attempts to “practice what it preaches”.

During a well-received talk given in Mexico at the 2007 gathering of all the Visitors, the Treasurer General at that time, Fr. John Gouldrick, spoke of an overall plan for economic solidarity in the Congregation that has a vision, goals and strategies²⁸.

He describes the vision in this way: “That those provinces with minimal income to meet their expenses might be able to stabilize their financial resources in the near future”. Within that vision, he delineates three goals. First, the plan aims at strengthening the financial position of provinces that are struggling financially. Second, “the plan seeks to enable provinces to undertake capital improvements to support their mission”, including various small or large projects that go beyond ordinary expenses; e.g., building a novitiate or obtaining computers for a school. Finally, the third goal is “securing long-term financial stability in these provinces”.

Over the last two decades, a number of strategies for achieving those three goals have been developed. Below, we will describe those mentioned by Fr. Gouldrick, plus a number of others.

1. IMF (International Mission Fund): 2000 and IMF: 2004

In 1993, the Franz Foundation became aware that the Superior General lacked the resources needed to assist poorer provinces which were appealing for help and to respond to requests to begin new international missions among the poorest of the poor. It offered to aid him. Conversations between the General Curia and the Franz Foundation led to the setting up of a fund, known as IMF: 2000. The Foundation, in its offer to help create this fund, laid down a condition; namely, it asked the General Curia to raise the same amount of money that the Foundation was offering; that is, it offered a “matching grant”. The Superior General appealed to a number of provinces to help him gather funds for the “match”. The response was very generous. Initial donations from the five Provinces of the United States, followed by donations from provinces in Europe, Asia, and Latin America, enabled the Curia to set up, over two five-year periods, not just one, but two endowment

²⁷ Of course, this issue is much wider than the Congregation of the Mission. For some interesting analogous considerations, cf. THOMAS J. GREEN, “Shepherding the Patrimony of the Poor: Diocesan and Parish Structures of Financial Administration”, *The Jurist* 56 (1997), 706-734.

²⁸ JOHN GOULDRICK, “Solidarity in the Congregation, Our Efforts at Economic Collaboration”, *Vincentiana* 51 (January-April 2008), 35-40.

funds. Today, IMF: 2000 and IMF: 2004 have a market value of more than \$14 million, even after disbursing more than \$5 million to poorer provinces. The income from these funds constitutes a large percentage of the total amount disbursed in the annual Mission Fund Distribution.

2. VSO and VSF

A strategy for implementing the second goal (enabling provinces to make capital improvements) and also for encouraging creative projects in the developing world was to set up the Vincentian Solidarity Office (VSO), which helps poorer provinces to write grant proposals and to direct them to appropriate agencies. Brother Peter Campbell was appointed to lead this office, which, using a newly created Vincentian Solidarity Fund (VSF) wisely, especially by assuring agencies that the VSO could find matching funds for any grants it received, has financed numerous large projects and the micro-projects each year. In 2011, for example, the VSO, currently headed by Fr. Miles Heinen, helped poorer provinces obtain 23 new grants and add to 4 older grants, for a total of more than \$1,080,997. Since the office opened it has raised quite significant funds:

VSO - TOTAL GRANTS JUNE 2002 - DECEMBER 2011

VSO - TOTAL GRANTS BY TYPE AND ACTIVITY						
PROJECT ACTIVITY	PROJECT TYPE				GRAND TOTAL	%
	ADMIN	CANDIDATES	PASTORAL	SOCIO-ECONOMIC		
Construction	181,488	1,034,691	1,135,205	2,278,891	4,630,275	66.20%
Equipment	43,966	249,993	54,284	166,219	514,462	7.36%
Materials	16,255	106,614	42,305	103,982	269,155	3.85%
Program	30,000	31,707	65,436	647,523	774,665	11.08%
Scholarship	39,249	48,800	0	16,490	104,539	1.49%
Vehicle	30,234	224,444	357,393	89,330	701,401	10.03%
Grand Total	341,192	1,696,249	1,654,623	3,302,434	6,994,498	100.01%
%	4.88%	24.25%	23.66%	47.21%	100%	—

In recent years, the VSO has taken on some aspects of an international Development Office, reaching out to donors beyond the Congregation of the Mission. This creates additional demands on the time of

the Superior General, since it requires that he be directly involved in fund-raising and in face-to-face meetings with significant donors.

In order to help the Superior General in his fund-raising efforts, a committee has been appointed to examine the possibility of creating a non-profit organization at the level of the General Curia²⁹.

Over the last several years, the VSO has also been appealing to confreres throughout the world to identify possible donors. Within the United States, it has set up a sub-committee made up of former students who left the major and minor seminaries, as well as former confreres, to assist in raising funds.

3. Patrimony Funds for Poorer Provinces

The principal strategy for attaining the third goal (assuring long-term financial stability within poorer provinces) was the creation of patrimony funds, which are a type of endowment fund. Over the last 11 years, the Franz Foundation has been collaborating with the General Curia of the Congregation of the Mission (CM) in a long-range project to help each of the poorest provinces of the CM to establish a Patrimony Fund; that is, a stable fund which will guarantee a firm financial foundation for each of those provinces. This project is now also called the “Vincentian Endowment Challenge” and is described in detail at www.cmglobal.org/patrimony-en. The patrimony funds are invested securely in order to ensure their permanence. The annual returns from the investments provide those provinces with a stable base from which they can plan for the future in three areas: 1) the needs of the poor served by the province, 2) the formation of its seminarians (who are often numerous), and 3) the care of its elderly members. Some distinctive features of endowment funds are these:

- The principal or corpus of the fund is not to be liquidated; that is, converted into cash in order to meet current expenses
- Only the returns – namely, interest, dividends and capital gains on the investment – can be used
- The returns must be used only for the purposes for which the fund was established.

A large number of patrimony funds have been established. Some are already completed, some are in the process of being completed, and some are just beginning. These funds, from a legal perspective, have different “owners”. In some cases, the “owner” of the patrimony fund

²⁹ In Italy, such organizations are called an ONLUS (Organizzazione Non Lucrativa di Utilità Sociale – Non-Profit Organization Social).

is the sponsoring province from which a new province or mission originated. For example, the Province of Holland, which has had admirable foresight, created patrimony funds for China, Indonesia, Ethiopia and Fortaleza; the Province of Ireland, for Nigeria; the Province of Naples for Eritrea; the former Province of Belgium for the Congo. Spain has generously helped set up stable funds for missions and provinces to which it gave birth. Many other financially stable provinces have formed a relationship with financially struggling provinces and have created patrimony funds to help guarantee their future. For example, the former Southern Province of the USA set up a patrimony fund for the Province of North India. The Eastern Province of the United States began patrimony funds for seven different provinces. The Province of Turin is currently helping to build a patrimony fund for Madagascar. The money in some of these funds has sometimes been augmented by matching funds offered by the Franz Foundation.

4. A Patrimony Fund for the General Curia

In 2005, foreseeing in 2025 the 400th anniversary of the founding of the Congregation of the Mission, the Franz Foundation suggested to the Superior General the creation of a large patrimony fund over a 20-year period, with half coming from the Foundation and half coming from the fun – raising efforts of the Congregation of the Mission. The Patrimony Fund would be at the disposition of the General Curia, so that it might better serve the needs of the provinces and of the poor whom the Congregation serves throughout the world. Nine poorer provinces were originally included as beneficiaries of the patrimony fund during the first 10 years. Part of the fund built up during that same 10-year period would go toward assisting three international associations which fall under the direct supervision of the Superior General: Vincentian Marian Youth (JMV), Vincentian Lay Missionaries (MISEVI), and the Association of the Miraculous Medal (AMM). During the second ten years, the fund that would be built up was intended for “mega-projects” such as those which will be described below.

5. Commission for Promoting Systemic Change

In 2005, Fr. Gay, with the help of the Franz Foundation, established the Commission for Promoting Systemic Change. In recent years, the Commission has written a book entitled *Seeds of Hope: Stories of Systemic Change*, developed a toolkit for teaching about systemic change and offered systemic change workshops in Mexico, Brazil, Cameroon, Thailand, and the United States. In coming years, it plans to offer

workshops at three locations in Europe; it has also received numerous invitations from both inside and outside the Vincentian Family in Latin America, Asia and Africa. At a recent systemic change workshop, which took place in the USA, 113 members of the Vincentian Family, including the leaders of all its principal branches, took part actively. Besides presentations on the notion of systemic change, 12 projects in the USA with a systemic change focus were analyzed.

6. Three Award Programs

The Franz Foundation assisted the General Curia in setting up three award programs:

- a) The Mission Awards.** These awards, which were offered from 2006 until 2010, aimed at stimulating missionary creativity in the evangelization of the poor. In 2010, the Superior General and his council awarded a total of \$100,000 to projects in Brazil, Guatemala, Bolivia, Ethiopia, and Mozambique.
- b) The Systemic Change Awards.** As is evident from the name, the goal of these awards, which were granted from 2006 until 2010, was to promote systemic change projects. A sum of \$100,000 was given out by the General Curia every other year. In 2009, for example, the Superior General and his council distributed awards to projects in Honduras, Costa Rica, and Ireland.
- c) Start-up Grants.** The Franz Foundation also finances the distribution of start-up grants for systemic change projects within the broader Vincentian Family. These awards are granted by the Commission for Promoting Systemic Change. In 2011 they were given to new systemic change projects in Ecuador, Burundi and Mexico.

7. Wise Money Management for the Mission

This is one of the core values of the Franz Foundation. In 2010 the Foundation sponsored a three-week workshop, directed by Fr. John Gouldrick, for Provincial Treasurers in the Asia-Pacific region. Nine participants engaged actively in the workshop, which took place in Manila. The evaluations submitted by the participants were quite positive.

In August 2013, the Foundation will co-sponsor a symposium in Paris, along with DePaul University, on the same theme. The papers and discussions at the symposium will be published online, so that the key concepts and practices involved in wise money management for

the mission will be more widely available to the international Vincentian Family.

In conjunction with that symposium, Fr. Joseph Geders, the current Treasurer General, is preparing a workshop for Provincial Treasurers which will include a segment on economic solidarity and wise money management for the mission. He is also working at designing a longer program for training local, regional, and provincial treasurers by pairing them with experienced mentors.

Recently, the Superior General asked Fr. Joseph Agostino to facilitate a strategic planning process in Ethiopia, assisting the confreres there, as well as the Daughters of Charity, in both provincial planning and, with the help of Sr. Marge Clifford, D.C., the development of Advancement Strategies, including wise money management, grant-writing, and the development of income-generating projects for self-sufficiency.

Many provinces, of course, have taken significant steps in regard to wise money management on their own, creating revenue to support their mission through developing commercial enterprises, renting out properties they own, staffing income-producing schools, etc. Examples of these initiatives will be described in the third section of this article, under #6, but, as we trust is evident, such initiatives are too numerous to describe them fully here.

Often, professional advice about money management and property management is indispensable. One interesting example of the good use of expert advice occurred recently in the Eastern Province of the United States. The province's minor seminary closed in 1992. Since that time, though various programs continued there, the buildings and property were a very heavy financial liability for the province. In 2008, the province invited a company of professional property consultants, David Belt Incorporated (DBI), to assist it in finding ways to utilize the property better. Now, all the buildings of the former minor seminary are occupied by a consortium of four schools. The rest of the property will soon be used by a cemetery. Consequently, instead of being a significant liability, the property is a notable financial asset for the province.

8. Haiti

Conditions in Haiti, which were terrible before the earthquake of January 12, 2010, are now disastrous. The Franz Foundation is helping the Congregation and the wider Vincentian Family there in several ways.

Zafèn is a micro-finance website developed by DePaul University to assist the poor of Haiti, through online loans and donations, to begin small businesses that will enable them to become financially independ-

ent. It also appeals for donations for scholarships for Haitian children (a full-year scholarship costs only \$50!). The Franz Foundation has joined with various branches of the Vincentian Family in initiating a Seed Money Fund which helps sustain the website and which often matches funds contributed through the website for scholarships. More than 4800 scholarships have already been awarded. A recent project called CLM (Chemen Lavi Miyò or Pathway to a Better Life), which was put online on September 27, 2011, raised more than \$520,000. The Seed Money Fund, to which many other groups are now contributing, is helping finance the salary of a Vincentian Family Project Developer in Haiti and a Zafèn Administrator in the USA.

We conclude this section of the article with three observations.

First, while above we have described at length the General Curia's involvement in promoting economic solidarity, we trust that it is evident, from some of the examples we have given, that the Curia's plan is not the only instance of economic solidarity in the worldwide Congregation. Much collaboration is also taking place among the provinces themselves. For years, for example, the Province of Toulouse has been helping other provinces with their financial needs. Numerous provinces directly assist missions to which they have given birth. Others help with CIF. There are multiple examples on all the continents.

Second, in the case of initiatives launched by the General Curia, many provinces quickly joined in and have contributed generously; e.g., to IMF: 2000-2004, to the Vincentian Solidarity Fund, and to the Patrimony Funds.

Third, in regard to Patrimony Funds, it is important to note that, in the Vincentian tradition, neither the donor provinces nor the receiving provinces "own" what our Constitutions call "the patrimony of the poor"³⁰, and which the Constitutions of the Daughters of Charity speak of as the "patrimony of the most deprived"³¹; rather, we are called to be responsible stewards of this patrimony³².

³⁰ C 148, § 1.

³¹ *Constitutions of the Daughters of Charity*, 30a.

³² In this regard, it is interesting to note that, in St. Vincent's extant writings, the word "patrimony" appears only three times. Twice he was speaking about the patrimony that confreres received from their families, so the context in those instances was quite different from our present theme. On the third occasion, speaking specifically about the material goods of the Congregation, the phrase actually used by St. Vincent was: "We live from the patrimony of Jesus Christ, from the sweat of the poor" (SV XI, 201). In this context, Vincent evokes

III. SOME POSSIBILITIES FOR THE FUTURE

To foster a “relative, not absolute, economic equality” among the provinces – if we might return to the terminology employed by Fr. Franz at CIF – is an ongoing challenge for the Congregation. Toward that end, we offer the following suggestions. This list is by no means exhaustive. It is only a modest attempt, which we hope will encourage others to offer further suggestions. Once again, our focus here is on the Congregation of the Mission. One might suggest many other things in regard to the universal Church.

1. Consciousness-raising

Participants at CIF have felt that many confreres, and even many Visitors, are not aware of all that the Superior General and his Council, the Provinces, and the Franz Foundation are already doing to promote economic solidarity. They suggested that presentations on this theme would be helpful in raising consciousness about it. A presentation might address, for example:

- a) The importance of solidarity among ourselves and with the poor today (using the documents of the Church³³, our own Constitutions, etc.)

the image of a missionary who is returning home and going to the refectory. He states that, as a missionary, he ought to ask himself whether he has earned the food he is about to eat, which comes from the work of the poor. «Nous vivons du *patrimoine de Jésus-Christ*, de la sueur des pauvres gens. Nous devrions toujours penser quand nous allons au réfectoire: “Ai-je gagné la nourriture que je vais prendre?”. J’ai souvent cette pensée, qui me fait entrer en confusion: “Misérable, as-tu gagné le pain que tu vas manger ce pain qui te vient du travail des pauvres?”. Au moins, si nous ne le gagnons pas comme eux, prions pour leurs besoins». The phrase of the 1984 Constitutions, “patrimony of the poor”, is found in Abelly. Describing Vincent’s role on the Council of Conscience, he speaks of the saint’s concern about equity “in the distribution of ecclesiastical goods, which the holy Fathers call the patrimony of the poor and the price of redemption from sin”. Cf. ABELLY, II, 447: «Ainsi, ce fidèle conseiller avait, d’un côté, les yeux ouverts pour prendre garde qu’on n’usât d’aucune surprise dans les affaires bénéficiales, au préjudice du service de Dieu et de l’honneur de l’Église; et de l’autre, il tenait en main la balance pour garder, autant qu’il dépendait de lui, une juste équité en la distribution de ces biens ecclésiastiques, que les saints Pères appellent le *patrimoine des pauvres* et le prix du rachat des péchés».

³³ In this regard, many cite *Populorum Progressio* (65): “That is the goal toward which we must work. An ever more effective world-solidarity should

- b) The different types of solidarity mentioned above: solidarity in mission, personnel, common life, spirituality and prayer, as well as in regard to economic resources
- c) The many things that the Congregation has done in recent years to promote economic solidarity (as above)
- d) Further steps that might be taken toward economic solidarity in the future

Perhaps this theme could be highlighted at meetings such as these:

- Provincial Assemblies
- the periodic meetings to orient new Visitors
- the meeting of all the Visitors between General Assemblies
- the next General Assembly
- the periodic meetings of Provincial Treasurers
- CIF
- the Money Management for Mission Program.

2. Building up the Patrimony Funds

These funds are a very concrete way in which the resources of the Congregation are being shared. Not only do they involve *economic* solidarity, they also stimulate *collaboration* among the provinces in training confreres in developing provinces so that they might eventually manage the new resources of the province autonomously. Building up the patrimony funds until they reach maturity is an ongoing challenge.

As mentioned above, it is not just the General Curia that has contributed to such funds. Many provinces have been helping too, but there is still more to be done. From time to time each province might ask itself: is there a poorer province or mission on which we might focus? Could we tithe our earnings for the benefit of our developing provinces and the poor they serve?

3. Clarifying the Conditions for the Use of the Patrimony Funds

The patrimony funds are now numerous. They came into existence at different times, and often quite independently of one another. So it might now be useful, in the light of the experience of the last ten years, to examine all the contracts that have been drawn up between donor

allow all peoples to become the artisans of their destiny". *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (9, 47) and *Octogesima Adveniens* (5, 18, and 41) continue this theme.

provinces (or the General Curia) and receiving provinces and to determine what contractual conditions will best guarantee the stability of the funds for the future.

Unfortunately, not all receiving provinces have used their patrimony funds well, nor have all carefully observed the conditions laid down for their use. As a result, the patrimony destined for some developing provinces has suffered damage.

4. The Use of Micro-Credit as Illustrated in Efforts to Assist Haiti

Economic solidarity can take place not only by assisting a poorer province in its inner life (e.g., by helping to finance its formation program or the care of its elderly confreres); it can also take place on the level of that province's works. In fact, often those works serve the poorest of the world's poor.

The Vincentian Family's use of micro-credit to help those in Haiti who are living in poverty is a relevant example. The website *Zafèn* assists Haitians to begin small business enterprises and it also raises money for scholarships for Haitian children. The initiative for the website came from the international leaders of the Vincentian Family and DePaul University. They then entered into partnership with Fonkoze, the largest micro-credit agency in Haiti, and with the Haitian Hometown Associations Resource Group. Through this joint venture, hundreds of jobs are being created in Haiti, numerous small business enterprises are being opened, and thousands of Haitian children are receiving the opportunity to go to school.

Could micro-credit be used to assist the poor in other provinces? Could provinces which have experience in this regard assist those that do not?

5. Mega-Projects

Some large projects in the service of the poor involve, but at the same time transcend, the Congregation of the Mission. Today, in such projects, we often collaborate with the various branches of the Vincentian Family and with other groups outside the Family. One of the goals of the patrimony fund for the General Curia which Fr. Greg has initiated is precisely to help fund such projects.

Much could be written on this subject. Here, a couple of examples will suffice.

- a) At present, as a very interesting spin-off of *Zafèn*, a consortium of 36 schools is being organized in Haiti. These schools are sponsored by the Daughters of Charity, the Congregation of the Mis-

sion, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, and FATEM, an NGO with whom the Vincentian Family collaborates on the central plateau of the country. Recently, we have entered into negotiations with a foundation called Mary's Meals to provide a hot meal each day at those schools, probably the only hot meal that most of the students will eat that day. Through Zafèn we hope to provide scholarships for many students at those schools who otherwise might not be able to attend and also raise the level of their education through teacher-training programs. It is a huge project, involving thousands of students. If successful, it will have a profound effect on the lives of the young children who attend those schools. Organizing and financing the project will demand economic (and other types of) solidarity, not just within the Congregation of the Mission, but also within and beyond the Vincentian Family.

- b) DREAM (Drug Resource Enhancement against AIDS and Malnutrition) is a project of the Community of Sant'Egidio and the Daughters of Charity. Since the two communities entered into a contractual relationship in June 2005, DREAM has spread to a new country almost every year. The Daughters and the Community of Sant'Egidio now collaborate in Mozambique, Nigeria, Kenya, Cameroon, the Congo, and Tanzania, with other countries on the horizon. In Mozambique alone, the DREAM centers serve more than 8,600 patients. The project has grown exponentially. Provinces of the Daughters of Charity have joined in offering economic and personnel assistance. In a lesser way, the Congregation of the Mission assists, as does the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

These are the types of projects that Fr. Greg is envisioning when he speaks of a patrimony fund for mega-projects.

6. Efforts to Help Provinces to Become Self-Sustaining

Of course, the ideal is that all provinces become self-sustaining. An ongoing exchange of information between provinces which are self-sustaining and those which are not could be very helpful, since it might generate ideas about how poorer provinces might develop assets.

It is interesting to ask the question: how did provinces that are self-sustaining get to be that way? A whole article could be written on this subject. Here, a few examples and some schematic thoughts will have to suffice.

Some provinces have developed significant income-producing works whose revenues are used for the province as a whole; e.g., universities in the United States and the Philippines, high schools in India, some

parishes in numerous provinces. Some provinces have had works which raised money for specific purposes; e.g., initially two associations in the United States – the Central Association of the Miraculous Medal in Philadelphia and the Miraculous Medal Association in Perryville – raised money especially for the support of seminarians; then they expanded their purposes gradually.

Some provinces, at an early stage in their history, acquired land or buildings. The development, renting or sale of those real estate assets at a later date became a source of significant income. In Spain, Italy, Lebanon, and Greece – just to give a few examples – the Congregation still possesses very significant properties.

At times, wise Visitors and Treasurers have known the opportune moment to convert such assets into other stable investments. In the western world especially, investment portfolios have often come to play the same role as property does in other parts of the world.

In recent years, many provinces have taken very creative initiatives in launching business enterprises. The Province of Madrid has a factory that produces olive oil, as well as a parking garage which provides significant income. The Province of Paris is in the process of building a similar garage. The Province of Rome and the Province of Paris earn income by renting out rooms in their large provincial houses.

The Provinces of Slovakia and Poland, which emerged from behind the Iron Curtain only two decades ago, quickly took wise steps toward economic independence. In the design for its new Provincial House and its seminary, Slovakia allotted space for stores to be rented out on the ground floor. Poland began a similar venture (renting to McDonald's!), and built a power plant in Piekary, just outside Krakow, to help support the impressive work named "Good News 2000". Other provinces have similar income-producing sources.

In Africa and Asia, developing provinces are evolving plans for raising crops and animals not just as food for the members of the Congregation, but as sources of revenue for the future.

At a recent meeting, Brother Peter Campbell suggested that start-up grants, like those awarded by the Commission for Promoting Systemic Change, might be used to stimulate similar creative ventures that are geared toward making provinces self-sustaining.

7. Wise Money Management for the Mission

The keys here are wisdom and mission. To use a phrase from our daily prayer, wisdom is *recta sapere* (which the English translator has rendered rather aptly as "a sense of the true and a taste for the good"). In financial matters, this involves the careful conservation of the province's patrimony for the sake of the mission, but at times it also involves

some prudent risk-taking. Not all will always agree with a wise money manager's choices. In 1867, when the Secretary of State of the United States, William Seward, purchased Alaska for 7.2 million dollars, newspapers and political opponents scoffed at the deal as "Seward's Folly". Today, seeing Alaska's natural beauty, its fisheries, and its petroleum resources, all recognize that it was one of the best buys in history.

Within the Congregation, a golf course bought at a cheap price during the depression of the 1930's is now St. John's University in New York. Members of many provinces can think of similar bargain purchases that are now worth ten or even a hundred times the original price paid. Many can also, unfortunately, think of properties which their province sold cheap and which would now be worth a fortune!

One of the principal interests of the Franz Foundation is wise "Money Management for the Mission". Toward that end, it helped finance the workshop in the Philippines described above. It will soon, in collaboration with DePaul University, organize a symposium in Paris on the same topic. It has addressed the theme in CIF sessions too.

Could each province have at least one or two confreres trained in wise money management for the sake of the mission?

8. Promoting a Fully-Functioning Development Office

Above, the origin and purpose of the Vincentian Solidarity Office was recounted. In recent years, the Superior General, Fr. Greg, has expanded the personnel in that office with a view toward making it a development office for the worldwide Congregation.

Seeing that the needs of the poor are enormous and that the resources of the Congregation are limited, he is eager to tap not just remaining sources of funds within the Congregation of the Mission, but also sources outside it, including individuals, foundations, NGOs and governments.

Such an office could prove a significant factor in raising funds for poorer provinces and for mega-projects. The Western Province of the United States began a development office six years ago, which now raises 1 to 1.2 million dollars annually for the needs of the province, including annuities and bequests.

9. International Investment Committee

In light of the creation of numerous patrimony funds, which now have significant value, an international Investment Committee is now being formed. There are, of course, numerous lay investment advisors who already assist the Congregation. But it is crucial that we not

renounce our own responsibility in that regard. The Congregation itself is ultimately responsible for the use of its assets, including its financial ones, in the service of the poor. A small investment committee, with confreres from various parts of the world, will be able to offer wise counsel to the international Congregation about its resources.

10. Preserving and Sharing the Patrimony

When someone lives a hand to mouth existence, it is hard to think about the future. But it is a mistake not to. Wise parents, even among the poorest of the poor, labor strenuously to put aside something for their children's education, hoping that they can break out of the circle of poverty.

St. Vincent and St. Louise, while living very simply, saw no contradiction between trusting in Divine Providence and in being provident themselves. They laid solid economic foundations for all the houses and works they founded³⁴.

The lure to invade one's patrimony is perennial. Immediate needs usually capture our attention much more forcefully than long-range ones. At times, families mortgage their homes and bite into their retirement "nest egg" for reasons that are less than grave.

So, too, it is imperative that provinces keep their patrimony intact, manage it wisely, and increase it appropriately. If, as sometimes occurs, the patrimony becomes larger than the reasonable future needs of the province demand, our Constitutions then call provinces to share their patrimony with other provinces. As mentioned above, there have been numerous examples of this within the Congregation. The temptation is to spend surplus assets on ourselves. One hopes that, within the Congregation, we can avoid that temptation.

Years ago, in graduate school, a famous patrologist, Johannes Quasten, was offering a course that many of us took because he was so well-known. We were rather awestruck one day when he offered, quite humbly, to help us do research for a project that we were working on. He referred us to a foundational work on the economic-ethical teaching of the Fathers of the Church³⁵. It had a great impact on us. Today we would describe its contents as the early social teaching of the Church. One of the key themes was the "common ownership" or the "universal

³⁴ Cf. JOHN RYBOLT, "St. Vincent de Paul and Money", *Vincentian Heritage* 26, 1 (2005), 81-103. Also, JOSÉ-MARÍA ROMÁN, "Foundations of St. Vincent", *Vincentiana* 18 (1984), 457-486.

³⁵ IGNAZ SEIPEL, *Die wirtschaftsethischen Lehren der Kirchenväter* (Vienna 1907).

destination” of material goods³⁶; that is, the conviction of the Fathers of the Church that the goods of the earth are made first of all *for all* and that private property is only a secondary, even if privileged, means for distributing those goods. A second theme was that the goods of the Church are also the goods of the poor.

Both these themes are extremely relevant today, not just in the global human community and the worldwide Church, but in the Congregation of the Mission. They are the foundation stones of economic solidarity.

³⁶ Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 69.