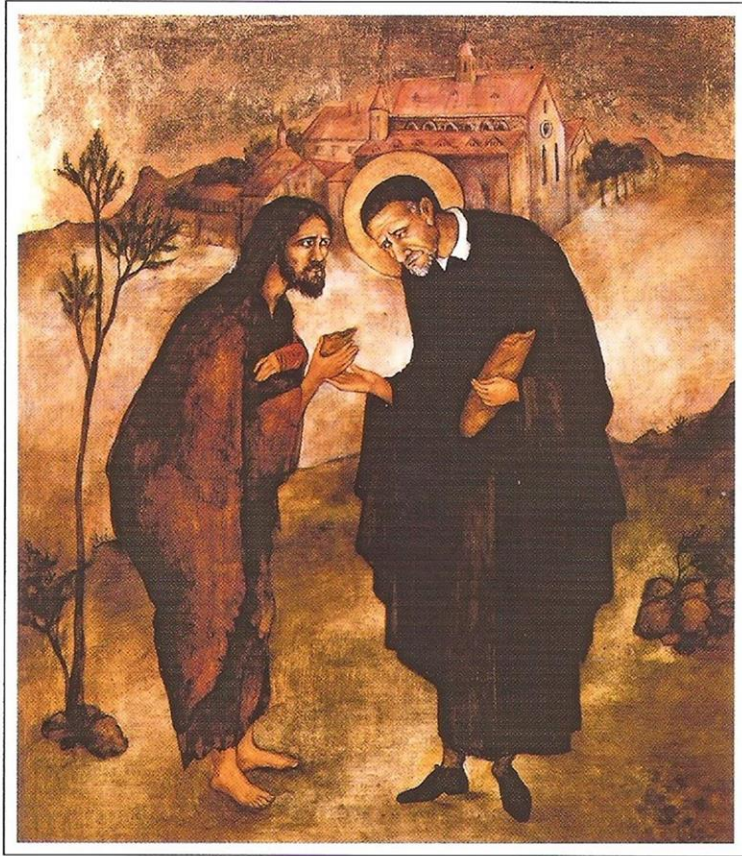


VINCENTIANA

49th YEAR - N. 4/6

JULY-DECEMBER 2005



The Five Vincentian Virtues Today

CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION
GENERAL CURIA

GENERAL CURIA

Rome, 11 September 2005

Feast of St. John Gabriel Perboyre

To the Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission

Dear Brothers,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your hearts now and forever!

With joy I write to share with you two things that cause great happiness in the Vincentian Family: MISEVI is spreading to different parts of the world and it will be holding its second International Assembly in December.

MISEVI started as a small seed, but quickly, the missionary impulse of the young people of the Vincentian Marian Youth of Spain rubbed off on some lay Vincentians throughout the world. As you well know, on 7 April 1999, the Holy See approved MISEVI as an International Public Association of the Faithful and in January 2001 it celebrated its first General Assembly at which the first International Coordinating Team was named.

During these past four years, the Coordinating Team has consolidated the structures of the Association, has procured economic funds for it and has helped in its worldwide expansion.

At present, Spain, Mexico, Colombia, Italy and Indonesia have approved National Statutes; those of Venezuela, Ireland and France are waiting approval; the United States and Brazil are drawing up theirs; and in various countries, such as Peru, El Salvador, Ecuador, Santo Domingo, Philippines, Cameroon, Slovakia, Ukraine and Germany, there are lay Vincentians who are most interested in establishing MISEVI.

I am sharing all this with you in order to give thanks to God, for, as you can see, the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul continues to be alive and to incite new ways to share itself, this time in this Association which seeks to stimulate, support, accompany and form the missionary vocation among the lay people of our Vincentian Family.

At the same time, we know that this is also a call to greater responsibility. We can and ought to continue to accompany them, as has been done until now, supporting them with our dedication so this new Association can emerge in our provinces.

The Association is preparing for its Second International Assembly. This will take place from 26-30 December 2005 in the Berceau, St. Vincent's birthplace. With the theme "Open our eyes to the world, our hearts to the mission," it hopes to evaluate its experience in these past four years and plan a program of action for the next four. I know how enthusiastic it is for this Assembly at which various countries will assist with the right to speak and vote and it hopes that some more will join with Statutes approved before 27 September 2005. Moreover, the Assembly is open to the participation of those countries which have started the process of establishing MISEVI and even to those who are thinking about doing so. In order to participate in the Assembly one simply has to write the International Coordinating Team, through www.misevi.org or at asamblea@misevi.org

As the event draws near and with the Vincentian Family's warm welcome of the Association, I ask with enthusiasm some commitments which we all can make:

1. Be attentive to lay missionary vocations and help them discern their evangelizing work among the poor; help them in whatever way you can, through material and spiritual means (support, orientation, advice, formation, economic funds, etc.).
2. In the Provinces where MISEVI is yet to be established, it would be good to appoint a confrere who could spend a bit of his time in a special way to collaborate closely with the lay missionaries and who could serve to accompany them in order to form the Association.
3. If there are already work experiences with lay missionaries in your countries, as well as outside of them, whatever they may be, communicate with me or directly with the International Coordinating Team (misevi@misevi.org); one of MISEVI's objectives is to be a channel where all lay missionaries in the Vincentian Family can converge, and for this reason it is important that communication be strengthened in order to "organize charity," as St. Vincent said.
4. Finally, if nothing has been organized yet in the area of lay participation in the work of evangelization with the poor, encourage and promote this vocation that is so important for our Vincentian spirit. You may include in your Provincial Projects the collaboration of lay people in

the “missions ad gentes” or you can offer to young people with whom you work some missionary experiences on a short or long-term basis. The Coordinating Team can give you more information on how this can be done.

At the threshold of the Second International Assembly of MISEVI, I dare ask for your close collaboration, according to your possibilities, in this endeavor. With all my heart I pray that Christ, the Evangelizer of the Poor, continue to bless the many lay people who dedicate part of or their entire life at the service of the mission, as well as those future members who are preparing to serve the poor throughout the world.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General

Rome, 10 October 2005

To all Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission

Dear Visitor,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your heart now and forever!

I invite you and your council to submit a project from your province for the 2006 Systemic Change Award. Below, I have included information you will find helpful in identifying a project eligible for the award.

You will also find an application form with this letter. The completed application should be submitted to the Econome General by December 1, 2005. The complete application must be signed by the Visitor or Vice-Visitor. Please note that only one application can be submitted for each province or vice-province.

“SYSTEMIC CHANGE AWARD”

This is an award given to acknowledge and support a specific project developed by an individual confrere or group of confreres, that reflects St. Vincent’s creativity in responding to the needs of the Church and/or help promote systemic change to the unjust structures which oppress the poor. This award will be granted annually from 2006 to 2016.

Some criteria for choosing the recipient(s) of the award:

1. The projects submitted should reflect St. Vincent’s creativity in finding and implementing unique and even untried ways to respond to the urgent needs of the times and which address changing the unjust structures which oppress the poor.
2. The projects should manifest creativity in proposing: *a*) a new form of apostolic service; or *b*) a new methodology; or *c*) new ways of forming and/or involving lay pastoral agents; or *d*) an approach to changing the unjust structures which oppress the poor, i.e. projects which promote systemic change.

The Systemic Change Award will be granted to up to five projects on January 25, 2006, chosen by the Superior General with his council. The amount of \$ 100.000 will be divided equally among the projects that have been granted the award. The amount of the

award to each individual project will be distributed over two years. The first half of the award money will be given to the project on January 25, 2006. The second half of the award money will be given on January 25, 2007 after the Superior General has received a report on how the first half of the award money was used.

I look forward to receiving an application from your province.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General

Rome, 26 October 2005

*To all the Visitors and Visitatrixes and Members
of the Vincentian Family*

Dear Sisters and Brothers in St. Vincent,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your hearts now and forever!

I would like to share with you two experiences that I had in recent days.

The first is from my visit in Great Britain. I met a non-Catholic religious congregation which considers St. Vincent de Paul as a co-patron. It is moving to think how the Vincentian charism has gone beyond the borders of the Catholic Church, but, at the same time, this involves the need for a greater coherence in living the spiritual patrimony of the saint of charity.

The second is the collaboration that the Daughters of Charity have begun to accomplish with the Community of Sant'Egidio in Project DREAM (Drug Resource Enhancement against AIDS and Malnutrition), with Fr. Maloney representing the Congregation of the Mission as the coordinator of the group. This is a program which was initiated three years ago for a global fight against AIDS (education, prevention, and cure), malaria, malnutrition, tuberculosis, and the principal illnesses. Mozambique became the place where this project was first tried. Today it has become a proposal and a model for all Africa, with the best results in terms of both quality and quantity, with sustainable expense levels for economies with few resources and little infrastructure. I believe that, in uniting ourselves, firstly, as the Vincentian Family, and secondly, with other organizations, in order to promote programs of concrete action in favor of the poorest, we will be giving life to the Gospel of Jesus and our charism.

I would like to tell you that I participated in several meetings with the Community of Sant'Egidio to promote a **“Campaign of Humanization in prisons and in the fight against the death penalty.”** A first step in this campaign is to take a census of those who work in prisons, know a little about their work, etc. Later, once we have this information, we will reflect about how we can move this campaign forward. It would be well to remember that this same census (appendix 1) is being asked of all Congregations of Consecrated Life, through the International Union of Superioresses General (UISG) and the Union of Superiors General (USG). I hope that you will send me, as soon as possible, all this data on a national level. I am also interested in knowing if this type of service is carried

out as the Vincentian Family or as a particular branch of the Vincentian Family.

Let us unite in prayer, asking the God of life to grant us fidelity and joy in order to live intensely and share our charism with the poor. I entrust to your prayers all the wonderful work that the Vincentian Family carries out throughout the world. May God bless you always!

Your brother in St. Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General

Rome, 28 October 2005
Feast of Sts. Simon and Jude, Apostles

To the Members of the Congregation of the Mission

Dear Brothers,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your hearts now and forever!

This circular has to do with the *tempo forte* meeting of the General Council from 3-7 October 2005. In this *tempo forte* meeting we treated almost 50 points that needed to be dealt with concerning the Congregation of the Mission at the general level. I will try to highlight briefly some of the major points on which we made decisions.

At the beginning of our meeting, we had an ongoing formation session, to which we invited all the members of the Curia House. Also present was Msgr. Ríos Mont, our confrere who is the Auxiliary Bishop of Guatemala. We had a conference entitled, "The Humanization of Jails and the Liberation of Their Prisoners." This was presented by Fr. Marco Gnavi from the Community of Sant'Egidio.

1. As a recommendation which came from the General Assembly with regard to **Vincentian places**, we have decided as a council to try to pursue enriching our heritage as a Vincentian Family at the Berceau of St. Vincent de Paul. With the help of Fr. Jean-Pierre Renouard, we have received some valuable information with regard to the Berceau and we will be asking the support and opinion of the Visitors of Paris and Toulouse in regard to this holy place of the Congregation.
2. I received a letter from Fr. Giuseppe Guerra, the Postulator General, regarding a **petition from the Holy See** that we include two confreres in the list of the memorial of the Blessed on 2 September. More information will be forthcoming from the Postulator General and the Superior General on this matter.
3. In responding to another petition of the 2004 General Assembly, we have concretized the **Commission for the Study of the Statutes** of the Congregation of the Mission. The Commission will be composed of Frs. Paul Golden (Midwest), Giuseppe Turati (Turin), Juan Julián Díaz Catalán (Zaragoza), Eli Chaves dos Santos (Rio de Janeiro), and Alberto Vernaschi (Rome). The Commission will have its first meeting in March 2006. We would

hope that they will have their program for studying the Statutes ready six months before the Visitors' Meeting in 2007.

4. We have chosen the Province of Mexico to host the **International Meeting of Visitors** in 2007. This meeting will take place from 4-15 June 2007. I want to extend special thanks to all the provinces who offered to host this meeting. The Preparatory Commission for the Visitors' Meeting will be named at our *tempo forte* meeting in December.
5. The first draft of the **project of the General Council** for 2005-2010 was presented by the Superior General. The project, as you will see, is based on the idea of greater communion and participation at all levels of the Congregation, including the Vincentian Family.
 - There will be a special focus on the development of our identity as a missionary Congregation.
 - We will deepen our knowledge of the Congregation as an international institution, developing the role of the Conferences of Visitors and/or Provinces.
 - Each Assistant to the Superior General is asked to establish a deep relationship with the different provinces and Conferences that are under his care.
 - Another point is to promote the living of our vows in the context of the world in which we are living.
 - Another will be the emphasis on initial and ongoing formation, with a desire to support the project of SIEV for the formation of our confreres, as well as the promotion of the CIF program.
 - We will also continue promoting the Vincentian Family and our relationship therein.
 - We will try to respond to the challenge made to us by Pope John Paul II in his letter addressed to me and the members of the General Assembly by strengthening our formation of the diocesan clergy.
 - We will also seek to strengthen the dimension of prayer in the life of the Congregation at all levels.
 - We hope to optimize communication and access to information.

These are some of the points that will be considered for our project. As mentioned above, it is only a first draft, so we will continue to work on it during coming ordinary council meetings throughout the year.

6. We have begun to investigate the possibility of establishing a **development office** for the Congregation at the international level.
7. We approved a **“Program for Systemic Change”** with the objective of helping to bring about systemic change in the apostolates of the confreres, especially those ministering to the oppressed poor. This program, which will probably be called the “Think Tank,” will be coordinated by Fr. Robert Maloney, with a team composed of the following: Joseph Foley, C.M. (NGO representative at the UN), Pedro Opeka, C.M. (Madagascar), Norberto Carcellar, C.M. (Philippines), Mrs. Patricia de Nava (AIC), Sr. Ellen Flynn, D.C. (Great Britain), with pending a member from the SSVF.

Related to the “Program for Systemic Change” is the **Systemic Change Award**, which has as its objective to acknowledge and support specific projects developed by individual or groups of confreres who have designed a project in their apostolate, whether specifically missionary or not, that reflects St. Vincent’s creativity in responding to the needs of the Church and/or help promote systemic change to the unjust structures which oppress the poor. This Systemic Change Award will be granted annually on 25 January. The Visitors will soon have information about the details of the award and its application to share with the confreres of the provinces.

A second award, the **Mission Award**, has as its objective to acknowledge and support specific projects developed by individual or groups of confreres who have designed a project that promotes in a noteworthy way the missionary work that they are involved in. This award will be granted annually on 30 July, the feast of St. Justin De Jacobis.

One of the main ideas behind these projects is to stimulate the creative missionary juices of the different members of the Congregation of the Mission, to help us to continue to be on fire in our evangelization of the poor.

8. Another economic issue we discussed was the **patrimony fund project**. A donor has promised us matching-fund money by which we hope to be able to establish patrimonial funds for a number of the poorer provinces of the Congregation.
9. We are also in the process of organizing the **meeting of new Visitors** which will be from 18-24 January 2006. Fr. Corpus Delgado has been asked to coordinate the program. He met with us to discuss the details.
10. The General Council approved a project, with the approval of COVIAM, to solicit the support of a confrere from the Eastern

Province of the United States, Fr. Sylvester Peterka. He has been asked to **support different provinces of COVIAM**, particularly in the areas of formation of formators and ongoing formation, through workshops and programs that will be developed during the summer months.

11. A tentative agreement was drawn up between the General Curia and the Visitors of the Asian Pacific Conference, by which the APVC will take **responsibility for the mission in the Solomon Islands**, with the support of the General Curia.
12. The issue of **reconfiguration** was discussed with regard to a number of provinces that have already been contacted. The General Council will encourage ongoing dialogue on this issue in order to come to an understanding about it and how it can help us in being faithful to our main objective which is to evangelize the poor and to do that in the most efficient and edifying way.
13. We discussed a number of reports from different commissions related to the General Curia. One report in particular concerned the meeting of **SIEV** (International Secretariat for Vincentian Studies) which was held on 20-21 September here at the General Curia in Rome. Present were the members of the outgoing team, as well as the new group of confreres who will be taking over the work of SIEV. I want to take the opportunity to thank the outgoing members of SIEV for the many years of generous service that they have given in the promotion of ongoing formation in the spirit of the Congregation of the Mission: Roberto Lovera (Turin), John Prager (Eastern, USA), Kazimierz Stelmach (Poland), José María Nieto (Delegate from the General Curia), and Julio Suescun (Zaragoza). The new team, which gathered with them for this time of transition, is composed of the new Executive Secretary, Fr. Alexander Jenerj (Austria), and Gilson César Camargo (Curitiba), Eugene Curran (Ireland), Elie Delplace (Paris/Cameroon), Hugh O'Donnell (representative from CIF), Mitxel A. Olabuénaga Ornes (Zaragoza), and Juan Carlos Cerquera (Secretary General, delegate from the General Curia). The new Executive Secretary of SIEV will be getting out a report to the members of the Congregation to present the projects that they hope to develop in their years of service to the Congregation in this function.
14. It is also worth mentioning again for the information of all the confreres, the report of the **webmaster for the Vincentian Family**, Fr. John Freund. Let me repeat that the Congregation of the Mission website has a new address: www.cmgglobal.org The priority for this new site is input of content from the General Curia. A point of interest on the website is the Vincentian

Encyclopedia, the Wikipedia, wherein you can find, for example, posts from John Rybolt, who continues to add draft chapters of his *History of the Congregation*.

15. In his report to the General Council, Manuel Ginete, the **Delegate of the Superior General for the Vincentian Family**, mentioned, among other things, the ongoing preparation for the Second International Meeting of the Association of the Miraculous Medal. This will be held in Rome from 24-28 October. Manuel also participated in the Second International Assembly of JMV, as well as World Youth Day in Cologne, Germany, together with the Superior General. He visited different members of the Vincentian Family in Tanzania and Ethiopia. He likewise participated in a theological-cultural conference of the Italian Society of St. Vincent de Paul, the Foundation Frederick Ozanam, together with the Superior General and Fr. Mario Di Carlo, Superior of the Curia House in Rome.
16. Under the theme of **missions**, we discussed the candidates for the missions throughout the Congregation. More information about this will come out in the Mission Appeal Letter later this month.
17. We worked on the agreement among the Superior General, the Province of Chile and the missionaries of El Alto with regard to the formation of students, who come from the **international mission in El Alto, Bolivia**.
18. The **international missions in the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea** received a visit from the Assistant General for Missions, Fr. José Antonio Ubillús.

Those are just some of the highlights of our October *tempo forte* meeting.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General

Rome, 31 October 2005
Eve of the Solemnity of All Saints
Mission Appeal 2005

To all the Missionaries of the Congregation

Dear Brothers in St. Vincent,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your hearts now and forever!

I would like to begin by sharing some reflections that I also shared with the members of the Curia House when we were on retreat together during the week of 25-30 September. It fell on me to celebrate the Eucharist on the Feast of St. Vincent de Paul. Based on the traditional readings for the theme of mission, I would like to encourage all the members of the Congregation of the Mission to deepen their own sense of identity as missionaries. For, as it says in our Constitutions (52): "Among the members, all of whom share in the royal priesthood of Christ through baptism and confirmation, there are clerics and brothers, **but all are known as missioners.**"

1. I want to encourage all missioners to maintain deep within their hearts and within their apostolic expression an enthusiasm, unequal to any other enthusiasm, for sharing in the great mission of Jesus Christ in evangelizing the poor.

To evangelize the poor is a mission so sublime that it is, par excellence, the mission of the Son of God; and we are applied to it as instruments by which the Son of God continues to do from heaven what he had done on earth.... Indeed, it is something worthy of a missionary to have and keep this desire of going to the missions..., of assisting the poor people in the way that Our Lord would assist them, if he were still on earth, and finally to turn one's attention to living and dying in this holy work (SV XII, 80, 82-83; Conference 195 "On the End of the Congregation of the Mission").

I just ask that you reflect on what St. Vincent told his missionaries in this conference of 6 December 1658.

2. We must be aware of the need to enkindle continually within ourselves the spirit of humility, as reflected in the reading from 1 Corinthians (1:26-29):

Consider your own calling, brothers. Not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. Rather, God chose the foolish of the world

to shame the wise, and God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong, and God chose the lowly and despised of the world, those who count for nothing, to reduce to nothing those who are something, so that no human being might boast before God.

Please reflect on this characteristic virtue of which St. Vincent was so fond.

3. The third point is taken from the motto of the Congregation of the Mission, Luke 4:18-19:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.

In order to announce the Word of God as it is set forth here and as it has been witnessed to down through the ages, one also has to denounce the injustices that are ever present. To do so, one needs courage. So we ask the Lord to deepen, in the hearts of all his missionaries, the gift of courage.

Those are three things, as I begin this Mission Appeal Letter, which I ask you to reflect on in terms of each of us being missionaries: our state of enthusiasm, our state of humility, and our state of courage for the world in which we live, as we all announce the Good News of Jesus Christ to the poor.

A. UPDATE ON THE MISSION SITUATION

Since my last Mission Appeal Letter we were able to place three confreres in different mission works.

- The first to respond was Fr. Rafał Brukarczyk, from the Province of Poland, former missionary in El Alto. He volunteered to go to the mission in Moskitia, Honduras. As of 15 September, Rafał is there, working together with another two confreres in an area called Patuca.
- The second confrere who responded to the appeal was Fr. Claudio Santangelo from the Province of Rome, Italy. He has volunteered to go to Istanbul, in the Province of Austria. He has a special interest for deepening his understanding of the world of Islam and its interrelationship with Christianity.
- The third confrere is Fr. Greg Walsh, from the Province of Australia, who responded to the invitation to be a missionary in the Solomon Islands, where he will begin his duties in the upcoming school year.

I received letters from a number of other volunteers, but for one reason or another, we were not able to place them at this time. I am grateful to these three confreres and to all the confreres who consider responding to this Mission Appeal Letter, because the needs for serving in different parts of the Congregation throughout the world are great.

At this time I would like to present the possibilities for volunteers for this year 2005.

B. MISSIONS NEEDING VOLUNTEERS

a) *El Alto, Bolivia (international mission dependent on the General Curia)*

As we are all well aware, one of our missionaries there, Franc Pavlič, from the Province of Slovenia, died this past year, after having served generously for five years. Before his death, the mission team in El Alto was asking for confreres. We had also received a letter from the Bishop of El Alto, asking for a team of missionaries to help in the area of formation. So I put out this urgent appeal for missionaries for El Alto. At this time, there are three confreres serving there: Aníbal Vera (Peru), Abdo Eid (Orient), and Diego Plá (Madrid). We are looking for volunteers who could work in the mission itself and who would also be willing to accompany our candidates for the Congregation of the Mission. They could also volunteer as candidates for forming a new team of formators for the diocesan clergy of El Alto. The languages needed are Spanish and Aymara. This is certainly our most difficult mission, even in terms of the physical conditions. A number of people have offered to go to the missions, but declined El Alto, because of the effects the altitude would have on their own health.

Please ask the Lord to speak to your heart if you are able to respond positively to this urgent appeal for our international mission in El Alto.

b) *Mozambique*

The second most urgent need, this one in Africa, is in Mozambique. Both our vice-province there, as well as the mission of Nacala, which belongs to the Province of Salamanca, have a great need for missionaries. The mission in Nacala, in addition to the two confreres from Salamanca (José Eugenio López García and David Fernández Núñez), has a confrere from another province (Sergio Asengo from Costa Rica). Between the vice-province and the mission of Nacala, there is a possibility of losing eight missionaries within the next year. Their contracts are running out and, for one reason or another, many are discerning not to return to the mission. So I

urgently ask you to consider the Vice-Province of Mozambique or the Mission of Nacala. The language needed is Portuguese first of all, and then some local languages.

c) Vice-Province of Sts. Cyril and Methodius

The third most urgent need is for missionaries for the Vice-Province of Sts. Cyril and Methodius. This is another very difficult mission, which, nonetheless, has great promise and enthusiasm for the future of the Church, where the faith, after having been suppressed for so many years, is being awakened in a lively manner in some places, but with much difficulty in others. It really calls for men to witness to a love of Jesus Christ in evangelizing the poor. The particular interest in the vice-province is to have men who can help to staff a mission in the near future which we will be assuming in Vilnius, Lithuania. The common language in the Vice-Province of Sts. Cyril and Methodius is Russian. In Vilnius, the language is Lithuanian. Many of the confreres speak Polish. As you may know, the vice-province is supported in a special way by the Provinces of Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, but they are not able to respond to all the needs that we are experiencing at this time in the Vice-Province of Sts. Cyril and Methodius.

d) Albania (Provinces of Italy)

Albania is a mission confided to the Province of Naples, with the assistance of the Provinces of Rome and Turin. However, these provinces are unable to supply all the necessary personnel. At present, there are only four missionaries in two places. I personally have a lot of hope for the mission. When I visited there last May, I found that, especially in Scutari, there is a very alive, animated parish, full of youth, with a wonderful desire to know Jesus and a thirst for God. There is work to be done in terms of evangelization. The languages are Italian and Albanian.

e) Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea (international missions dependent on the General Curia)

Another urgent need, which would help us respond more faithfully to Pope John Paul's challenge to us during the General Assembly, is to form formators, to work in seminaries.

Many generations of priests have reason to thank your Congregation for the formation they have received at your hands. The importance of this apostolate cannot be overstated. Consequently it is essential to assign exemplary priests to this work: priests of human and spiritual maturity, pastoral

experience, professional competence, capable of working with others (cf. Pastores Dabo Vobis, 66). Many Vincentians with these very qualities nobly dedicated themselves to priestly formation in the past. I encourage you to continue this vital mission in the years to come.

The particular challenge of the Pope will be taken up as part of the plan of the General Council in trying to promote the end of the Congregation of the Mission through the formation of the clergy in new and creative ways. Along this line we have openings for missionaries in our international mission in the Solomon Islands, as well as Papua New Guinea.

I am delighted to announce that the Asian Pacific Visitors' Conference has accepted to assume the personnel question of the seminary in the Solomon Islands, expanding it in the year 2007 from a philosophy seminary to also include a theology seminary. At the same time, in the petition made to the Superior General, they want to maintain this mission open to other confreres from outside the APVC area. The confreres presently serving in that mission are: Francisco Vargas (Philippines), Victor Bieler (Indonesia), Ivica Gregurec (Slovenia), Agustinus Marsup (Indonesia), Marek Owskiak (Poland), and Joseva Tuimavule (Australia).

The language needed in both the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea is English, as well as the native languages of the areas in which we serve there. Both missions are centered on formation work, but there are many other apostolates, of a pastoral nature, in which the confreres are involved. It is very encouraging to see the formators involved in other pastoral activities, along with the seminarians as they prepare for priesthood.

We have also received a petition from Bishop Cesare Bonivento of the Diocese of Vanimo in Papua New Guinea. He is in dire need of someone to be the rector of his seminary at this time and then, hopefully, for a team of formators from the Congregation of the Mission. Once again, the language needed is English. It would be nice to be able to establish another team in Papua New Guinea, as a way too of supporting the confreres who are there now: Rolando Santos (Philippines), Homero Marín (Colombia) and Tulio Cordero (Puerto Rico).

f) Province of China

Another urgent need is for members of the Congregation to consider serving as missionaries in China. These volunteers would be members of the Province of China and would work in any part of the province, either in Taiwan or on mainland China. There are a number of confreres who are preparing themselves to go to mainland China when there is a greater openness to evangelization there, as well as others already present in a silent, yet significant, way.

g) *Moskitia, Honduras (Province of Barcelona, Spain)*

Another need for missionaries is, once again, Moskitia in Honduras. Although we have a confrere who volunteered and has been placed there this past year, he will be replacing a confrere who we are losing, in one sense. Luis Solé was a faithful missionary in the Moskitia area and has been named Bishop of Trujillo. The language needed is Spanish, then eventually the local language of the people.

h) *Province of Ecuador*

Along the same lines of responding to the Pope's challenge in regard to formation is the need for missionaries available to help serve in Ecuador. The language needed is Spanish. Again, this is an opportunity not only for formators, but missionaries as well to help support our confreres in Ecuador, which is a very small province.

i) *Province of Austria*

1. *Istanbul, Turkey*

For those who wish to continue deepening their understanding of the relationship between Christianity and Islam, I once again put out the petition to serve in St. Georg's High School in Istanbul, which is part of the Province of Austria.

2. *Evangelization Team in the Province of Austria*

There is also a team of missionaries from the Province of Austria, who have requested missionaries to get involved in their project of a new mission for Europe. This is under the auspices of the "Institute St. Justinus" and is totally dedicated to the work of primary evangelization. "I can therefor only highly recommend your Institute to everybody. May it continue to grow and expand and may it find full support in all clerical levels of the Church" (Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, 9 February 2005).

j) *Thessalonica, Greece (Province of Paris)*

The Archbishop of Corfu, Zante, and Cephalonia, who is also Apostolic Administrator of Thessalonica, where our confreres are in Greece, came to see me with a request. He mentioned that the Vincentians have a real presence there and have had so for a long time. He would not want that to be lost. He pleaded for another confrere for Thessalonica. He also mentioned that, in the past, the confreres had a large house in Cavala, which they have had to leave. It is now an empty house. If possible, he would like to have another community there with two or more confreres. The language is Greek.

These are the needs and these are the petitions that I present to you. If there are confreres who have the desire to respond to a need somewhere in the world in the Congregation of the Mission, whether it be in an international mission or in one of a particular province mentioned, please let me know. At the end of this letter you will find the information needed to volunteer, after having discussed the matter with your Visitor. I would then get back to you after having discussed it with the members of the General Council.

C. FINANCIAL APPEAL

I would like to thank all the provinces and confreres who continue to provide financial support for the missions of the Congregation. At each *tempo forte* council meeting the Treasurer General presents a list of those who have given to the Vincentian Solidarity Fund (VSF) in support of the missions. I am often touched by the generous outpouring of support for the missions by so many confreres and provinces.

These donations to the VSF are being used to fund the Micro-Project Grants (projects of \$ 5000 or less) submitted by our missionary provinces. We have already begun receiving and funding Micro-Project Grants and will continue to do so at each *tempo forte* meeting. You will be able to read about some of these projects in upcoming issues of the Vincentian Solidarity Office (VSO) bulletin.

I do not find it easy asking for financial contributions, but I sincerely appreciate the generous response to my appeal last year. Once again, I ask you simply to reflect on whether you as an individual or a local community can make a contribution, small or large, to the Vincentian Solidarity Fund. I also ask each of the Visitors to discuss with the members of the council whether his province might be able to make a contribution, small or large. At the end of this letter you will find a sheet that will provide you with the instructions as to how this can be done.

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings glad tidings, announcing peace, bearing good news, announcing salvation, and saying to Zion, "Your God is King!" (Isaiah 52:7).

Your brother in St. Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General

Rome, 28 November 2005
Feast of St. Catherine Labouré

*To the Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission
and the Visitatrixes of the Daughters of Charity*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your hearts now and forever!

I write to give you some news about the Association of the Miraculous Medal. As you know, the Second International Meeting of the Association was held here in Rome from 24-28 October 2005. I am very happy to share with you some of the experiences we had during that week.

We were 92 participants coming from 29 countries. There were 50 lay persons, 15 Daughters of Charity and 25 confreres present. In addition, two sisters from the Community of Vincentian Sisters, who work with the Association in Austria, participated.

Under the theme: *“Loved by the Father and guided by Mary, committed to the mission of the Church”* was the objective: *Review the journey made since the First Meeting in 2001 in order to discover our vocation in the Church and continue moving forward in our missionary commitment and service of the poor.* The dynamic of the meeting was the following: We took off from an evaluation that made us aware of the progress and achievements made since 2001, when the first Meeting was held. We were also able to identify challenges for continuing to advance. Afterwards, we focused on the ecclesial dimension of the Association, on formation, on the apostolate among the poor, and on the theme of youth in the Association. We had some interesting moments of group work which allowed the participants to share their experiences and to seek enlightenment for progressing in the renewal of the Association. These ideas were embodied in a Final Document which contains the commitments assumed for moving forward in the coming years. You will find this document attached.

At the conclusion of the Meeting, I met with the confreres and Daughters of Charity who work most closely with the Association. We discussed the role of the animators and formators of lay leaders, so that they might be active participants in it. We spoke about the appointment of National Advisors in order to accompany the laity in the foundation of the Association and the drafting of National Statutes. For this I ask the Visitors and Visitatrixes that, in those countries in which no confrere or sister has been named as Advisor,

they present to me one whom I could name to this duty. It has been wonderful to see this Association grow and strengthen in many countries. Together with the International Coordinator and his Council, we want to continue working to introduce it into those countries in which it does not yet exist, since its apostolate among the poor, in hospitals, among fallen-away families, with youth and in favor of mission countries is a treasure for the Church.

Finally, I want to encourage you to visit the website of this Association, on which you will find information about the countries and, above all, a great wealth of catechesis to offer formation to its members. The address is: www.amminter.org

May Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal continue to lavish abundant graces and blessings on this Association.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.

Director General of the A.M.M.

Rome, 15 December 2005

To the Visitors of Europe and their Provincial Councils

Dear Brothers,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your heart now and forever!

During the *tempo forte* session of December, the General Council met with the Vice-Visitor of Sts. Cyril and Methodius and the Visitors of Slovakia, Slovenia and Poland.

We discussed an agreement of support between the General Council and the Vice-Province of Sts. Cyril and Methodius.

I am writing you at this time in order to ask you, in a fraternal spirit, to discuss with your Provincial Councils the possibilities that your provinces might have to help the Vice-Province of Sts. Cyril and Methodius.

There are many ways to collaborate and, among others, I suggest the following:

- Send volunteers from among your confreres to overcome the shortage of personnel.
- Give financial assistance to the vice-province which does not have sources of income.
- Establish twinning programs between your province or its houses and a particular house or specific apostolate of the vice-province.
- Make visits in order to learn about the world and the Church where the vice-province carries out its mission.
- Sponsor a confrere of the vice-province, offering the help necessary to carry out his pastoral work, formation or studies.
- Offer in your own provinces a place for the formation of the formators or the students of the vice-province.

At the next meeting of the Conference of Visitors of Europe (CEVIM), which will be held during Easter Week of 2006 in Istanbul, one of the topics on the agenda will be the situation of the Vice-Province of Sts. Cyril and Methodius. I ask you, then, to come to this meeting with concrete proposals of help that your provinces could offer to our brothers in Eastern Europe. In Turkey, we will

come to an agreement on how to make real a project of inter-provincial collaboration, solidarity and fraternal affection.

I trust that you will celebrate a happy and holy Christmas in the Lord.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.

Superior General

Rome, 20 December 2005

To the members of the Congregation of the Mission

Dear Brothers,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your hearts now and forever!

The General Council held its final *tempo forte* meeting of 2005 from 5-9 December. For our ongoing formation session this time, we had a presentation given by Fr. Bartholomew Kiely, a Jesuit from the Institute of Psychology at the Pontifical Gregorian University. He spoke on "Homosexuality and the Priesthood: Criteria for Accompaniment." He based his remarks on the just-released document from the Congregation for Catholic Education, "Instruction Concerning the Criteria for the Discernment of Vocations with regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies in view of their Admission to the Seminary and to Holy Orders."

1. Among the different matters that we treated in the *tempo forte* meeting was an initial report on the International Development Office. We have asked Fr. Carl Pieber of the Eastern Province to assist us in investigating the possibility of beginning a Development Office at the international level. He has been invited to bring together some people and chair an ad hoc committee meeting sometime at the beginning of the new year.
2. We also studied the fifth draft of the proposal for the election of the new Superior General for 2010. A sixth draft will be prepared and then presented at the meeting of the Visitors in Mexico in 2007 for their discussion and input.
3. We talked about some of the final details of the Think Tank meeting, which will be held here in Rome from 27 February to 3 March. You will recall that Fr. Robert Maloney will be coordinating this group, which includes the following members of the Congregation and other members of the Vincentian Family: Fr. Joseph Foley (CM NGO representative at the UN), Fr. Pedro Opeka (Madagascar), Fr. Noberto Carcellar (Philippines), Sr. Ellen Flynn, D.C. (Great Britain), and Mrs. Patricia de Nava (AIC). You will recall that the purpose of the Think Tank is to have its members share their best practices in serving the poor, which, we hope will, in turn, help to stimulate more creativity in our evangelization and service of the poor throughout the Congregation.

4. We discussed an update on the New Visitors' Meeting, considering the final details of that meeting which will be held from 18-24 January 2006.
5. A concern of the former Superior General and his council was how to help provinces deal with the situations of confreres in difficulty in a general way. We have decided to organize, for January 2007 a workshop for those who might help confreres in difficult situations in the various provinces. In the near future, a letter will be sent to all the Visitors with regard to this matter.
6. We named the Preparatory Commission for the International Meeting of Visitors in Mexico in 2007. Its members are: Frs. Gabriel Naranjo (Coordinator, Colombia), Antonius Sad Budianto (Indonesia), Yves Bouchet (Toulouse), Daniel Borlik (USA South), and a confrere from Africa.
7. We spent almost a day and a half on the Treasurer General's report to the General Council. We made the decision to give a donation to the confreres and Daughters of Charity in Burundi, who were recent victims of an armed robbery, as well as to some of the social projects of the International Mission in El Alto, Bolivia. The budgets for the Vincentian Solidarity Office, the CM Website, the CM NGO Representative at the UN, SIEV, and the possible new Development Office were approved, as was that for the History of the Congregation project. We also studied the budgets for the International Missions of El Alto (Bolivia), the Solomon Islands, and Papua New Guinea.
8. We decided upon the recipients of the Systemic Change Award which will be announced on 25 January 2006. The \$ 100,000 will be divided equally among five projects which were chosen. This award will be granted to acknowledge and support specific projects that are developed by confreres and which reflect St. Vincent's creativity in responding to the needs of the Church, while also helping to promote systemic change of the unjust structures which oppress the poor today.
9. We studied the VSO report to the Superior General and General Council, as submitted by Brother Peter Campbell, the Administrator of the Vincentian Solidarity Office. Since the last *tempo forte* meeting in October 2005, the VSO accepted three new projects, secured funding for two previous projects, and awarded Vincentian Solidarity Fund money for three Micro-Project Grants. Information about the Vincentian Solidarity Office is on its website, which has been updated (www.famvin.org/vso). To this date, the English and French versions of the website are available and the Spanish version is in process.

10. In the report on development in using the internet from our webmaster, Fr. John Freund, we received an update on the new technology of podcasting. Basically this refers to the ability to subscribe to or tune into a series of audio or video presentations, broadcast via the internet. The religious subset of podcasting is called "God casting" and is a rapidly growing tool of evangelization. You can find an example of the podcasting on the famvin website under "Fr. Greg Reflects," which has a new layout, part of which includes the video podcast.
11. We received the quarterly report to the Superior General and his Council by Fr. Manuel Ginete, my Delegate for the Vincentian Family. Among other things, he gave us some reflections on the role of the Delegate for the Vincentian Family. The matters of the Vincentian Family are as important to us as any other ministry that we have. The Delegate is directly accountable to the Superior General and reports to him and the General Council on a quarterly basis. Fr. Ginete's role this year is to concentrate on stabilizing the different National Councils of the Vincentian Family throughout the world, as well as on raising consciousness in other areas of the importance of uniting ourselves in order that we might be a greater force in the service of our brothers and sisters, the poor.
12. Fr. Joseph Foley, the CM NGO representative to the United Nations told us in his report that links in Spanish and French have been added to the website (www.cm-ngo.net). He also reported that he has been giving classes on the UN Millennium Development Goals at De Paul University, as well as at the CIF Program. The Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, reminds us all that "development, peace and security, and human rights form the indispensable foundations for collective security and well-being."
13. We also reflected on some of the volunteers who responded to the Mission Appeal letter of October 2005. To this date, we received four responses, two of which will be processed shortly. Fr. Gregory Walsh, from the Province of Australia, has been assigned to the International Mission in the Solomon Islands and will be moving there at the beginning of 2006. He is replacing Fr. Marek Owsiak who, after having served for five years on that mission, is returning to Poland. We are most grateful for Fr. Marek's generous service there.
14. We had a meeting with the Vice-Visitor of the Vice-Province of Sts. Cyril and Methodius, Fr. Paul Roche, and the Visitors of Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia in order to draw up a new agreement for supporting the Vice-Province from 2006-2011.

15. We concluded by studying the reports we received from the various Visitors' Conferences. The NCV gave us an update on the collaboration among the provinces in the United States. CLAPVI sent a three-year plan (2005-2008), along with the revision of its Statutes. From Asia-Pacific we got the announcement of the new President for the next period, Fr. Mathew Kallammakal of the Province of North India. He will be participating with the other Presidents of the Conferences of Visitors at the meeting scheduled just prior to our June 2006 *tempo forte*. As you have probably heard, the President of COVIAM, Fr. Benjamin Ramarosan, has been named Bishop of Farafangana. It will be necessary, therefore, to elect a new president at the next meeting of COVIAM in Madagascar. Meanwhile, COVIAM is under the responsibility of the Executive Secretary, Fr. Emmanuel Typamm from Cameroon. I take this opportunity to thank Fr. Benjamin for his generosity in serving not only as Visitor of the Province of Madagascar, but also as President of COVIAM. He did a fine job in the short time that he was president.

Those are the main things that I would like to share with you with regard to our *tempo forte* meeting this month. I take this opportunity to wish all of you a blessed and peace-filled Christmas and a New Year 2006 filled with enthusiasm and joy in your living in community for the service of the poor.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General

To the members of the Congregation of the Mission

Dear brothers,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your hearts now and forever!

A Christmas Story

I love to read stories and I love to tell them. When I am home visiting my family, my nieces and nephews always are anxious to hear some of the stories that I invent to entertain them. I try to tell a story that has a good moral message, taking something that might ordinarily be a source of fear and converting it into a story that has a happy, peaceful ending. That is how I would like to speak about our preparation this year for Advent, by telling a story.

My story is about my first Christmas in the mountains of Panama in 1986. I will never forget the experience. It began with a celebration of the Eucharist in a one-room school building on the top of a mountain. There were no decorations. The altar was a teacher's desk. The pews were the pupils' benches. Despite the fact that there were no decorations or flowers to speak of the joy of Christmas or lights to brighten the environment, that joy and that light were ever present on the faces of the people who participated in the Eucharist. It was simple, because I could barely speak and understand Spanish. Yet I remember clearly trying to communicate that we celebrate the fact that God is among us now in a special way, that the Word of God, Jesus Christ, has become flesh and that we have to make that an everyday reality, especially in our ways of dealing with one another in family and in the community.

After Mass I went down the mountain and off into the darkness, conducted by the village lay leader, not knowing where I was headed, guided only by the dim light of a flashlight, across streams, through brush, up hills, down hills, until we finally came upon a little village hut. We went around the back of the house and there was a makeshift lean-to with bamboo benches around the border and a big table off to the side, filled with food for sharing. We ate a simple meal, rice with chicken. We drank a homemade corn drink and we listened to typical Panamanian music on a transistor radio. People chatted. People were excited. They asked me questions. They laughed as I attempted to speak and answer their queries and their requests. After we had finished sharing the meal, the music began. And so we danced. I returned to the house later that night, again through the

woods, across the streams, up and down hills, in the pitch dark, guided by the dim light of a flashlight. The next day, I woke up and remembered: "It is Christmas Day." On this occasion there were no toys for the children, no exchange of gifts. In one sense, it was just another day like every other day, except that the people did not have to work. They just sat and enjoyed one another's presence. After sharing breakfast with them — a bowl of rice with a precious egg on top — I rode off on my horse to the next village to celebrate with the people there the Christmas Eucharist.

In all honesty I have to say that it was the best Christmas I have ever spent in my life. I have had other good ones — and I hope to share them in coming years — but this was the best. It spoke to me a great deal of what Advent is really all about: a time of joy, a time of walking in the darkness led by the light of God's Word, a time of deepening our sense of community, a time of being family with our friends and neighbors, a time of sharing around the table: both the Eucharistic table and the table where the best of our meals are set before us in all simplicity. It is a time to laugh and a time to question. It is a time to respond to questions that come from the depths of our heart, through the Word of God that we hear, through the experience of the suffering of the poor, where God speaks to us with loud shouts. It is a time to celebrate. It is a time to dance, a time to be free, a time to let go. It is a time to return home. It is a time to be quiet, a time to slow down, a time to be alone. It is even a time to be lonely without fearing that loneliness, but learning to love more deeply our own self and the God who meets us in the quiet moments of our life, in the depths of our heart. It is a time to listen. It is a time to pray.

Advent is also a time to reflect, above all, on the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us. We sing Emmanuel: God is with us, choosing to be like us in order that we might be like him, assuming our humanness in order that we might assume the divine. The incarnation was a theme very dear to the heart of St. Vincent. It is a time to recover the true meaning of Christmas by looking for alternate ways of celebrating, by moving away from materialism. There is really no need for physical gifts, nor even toys for the children. We already have the most important gift: the Word made flesh, the gift of the Eucharist, God with us in his body and blood. We also have the gift of one another, the gift of the music we make together and the laughter we share, the gift of nature we contemplate. There is the gift of darkness too that blends into light, the gift of loneliness that leads us to intimacy with the God who dwells within the deepest part of our soul. Advent is the time to prepare ourselves for the joy of celebrating God eternally with us.

I offer this Christmas story for your own personal reflection in this wonderful, mysterious time in which God desires to speak to

our hearts, to change our lives, to unite himself with us, to meet us and heal us of all our weakness, to shed light on our strengths, to bind us together that we might have the strength and courage to walk forward together in the midst of darkness guided by his ever-present light.

Reflect on your own Christmas stories and share them in community. Recall the most memorable moments: those times that touched your heart, those times that lifted you up to praise God, those times that strengthened your own desire to serve more deeply those who show us the true meaning of life. For it is among those who know what true religion is all about, our brothers and sisters, the poor, as St. Vincent so clearly states, that we come to know God, we come to live God, we come to love God and our neighbor and ourselves.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General

FEATURE:

The Five Vincentian Virtues Today

Presentation

by Alfredo Becerra Vázquez, C.M.

Editor of "Vincentiana"

Saint Vincent de Paul invited the first missionaries and continues inviting us, Vincentian missionaries of the XXI Century to clothe ourselves anew in the person of Christ: to have the same feelings and affects, motivations and options, and commitment to the most poor, the disenfranchised, those who linger on the margins of society, the faceless and voiceless.

We need to recover this *missionary fire* of the first years of the Congregation. What impelled the first missionaries and so many others throughout the history of our community to seriously commit themselves to those who were abandoned and marginalized? How must we live in order to be authentic and faithful followers of the missionary Christ, Christ the evangelizer of the poor?

Saint Vincent proposed to us the five virtues of the missionary Christ: simplicity, humility, meekness, mortification and zeal for the salvation of souls. These are the spiritual means that ought to enable us to commit ourselves to following Christ, the evangelizer of the poor.

In this edition we offer you a reflection on the Vincentian virtues. The articles have been prepared by confreres in distinct geographical areas and with different missionary experiences.

In the first article, *St. Vincent de Paul and the Five Fundamental Virtues*, Jean-Pierre Renouard, C.M., offers us a general presentation of the Vincentian virtues and places them within the broad context of Vincentian spirituality.

The following articles are reflections on the Vincentian virtues from a very real and actual perspective.

Bernard J. Quinn, C.M., in his article *The Virtue of Humility* share his personal and pastoral reflections. He begins with some references to Saint Vincent's life and then presents the Biblical foundation of this virtue. He continues with a discussion of the practice of the virtue and concludes by offering some hints with regard to a spirituality of *imperfection*.

My Gospel... Let then Simplicity Live... is the title that Richard McCullen, C.M., gives to his article. He begins with references about Saint Vincent and simplicity. He presents various Vincentian texts with regard to this *gospel pearl*. This was the virtue that Saint Vincent loved most and recommended this virtue to the Daughters of Charity as well as the Vincentian missionaries. He concludes by reminding us of the ways in which this virtue is united to prudence, the truth, charity and the authenticity of life.

Michael Ngoka, C.M., shares with us his thoughts on *The Virtue of Mortification*. He begins by speaking about the prevalence of a consumerist mentality in our society. From this perspective he invites us to live the virtue of mortification in an intense way. This virtue has spiritual and pastoral implications.

Meekness is the title of Noel Mojica García's, C.M., reflection. He describes the actual situation and presents Saint Vincent's vision on this virtue. He studies Jesus' meekness and from this perspective and with the assistance of a Brazilian author, he shares some key moment in Jesus' life. All of this is done in order to help us in our human, personal following of Jesus Christ who continues teaching us how to live meekness in a concrete way.

Francisco Ruíz Barbacil, C.M., is the author of the article *Zeal for the Salvation of Souls*. He describes the three enemies of this virtue in the life of the Vincentian missionary. He explains the general meaning of this world and presents Saint Thomas Aquinas' definition. He then presents Saint Vincent de Paul thoughts on this virtue and the vices that are contrary to zeal — vices that Vincent invites the missionaries to be attentive to and avoid. He concludes by describing some implications and consequences in the apostolic and spiritual life of the missionary.

Every Christian and every Vincentian who grows in living out these virtues also grows in the grace of God. As Vincentians we are

called to grow in the human, Christian and Vincentian virtues: joy, goodness, chastity, gentleness, enthusiasm, fidelity, generosity, honesty, modesty, patience, silence, sincerity and others. The virtues are spiritual means that help us know how to respond in a better way to our vocation and our service of the poor as an expression of our following of Christ, the evangelizer of the poor.

Enjoy your reading!

(CHARLES T. PLOCK, C.M., translator)

St. Vincent de Paul and the Five Fundamental Virtues

Jean-Pierre Renouard, C.M.

Province of Toulouse

It is common to hear those who are familiar with St. Vincent de Paul assert that he did not write methodically. And they are correct. The saint did not feel the need for the systematic. He is more animator than teacher. The book to which he returned again and again was that of experience. He lives events, looks at people, sees the instances of hardship and shares, with those to whom he speaks and corresponds, what he feels and what moves him to action. He is first and foremost a man of action: "*Totus opus nostrum in operatione consistit*" (SV XII, 41).¹ Nevertheless, he knows how to communicate a message and succeed in teaching it. This would only be for his own. We must pay particular attention when he teaches like this. In this (case) he speaks more than he writes.

A small portable notebook (about 10.5 cm by 5 cm) is the exception and offers a more structured and organised view, namely *The Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission*.² St. Vincent made them live, trying them out for 30 years before writing them down and distributing them to his confreres on 17 May 1658 during the course of a memorable conference (SV XII, 1-14). Besides, he has a history of printing. Even when he has decided on publishing, on setting his thought in print, St. Vincent only does so after confirmation by experience. Life must first verify the script. It is always an absolute with him, in short, a golden rule. This little

¹ We have 14 volumes of St. Vincent's Works, eight of letters (Volumes I to VIII), two of Conferences to the Daughters of Charity (Volumes IX and X), two of Conferences to the Missionaries (Volumes XI and XII), one of Documents (Volume XIII) and one of Tables (Volume XIV) edited by Fr. Pierre COSTE, Priest of the Mission, and published by Gabalda between the years 1920-1925. In 1960, Fr. André DODIN produced a volume of 144 letters in a special issues of the revue *Mission et Charité*. In that study, every Roman numeral indicates the volume and the Arab numeral the page, as is the custom.

² *Regulae seu constitutiones communes Congregationis Missionis*, Parisiis 1658, in 24.

book of Rules, today the basis of the new Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission, is a document of 12 chapters, of a few paragraphs each.³ Chapter two is particularly important where Vincentian spirituality is concerned. It deals with Gospel teaching, spiritual disposition towards realities which the disciple should put on so as to be a true and good missionary. "Christ's teaching will never let us down, while worldly wisdom always will."⁴ He suggests "seeking the kingdom of God" in devotion to Providence and trust in carrying out at every opportunity "the will of God," in attention to simplicity and prudence, in the practice of gentleness, humility, mortification of "one's" own will, the renunciation of one's own judgement and all one's senses, of excessive affection for one's parents, in cultivating the virtue of indifference, in seeking to preserve unity through a certain "uniformity," in carrying out "acts of charity," in putting up with slander, etc.

In short, it concerns doing everything possible "to keep the Gospel teachings, as they are very holy and practical, having in them more application to us than others, to know those that especially advise **simplicity, humility, gentleness, mortification and zeal for souls.**"⁵

These are the "fundamental virtues." St. Vincent points to them, insisting in a very particular way: "*The Congregation should pay special attention to developing and living up to these five virtues so that they may be, as it were, the faculties of the soul of the whole Congregation, and that everything each one of us does may always be inspired by them.*"⁶

The Constitutions of 1980-1984 summarised, more or less, the essentials contained in chapter II but they condense them, citing the core and referring to them explicitly. We have, therefore, the best of the Vincentian tradition.

The five virtues do not constitute the entire spirit of the Mission but they are a direct consequence: they bring out the profile of the Missioner. This point is important. In texts of great worth, in the works of important people, in interesting turns of phrase, one could

³ Caput I: "De fine et Instituto Congregationis," Cap. II: "De documentis evangelicis," Cap. III: "De paupertate," Cap. IV: "De castitate," Cap. V: "De obedientia," Cap. VI: "De iis quae ad infirmos spectant," Cap. VII: "De modestia," Cap. VIII: "De mutua nostrorum conversatione," Cap. IX: "De conversatione cum externis," Cap. X: "De piis exercitiis in Congregatione observandis," Cap. XI: "De missionibus caeterisque Congregationis functionibus erga proximum obeundis," Cap. XII: "De nonnullis mediis et adjuamentis ad praedictas functiones bene et fructuose obeundas requisitis."

⁴ *Common Rules* II, 1.

⁵ *Common Rules* II, 2-14.

⁶ *Common Rules* II, 14.

have been led to believe that we had here the summary of the Vincentian spirit. This approach is incorrect and we have to situate these virtues in their proper place in a context of a wide-ranging spirituality. We tend to simplify, which can prove dangerous in the long term. Take, for example, the end of the Congregation of the Mission. We spent many months in personal and collective reflection, two months of intensive work each summer for two years, preceded by five years of coming and going between a central commission and local communities in order to arrive at the celebrated text of paragraph 1 of the Constitutions:

“The purpose of the Congregation of the Mission is to follow Christ evangelizing the poor. This purpose is achieved when, faithful to St. Vincent, the members individually and collectively:

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 XIII, 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.*

But, in practice, one is aware of an oversimplification setting in as the years go by: “The Congregations is for the poor!” This is true and false. The Congregation has certainly given priority to the poor without ceasing to see to their evangelization. But its true end reveals itself in other ways: its mission is “to follow Christ evangelizing the poor” and all its life and that of its members calls to an imitation of Christ. An imitation, with Bérullian accents, and which assumes a configuration in the missionary acting. Fr. Koch shows us the basics of these assertions:

To express these two ways, Bérulle often uses two words that are found some times in the Bible (in Latin): “adherer” (translated in English — NJB, NRSV, NAB — as to hold fast do, to be near, and to be united to) in Deuteronomy 11:22; 13:14; and 30:20; Psalm 73:28; 1 Corinthians 6:17; and its noun “adherence,” and “to imitate,” four times in St Paul: 1 Thessalonians 1:16; 2 Thessalonians 3:7; 1 Corinthians 4:16 and 11:1. In Bérulle, “to imitate” and “imitation” appear almost as often as “to hold fast to” and “holding fast to” in the indexes of several volumes.⁷

⁷ Cf. Bernard Koch on FAMVIN, the website of the Congregation of the Mission, the francophone pages: *Bérulle et St Vincent*, No. 13.

We have absorbed the demanding reality of the imitation of Christ, which probably comes to us from Thomas of Kempis, the author of the *Imitation*, via Bérulle:

*St. Vincent quotes and recommends reading the Imitation, but he also uses "to imitate" and "imitation" in the spirit of Bérulle. Just like him, Monsieur Vincent aspires to the imitation of Jesus especially in his virtues, in his interior life and renunciation much more than in his acts of healing and preaching which will follow easily if we are first filled with the Spirit, the inclinations, the state of Jesus.*⁸

The first characteristic of the Congregation is mystical, because it is Christological, and for that to be forgotten runs the serious danger of dereliction and spiritually aridity. St. Vincent, who waged war on what was false, knew this well:

Our vocation, therefore, is a continuation of his (that of Jesus Christ), or, at least, it is related to its circumstances. What happiness, my brothers! But what an obligation to have any feeling for it!

We have a great reason then for this, it is the dignity of the thing — to make God known to the poor, to tell them about Jesus Christ, to say to them that the kingdom of heaven is near and that it is for the poor. How wonderful! But that we should be called to share in the works of the Son of God, this is beyond our comprehension. What! For us to take on, I dare not say it is so much, so elevated a service as evangelizing the poor, this is "par excellence," the work of the Son of God, and we are applied to it as instruments by which the Son of God continues to do from heaven what he did on earth. A great reason to praise God, my brothers and to thank him unceasingly for this grace (On the End of the Congregation of the Mission, 6 December 1658, SV XII, 80).

It is well to recall, in order to respond to the kind invitation of the editor of this journal:

1. What is the spirit of the Mission?
2. What is the content of the five virtues?

There are two steps in the process that we undertake and that are supposed to be complementary.

Others will be responsible for saying how to update them and especially how they are alive today.

⁸ *Ibid.*

I. THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST, THE SPIRIT OF THE MISSION

We repeat it emphatically: M. Vincent does not deal in the least with spirituality. All the same, the informed and careful reader is going to finish by finding constants in the life, the letters and the oral contributions of St. Vincent. He has very strong convictions, which show a way of thinking to which we can — in avoiding betraying it — give organization and substance.

a) Christ, Messenger and Servant of the Father

From the experience of Folleville and Châtillon and the two realities, which give strength and cohesion to his actions, “Mission and Charity,” St. Vincent came quite naturally to turn himself towards Christ, Missioner and Servant. This Christ is at the centre of his life. He irradiates it, stimulates it and above all gives him a subject of imitation.

Monsieur Vincent presents Christ as he himself presents himself: “Evangelizer of the poor,” “Missioner of the poor,” “Messenger of the Father.” This has to do with Isaiah 61:1, taken up again in Luke 4:8. Eight times in the texts that we possess, St. Vincent recalls this New Testament episode to which he connects the foundation of the Congregation of the Mission: “He sent me to bring good news to the poor” (SV XI, 32; XI, 108; XI, 135; XII, 3; XII, 79; XII, 90; XII, 367). The Lord is charged with bringing the good news which liberates and the missioner ought not do anything else:

Our end is to work for (the) salvation (of the poor), in imitation of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the one true Redeemer and who has perfectly fulfilled this amiable name of Jesus, that is to say, Saviour.... While he lived on earth, he directed all our thoughts to the salvation of man; and he continues still in the same sentiment, because it is here that he finds the will of the Father.⁹

This Mission registers in the core of St. Vincent’s conscience and mobilises his energies. Jesus is the Messenger of the Father, following him we are his new messengers. For Fr. Morin, an excellent student and populariser of M. Vincent, Jesus is the typical

⁹ LOUIS ABELLY, *La vie du vénérable serviteur de Dieu, Vincent de Paul*, F. Lambert, Paris 1664 (three volumes in one tome). This fundamental and indispensable work was reproduced identically in 1981: it is available through the Congregation of the Mission - 95, rue de Sèvres - 75006 Paris. The reference to this book will always be indicated by the name of the author, “Abelly,” followed by reference to the book, then the chapter and finally the page: here ABELLY, I, III, pp. 89-90.

missioner¹⁰ whom he meets each day in his ministry. He follows Christ, Evangelizer of the poor in the sense of the *sequella Christi* from which comes this wonderful summary that he grasped one day, and gave as a rallying sign to his missionaries: “*Jesus Christ is the Rule of the Mission*” (SV XII, 130).

Jesus Christ is also servant. He did not content himself to preach to the poor. He served them. This second function of Christ anchors itself on the scene of the washing of the feet where Jesus kneels before his Apostles and pronounces the famous, “*exemplum dedi vobis*” (John 13:15). Christ sends the Missioners in turn into a role that is not subsidiary but integral. It is about living day by day Matthew 25:31-46, the eminently Vincentian: “*All that you have done to the least among mine, you did to me.*”

He encourages his confreres to work in this manner, in the celebrated conference of 6 December 1658, often called (his) “testament conference” where he berates his own forcefully:

If there are among us those who think they are on Mission to evangelise the poor and not to bring them relief, to remedy their spiritual needs and not the temporal, I respond that we must assist them and have them assisted in every way, by ourselves and by others.... To do this, is to evangelise by words and actions, and it is the most perfect, and that practised by Our Lord, and it is also what they must do who represent him on earth by appointment and by nature, as priests (SV XII, 87-88).

He also explained to the Daughters of Charity: “*The poor are our lords, they are masters*” (SV IX, 119). He takes the formula of the vows of the Hospitalers of Italy as a formula of reference which says word for word: “*I vow... to serve our lords the poor*” (SV IX, 25).

This same turn of phrase is found in his conferences to his confreres. One cites most often in spiritual literature this significant extract:

Turn the medal and you will see by the light of faith that the Son of God, who wished to be poor, is presented to us by these¹¹ poor.... Oh God! It is good to see the poor, if we see them in God and with the esteem that Jesus Christ had for them (SV XI, 32).

His spiritual experience takes a shortcut here, heavy with meaning and commitment: Jesus Christ is in the poor person; the

¹⁰ « Vincent de Paul, son expérience et la nôtre », p. 57.

¹¹ Note the demonstrative pronoun: “these poor” and not those of whom one would dream or hope. The poor are given to us; we do not choose them. They are our lot.

poor person is Jesus Christ. These are the two faces of an identification desired by Christ himself. One would say today, in a more open theology: the poor person is the sacrament of Christ, the real presence of the poor Christ. Is not his greatest destitution when he is raised on the Cross? Paradoxically, it is he, then, who draws all people and who knew, in his act of extreme love, his divinity. St. Vincent is not mistaken in this when he proposes this love to his confreres:

Let us look at the Son of God: oh! what a heart of charity! What a flame of love! My Jesus, please tell us a little, you who left heaven to come to suffer the curse of earth, such were the persecutions and the torments that you received here. O Saviour! O Source of love humiliated to our level and to a despicable agony, who in this has loved the neighbour more than yourself? You came to expose yourself to all our miseries, to take the form of a sinner, to lead an oppressed life and to suffer a shameful death for us; is there any love like this? But who could love in such a surpassing way? There is only Our Lord, so taken with the love of creatures to the throne of this Father, to come to take a body subject to weakness. And why? To establish between us by his example and his teaching love of the neighbour. It is this love which crucified him and which accomplished the admirable work of our redemption. O messieurs if we had a little of this love, would we remain with our arms folded? Those we could help, would we allow them to perish? Oh no! love cannot remain idle; it applies us to the salvation and the consolation of others (SV XII, 264-265).

Jesus is the divine model, the one whom it is necessary to contemplate at length in order to assume his disposition and gentleness. Sentiments of compassion and pity, we were saying earlier. The missionaries are “*chosen by God as instruments of his great and fraternal love, that wants to establish itself and grow in souls*” (SV XII, 262).

b) Christ, the perfect homage of the Father

In contemplating Christ, St. Vincent finds him also in his relationship with the Father and with the Spirit and therefore with the Trinity. It is the source and the end of the whole spiritual dynamic of St. Vincent. The Congregation of the Mission must honour, “*in a very particular way, the ineffable mysteries of the Most Holy Trinity and the Incarnation.*”¹²

¹² *Common Rules X, 2*, which propose to honour them: 1° frequently honoring these mysteries by a prayer of faith and adoration, coming from our

St. Vincent would almost present Christ as “*Adorer of the Father,*” which is a Bérullian idea.

Still following Bérulle, he would consider Jesus as the first adorer of the Father, the model of religious people, but always tied to his love for people. The most typical passage is, at the same time, the shortest, towards the end of a presentation on the eminence of the ministry of the formation of priests, whose date is missing: “Oh! how fortunate you are to be the instrument of Our Lord in forming good priests... these men, called to the most lofty ministry on earth, through which they must exercise the two great virtues of Jesus Christ, namely, reverence toward his Father and charity toward mankind” (SV VI, 393).¹³

For him, the basis of religion is dependence on the Father. Christ is the Son who by his nature as Son pays homage to the Father. He receives his life, his being, from God himself. Through his prayer and action, he gives him every worship and praise. One is close to the Christ of Bérulle, often presented in a simplistic manner, in whom God acts where: “*His action becomes integrated into the activity of men.*”¹⁴

For St. Vincent, Jesus receives everything from the Father, he is totally dependent on him. He recognises that the Father is the author and the principle of all the good that is in him (SV XII, 109). He is sent by him as the price of a costly love (SV X, 85). One is almost into the contemporary theology of “*the suffering of God.*”¹⁵ Jesus gives all thanks to his Father by his obedience. For the Son is united to the Father, in a perfect intimacy, not only as Word but also as man (SV XII, 147-148). We touch here on the relationship of love between Jesus and his Father: he accomplishes his will (SV XII, 109).

It goes without saying that this privileged relationship, the prototype of every human relationship, between the Father and the Son blossoms in the living person of the Spirit. Vincent often contemplates the Holy Spirit, the unity of the Father and the Son and gives it as a model to his emerging communities.

inmost heart; 2° dedicating certain prayers and good works each day to their honor and, above all, celebrating their feast days with special dignity and the greatest possible personal devotion; 3° trying constantly, by our teaching and example, to get other people to know these mysteries and to honor and worship them.

¹³ BERNARD KOCH, *op. cit.*

¹⁴ Cf. RENÉ BOUREAU, *L'Oratoire en France*, Cerf, 1991, pp. 31-35.

¹⁵ “To believe in a God who suffers is to render the mystery more mysterious but in a more luminous way; it is to dispel a false clarity so as to replace it with ‘radiant darkness’” (FRANÇOIS VARILLON, *La souffrance de Dieu*, Le Centurion, p. 23).

c) Christ, the guarantor of the love of the Father

Jesus is the guarantor of the love of the Father in accomplishing his work. Again, this is a very strong idea with Vincent. He is concerned about the honour of God. “*God is God,*” says Bérulle. The soul must be amazed by his greatness and praise, bless, admire and bow before him. Vincent, always pragmatic, aims at more than the concrete: to work for the coming of the Kingdom in peoples’ hearts and the hearts of the poor, to be attentive to justice is his primary concern. It is to glorify God: “*I pray to God every day, twice or three times, that he destroy us if we are not useful for this glory*” (SV XI, 2). As we have already had the occasion to write, “the ultimate point of reference of the missionary vocation always lies in a question that one should know to ask oneself before setting out: ‘*If this is done, will God be glorified by it?*’” (SV XIII, 629).” And to Bernard Codoing, charged with “negotiating” the approval of the vows of the Congregation in Rome, he writes: “*Let us seek the glory of God; he will see to our affairs*” (SV II, 263).¹⁶ Often he will speak of the “good pleasure” of God, another “very 17th century” way of speaking of the will of God. For him, this divine will accomplishes itself pre-eminently through the evangelisation of the poor. In this, it is very personal, it is faithful to the Gospel and it “renews spirituality.” And, if we doubted it, here is the proof among others:

Oh! What happiness, what happiness, Fathers, always and in everything, to do the will of God! Is it not to do this that the Son of God came on earth, as we have already said? The Son of God came to evangelise the poor; and we too, Fathers, are we not sent for the same reason? Yes, missionaries are sent to evangelise the poor. Oh! What happiness to do on earth the same as the Saviour did here, which is to teach the poor the way to heaven!” (SV XI, 315).

d) Christ, who does the Father’s work

The missionary, according to St. Vincent, must continue the work of Christ. He carries on, he is his continuation. Work, work, act, act, such is his watchword. He willingly goes back to the terse phrase: “*Totus opus nostrum in actione consistit*”; all our work is in action (SV XI, 41); he wants a hardworking piety, “*with rolled up sleeves.*”¹⁷

¹⁶ J.-P. RENOARD, «La gloire de Dieu et le Règne de Jésus-Christ,» in COLLECTION, *Monsieur Vincent, témoin de l’Evangile*, Animation Vincentienne - 16, Grande rue St Michel - 31400 Toulouse, pp. 87-98.

¹⁷ The expression belongs to Fr. Jean Morin, C.M., who left many handwritten notes. Moreover, it is necessary to say, but it is impossible to be thorough, that the theme of work has very great importance for St. Vincent de

By our works, we show God that we love him. We will be inclined to respond by an all-out offensive!

And it is there the five fundamental virtues are grafted. They are the concretisation, the visible stamp of the Vincentian spirit, which we are trying to describe. St. Vincent has a marvellous word to encourage his missionaries to live by them:

Let us enclose ourselves in these five virtues, like snails in their shells... with them, we will go everywhere, we will accomplish everything; without them we will only be "cartoon" missionaries (SV XII, 322).

Everything follows on from there logically.

II. THE FIVE BASIC VIRTUES

We have a teaching of St. Vincent on the whole of the five virtues, which has a global merit, even if we present ours after his with a view to updating it.

1. The general teaching of St. Vincent on the five virtues

As one knows, the most general and most appropriate text to the request made of us by the editor of *Vincentiana* is the Conference of 22 August 1659 on the five fundamental virtues explaining the *Common Rules*, chapter II, article 14 (SV XII, 298-311).

The paragraph concerned says:

Although we should do our best to observe these Gospel teachings, being as they are holy and useful, there are among them, however, some that are more appropriate to us than others, namely those that advise especially simplicity, humility, gentleness, mortification and zeal for souls, the Congregation will pay special attention to them so that these five virtues may be, as it were, the faculties of the soul of the whole Congregation, and that everything each one of us does may always be inspired by them (SV XII, 298).

M. Vincent's main argument, which pleads in favour of the choice of the five virtues is, as one might have expected, Christ. To do the will of his Father, to speak of his goodwill and to teach people, he

Paul. In faithfulness, sometimes badly understood or exaggeratedly, the Daughters of Charity were often workaholics and were formed to be so. The formators often took literally and taught the recommendations of their blessed Father: "A Daughter of Charity should always be busy" (cf. SV IX, 7, 117, 221, 496). Today's more accurately sought-after balance depended on it!

left *“advice on the evangelical practices.”* The expression merits attention, because St. Vincent shows us in passing that here we are in the area of the counsels and that we would be well advised spiritually to receive them and live them as such. This is an invitation and proposition that leads us towards the perfection desired from the very first paragraph of the Common Rules.

Moreover, Christ practised *these Gospel teachings*, which are *simplicity, humility, gentleness, mortification and zeal for souls*. Monsieur Vincent strongly affirmed that: *“This was his aim, his glory and his honour, thus let us take it that our intention ought only to be to follow Our Lord and conform ourselves entirely to him”* (SV XII, 299).

It is in our interest to live them for our growth in holiness as we have just said. They pull us out of mediocrity, freeing us from, *“the love of the things of earth”* (SV XII, 300) and from, *“the three powerful, deadly enemies, which are: good, pleasure and freedom.”* The practice of these Gospel teachings is a great advantage according to St. Vincent!

“They give a person Christian liberty. You were, in the past, slaves of your passions; the attachment to wealth, to pleasure and to your own will had become your master; now, look, you are free through these Gospel teachings; neither the world with its delights, nor the flesh with its pleasures, nor the devil with his tricks can hold you captive, because the love of poverty, the mortification of your pleasures and submission to the will of God make you triumph!” (SV XII, 301-302).

As there are many Gospel teachings, on this subject it is good to reread all of chapter II of the Common Rules, in which our founder zooms in on five of them and he “always” remains insistent on them. Note his insistence: *“Because they are numerous, I choose those principally which are more suitable for missionaries; and which are they? I have always believed and thought that they were simplicity, humility, gentleness, mortification and zeal”* (SV XII, 302).

Simplicity consists in doing everything for the love of God, and having no other end in all one’s actions but his glory. This really is what simplicity is. All the acts of this virtue consist in saying things simply, without duplicity, or subtlety; in being straightforward, without prevarication or evasion. Simplicity, therefore, is to do everything for the love of God, one encounters no fabrication, we say that it is a very pure act and a very simple being. It is necessary, therefore, to banish all confusion in order to have only God in view. Now, my brothers, if there are people in the world who must have this virtue, they are missionaries, for all our lives are dedicated to

acts of charity, towards God or the neighbour. And for both, it is necessary to proceed simply, so that, were it something we had to do, concerning God and depending on us, we must flee from subtlety, because God is not pleased and only communicates his graces to simple souls. If we look at our neighbour, we must assist him corporally and spiritually, good God! How necessary it is to guard against appearing cunning, clever, sly and above all ever saying an ambiguous word! Ah, far be that from any missionary! (SV XII, 302).

In a crafty and dual way, simplicity! In an inquiry made at the time of the post-conciliar *aggiornamento*, it was discovered that what most pleased those who had been taught by French Vincentians (this was very evident then among faculty in seminaries and apostolic schools) was, precisely, simplicity. The practice was in keeping with the wishes of St. Vincent. I like this short and amusing admonition very much: “*Away with the Mission, farewell to its spirit if it has not that of simplicity*” (SV XII, 303).

Moreover, we know that, in the conference reserved to simplicity, St. Vincent indicates his own way of acting: It “*is the virtue I love the most and to which, I think, I pay the most attention in my actions...*” (SV I, 284) and he adds: “*God has given me such a high esteem of simplicity that I call it my Gospel*” (IX, 606).

The second point of Gospel teaching is humility: to annihilate oneself before God, to destroy oneself (one will note how badly the expression sounds today even though all advocate annihilation!); but the research is very positive, one wishes in this way “*to place God in one’s heart*” (SV XII, 304). And the reason for this work of annihilation, *kenosis*, one should say perhaps, is apostolic:

Our purpose is the poor, coarse people; if we do not adapt to them, we will be of no benefit to them at all; the way to do it is by humility because through humility we annihilate ourselves and establish God, the Supreme Being... I will say... that this state is appropriate to the Mission; and not being such, we have reason to fear that we do not have the spirit of a true missionary (SV XII, 305).

We have here a line of argument dear to St. Vincent: all the basic virtues have a missionary purpose. They reveal our vocation; they are useful to our apostolic work and allow us to live in witness.

The third point of Gospel teaching is of very Salesian origin: this is gentleness. It has the same goal: to put up with those whom we evangelise, “*so coarse, uncultivated, obtuse, and not to say, so stupid.*” It allows fidelity to reality without being aggressive but of service. The witness of St. Vincent is convincing:

Even convicts, with whom I spent some time, are not won over in any other way. Whenever I happened to speak sharply to them, I spoiled everything; on the contrary, when I praised them for their resignation and sympathized with them in their sufferings, when I told them they were fortunate to have their purgatory in this world, when I kissed their chains, showed compassion for their distress, and expressed sorrow for their misfortune, it was then that they listened to me, gave glory to God, and opened themselves to salvation (SV IV, 53).

This is the schema that is in place: simplicity models us on God, humility clothes us in him and gentleness puts us in the position of servant. It remains that these three emphases presuppose a radical method, which is mortification, to live together¹⁸ (without “constantly bickering” XII, 307) and to evangelise. It will be easy then to be zealous! Zeal is

... this pure desire to make oneself pleasing to God and useful to the neighbour. Zeal to spread the kingdom of God, zeal to gain the salvation of the neighbour. Is there anything in the world more perfect? If the love of God is a fire, zeal is its flame; if love is a sun, zeal is its ray. Zeal is what is most pure in the love of God (SV XII, 307-308).

As for St. Vincent’s conclusion it is imperative and connects with us across the centuries: *“These five virtues must be like the faculties of the soul of the entire Congregation; as the soul knows through understanding, wishes by will and remembers by memory, so must a missionary act only by means of these virtues”* (SV XII, 309) and further on he hammered home this principle: *“Let us make sure, each one of us, to enfold ourselves in these five virtues, like snails in their shells, and let us make our actions have the savour of these virtues”* (SV XII, 310).

2. Attempt at synthesis of the five virtues

This article must give an account of Vincentian thinking. To gather the essentials here is a modest attempt at synthesis.

1. Monsieur Vincent invites us to focus our gaze on Christ. The fundamental virtues are, above all, Christological. St. Vincent asks us to contemplate Christ simple (true), humble (servant), gentle (he masters himself perfectly), mortified (he chooses to save the world on the cross) and zealous, let us say ardent (the

¹⁸ Cf. especially, FERNANDO QUINTANO, « D  fis que la culture actuelle lance    la Congr  gation de la Mission, » in *Cahiers St Vincent, Bulletin des Lazaristes de France*, N   190, Spring 2005, pp. 5-19, especially pp. 14-17.

zeal of God devours him: "I have come to light a fire on the earth..." Lk 12:49).

2. Our vocation carries us to the poor; to adopt Vincentian behaviour is to clothe oneself in functional, practical virtues. The purpose of the fundamental virtues is apostolic, pastoral, missionary; it has been said, "*professional*."
3. We are simple, humble, gentle, mortified and zealous among ourselves to be better so with those for whom we are responsible. They would not understand that we are made for them by vocation in Christ's sphere of influence and without practical consequence in our behaviour with them and right into our character and our own psychology because we are changed by the principle of imitation implemented for the poor.
4. One lives the five virtues in community so that it may be more evangelising. Our first commitment is in the area of witness. People will better understand that we strive for these virtues if we begin by living them among ourselves.
5. Through the definition of the virtues we see appear points of insistence that can gather around the idea of commitment, energy, strength. It seems that the Vincentian attitude of the five virtues demands of us first of all the will. Because he is a man of action, the Vincentian takes risks, dares, undertakes. He holds firm after having made a decision that he thinks to be the best. He has this will because he is inhabited by *the force of love*.
6. This implies a certain non-violence to the benefit of real violence. It is like a shifting of violence. Our energies are employed in a struggle against ourselves so as to become good workers for evangelising the poor.

It is necessary to do oneself violence to master anger and to appear gentle; it is necessary to do oneself violence in order to be simple in one's lifestyle, in one's way of thinking and communicating, even though it is easier to appear wise or important; it is necessary to do oneself violence in order to be humble, at the level of the little ones, even though it is more gratifying to live with the rich and have a certain power; it is necessary to do oneself violence in order to opt for the crosses in our life, even though it is easy to run away from effort and sacrifice; finally, it is necessary to do oneself violence in order to opt resolutely for the spread of the Kingdom of God, even though laziness or insensitivity tempt us. This is the only acceptable meaning of mortification.

7. The practice of the fundamental virtues cannot exist without the grace of God. Only the Spirit gives the strength to be simple, humble, gentle, mortified and zealous. To live in this way, one

must act in this way and pray to achieve it. In this way, the man of prayer is capable of everything.

8. The five virtues put us on the path of the Beatitudes. It would not be difficult to find points of convergence with each one of Beatitudes. The five virtues are a digest of the Gospel. If Monsieur Vincent said: "*Simplicity, this is my Gospel,*" we can say: "*The five virtues, these are our Gospel.*"
9. Finally, one has noticed that the five virtues were "*virtues in balance.*" The phrase belongs to Fr. Jean Morin shortly before his death. We must say that St. Vincent is the saint of balance. There is nothing excessive in him. In positioning ourselves in truth in relation to God, in humility in relation to our being, in gentleness in relation to others and in walking in the footsteps of the crucified (through mortification, of course), we become the enthusiasts of the Kingdom (we are full of zeal).

Conclusion

For St. Vincent is an enthusiast. He is someone from the south of France who has put all his energy into the service of God in the poor. He is inhabited by passion, by enthusiasm, ardour. It seems to me that his passion is very present in the text which can serve us as a final meditation and which has the value of a testament:

In Madagascar the missionaries preach, hear confessions, teach catechism continually from four o'clock in the morning until ten, and from two o'clock in the afternoon until night time; the rest of the time, it is the office, visiting the sick. These are workers, these are real missionaries! May it please the goodness of God to give us this spirit that animates them, a big heart, huge, full! Magnificat anima mea Dominum our soul must magnify, amplify God, and for that may God amplify our soul, may he give us a depth of understanding to know well the greatness, the extent of the goodness and the power of God; to know how far our obligation to serve him extends, to glorify him in all possible ways; an extent of will to grasp all the opportunities of bringing about the glory of God. If we can do nothing ourselves, we can do everything with God. Yes, the Mission can do everything, because we have in us the germ of the almighty power of Jesus Christ (24 July 1655; SV XI, 203-204).

The Virtue of Humility

by Bernard J. Quinn, C.M.

Province of the West, USA

Asked to list the four cardinal virtues, St. Bernard of Clairvaux responded: "Humility, humility, humility and humility." St. Vincent de Paul considered humility central to those who would serve God and the poor. The Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission in keeping with this tradition reestablishes the importance of humility along with the other four key virtues: simplicity, meekness, mortification and zeal.

7. – The Congregation, furthermore, tries to express its spirit in five virtues drawn from its own special way of looking at Christ, namely, simplicity, humility, gentleness, mortification, and zeal for souls. Speaking of these five virtues, St. Vincent said: "The Congregation should pay special attention to developing and living up to these five virtues so that they may be, as it were, the faculties of the soul of the whole Congregation, and that everything each one of us does may always be inspired by them" (CR II, 14).

Recent treatments of the Vincentian virtues include Fr. Robert Maloney's excellent presentations that feature the "horizon shifts" necessary to understand and appropriate the virtues from a contemporary perspective. We likewise appreciate other successful attempts to encourage us to live out the virtues today such as Fr. Thomas McKenna's *Praying in the Spirit of Vincent de Paul*. These are two popular presentations available in English and there are others in other languages. This presentation will not explore ground so well covered by these two writers and others. Rather it will be a personal and pastoral reflection with references old and new.

BEGINNING WITH ST. VINCENT

In Chapter XII, 2 of the Common Rules, St. Vincent comments on the importance of humility in the life of a member of the Congregation:

Each one, in every single thing he does, especially in preaching or other ministries of the Congregation, should make an effort

to have, to the best of his ability, as pure an intention as possible of pleasing God alone. We should renew this intention many times. We should be careful above all not to indulge any wish for human approval or self-gratification. Such a wish can infect or spoil the holiest action.

By the time he wrote the Common Rules, St. Vincent was very aware of the failures of confreres and others, especially clergy and those of higher rank, to maintain Christian humility. But he was conscious of his own failure in this regard as well. We know that he had the habit of depreciating himself as an exercise in humility and his conferences are peppered with it. But it is his childhood experience that most touches me in regard to the importance of understanding Vincentian humility. Coste notes that St. Vincent was ashamed of his peasant father (*The Life and Works of St. Vincent de Paul I*, p. 14).

When I was a small boy and my father was taking me with him into the town, I was ashamed to walk with him and have people know that he was my father, because he was badly dressed and a little lame.

I remember that on one occasion in the College where I studied, somebody came to tell me that my father, who was a poor peasant, was asking for me. I refused to go and speak to him and thereby committed a great sin.

Such memories are not easily forgotten especially by a committed Christian dedicated to the care of poor and uncultivated people. Vincent may very well have remembered these incidents of his youth when he made the following well-known observations about poor people.

I should not judge poor peasants, men or women, by their exterior nor by their apparent mental capacities. All the more is this so since very frequently they scarcely seem to have the appearance or intelligence of reasonable beings, so gross and offensive are they. But turn the medal, and you will see by the light of faith that the Son of God, whose will it was to be poor, is represented to us by these people (SV XI, 32).

St. Vincent's memories and observations offer us a profound understanding of the nature of humility and therefore its importance for him and for us. Some definitions, such as the following, stress that humility is about truthfulness.

Humility, generically a candid attitude towards what we really are, an avoidance of humbug at two extremes, namely of inordinate self-esteem which claims too much and of

unwarranted and sometimes hypocritical self-abasement that claims too little (Encyclopedic Dictionary of Religion).

In the pursuit of holiness in accord with gospel values, Vincent discovered the meaning of his priestly vocation and the importance of acquiring the virtues necessary to follow Jesus, the Evangelizer of the Poor who was “meek and humble of heart.” While he tended to put himself down as a means to acquire humility and encourage others to do the same, he nonetheless was generous in congratulating the confreres, Daughters of Charity and others for the good they accomplished and as evidence of the working of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

The word “humility” is related to the term “humus,” dirt or earth. To be humble, then, is to accept that one is “from the earth.” To be humble is to stand with one’s feet on the ground in touch with the deepest truth of one’s self. The Bible begins with the truth of human origins. *“The Lord God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being”* (Gn 2:7). “The man” and, subsequently, “the woman” are provided with a paradise to cultivate and enjoy. But one of the animals that God had created, “the serpent” cunningly tempts the woman and, in turn, she tempts the man into eating of the forbidden fruit. They fall into the trap of believing that being human is not good enough but by eating of the fruit they would *“be like gods who know what is good and what is bad.”* Because of this lie, God curses the serpent, then curses the man and the woman for believing it and finally curses the ground itself. *“By the sweat of your face shall you get bread to eat, until you return to the ground, from which you were taken; for you are dirt, and to dirt you shall return”* (Gn 3:19). We are familiar with all that follows this root sin of our ancestors: brother kills brother and humans think they can build a mountain of their own making. All of this results in alienation and chaos and then a flood that almost destroys everything and everybody. But God, ever faithful and merciful, renews the face of the earth.

The rest of Holy Scripture portrays both God’s fidelity amid human infidelity. Various covenants are struck to reestablish a bond between God and his chosen people. Along the way we hear of those who struggle and fail and others who struggle but remain faithful. The final solution, from the Christian perspective, is the story of redemption that culminates in the paschal mystery of Jesus and one final covenant. God’s way to harmony, peace and fulfillment is the only way. A dramatic example of this struggle to live in truth and freedom is the story of Job, the *“blameless and upright man who feared God and avoided evil.”* But he was equally blessed with a

multitude of children and material wealth. Once again Satan, the tempter, enters into this blissful scene. God allows the temptation to take place but Job remains steadfast in humility and faith even though he is stripped of every blessing. He remains clear that he is a human being made and blessed by God who owes him nothing.

Then Job cast himself prostrate upon the ground, and said, "Naked I came forth from my mother's womb, and naked shall I go back again. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed by the name of the Lord!" In all this Job did not sin, nor did he say anything disrespectful of God (Jb 1:20b-22).

This well known expression of Job's humility occurs early on in the story. He struggles mightily to hold on to it in the midst of woe upon woe and profound grief. But he perseveres and sets the stage for the story of Jesus who will likewise remain faithful to his trust and love of God in the midst of temptation, suffering, grief and death. Job is rewarded with the restoration of his lost blessings. In the story of Jesus earthly blessings are transformed. The story of Jesus is again about humility — that God alone is good and all is grace.

The story of Jesus begins in Luke's gospel with Mary. She will be the ground in which the incarnation of God in Christ takes shape — with her balanced confidence in God and security in her humanity. Seeking nothing greater than what her ordinary life will bring to her, she allows God to do marvels through her. *"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior. For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness; behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed"* (Lk 1:46-48). After Jesus had expelled a demon from a mute person, a woman in the crowd yelled out, *"Blessed is the womb that carried you and the breasts at which you nursed."* But Jesus replied, *"Rather, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it"* (Lk 11:27b-28). Mary listened to God and so was able to respond humbly and truthfully. She, along with her husband, Joseph, would provide Jesus with a firm human ground transformed by grace, the foundation necessary *"to advance in wisdom and age and favor before God and man"* (Lk 2:52).

The gospel stories teem with references to the humility of Jesus and its importance in following him as disciple. One of the most significant occurs in the parable of the Lost Son (Lk 15:11-32). Jesus was being criticized by the Pharisees and the scribes for associating with the wrong element of society. *"This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."* Jesus not only finds such people worthy of his time and attention but socializes with them. He is one with them by joining them in a meal. He responds to his detractors with three parables. After describing the joy of bringing back a lost sheep in one parable and finding a lost coin in another, Jesus describes the joy of

the recovery of a lost son. It is a story of God's justice encompassing his mercy, patience, love and warmth. But the reaction and response of the elder son to his wayward younger brother demonstrates the danger of pride. For all of his affirmation of fidelity, the older brother reveals how far he is from a life-giving relationship to his father. When told that that his brother had returned and that his father had organized a big party for him and his friends, the older brother erupts in anger at his father and absolutely refuses to be a part of any such celebration. *"Look, all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders; yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends. But when your son returns who swallowed up your property with prostitutes, for him you slaughter the fattened calf."*

What a story! The faithful son is filled with anger, bitterness, resentment and profound disappointment while the disrespectful, greedy and lustful son is overwhelmed with his father's euphoria. The truth is that both boys had wandered away from their father's home and love.

*Not only did the younger son, who left home to look for freedom and happiness in a distant country, get lost, but the one who stayed home also became a lost man. Exterioerly he did all the things a good son is supposed to do, but, interiorly, he wandered away from his father. He did his duty, worked hard every day, and fulfilled all his obligations but became increasingly unhappy and unfree (HENRI NOUWEN, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*).*

The older son is not disposed to imitate his father's greatness of soul because he is filled with pride and anger; the younger son, repentant and overwhelmed by his father's joy and relief at his return, is disposed to humility, gratitude, and wisdom.

In the gospels we find reflected our own story of the struggle to be satisfied with a loving relationship with the Father and through him with others as the greatest gift one can have. To know Jesus and to learn from him is the way we come to know the Father and to live in his love. Many of Jesus' listeners did not make this connection because they were not humble enough to do so. But some did.

I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike. Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to who the Son wishes to reveal him. Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from, for I am meek and humble of

heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Mt11:25-30).

The gospels also highlight the difficulties of Jesus' disciples to learn humility and set the right priorities. Mark's gospel, in particular, shows them to be very slow learners indeed. Having given them yet a third prediction of his passion, death and resurrection, they remain deaf and preoccupied with themselves.

Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him and said, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." He replied, "What do you wish me to do for you?" They answered, "Grant that in your glory we may sit one at your right and the other at your left." Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking" (Mk 10:35-38a).

The coming of the Holy Spirit after Jesus' death and resurrection will make the difference for the apostles and many of the other disciples of Jesus. They will discover the truth of Jesus and the truth about themselves. They will know that even if they had denied him, abandoned him or even persecuted him, that he loved them and believed in them. The Acts of the Apostles and the remainder of the New Testament scriptures all touch on the conversion that Christian life entails.

Human priorities and aspirations all have to be transformed. Humility is a major stepping stone in the following of Christ and is not easily acquired. St. Paul in particular emphasizes it.

If there is any encouragement in Christ, any solace in love, and participation in the Spirit, any compassion and mercy, complete my joy be being of the same mind, with the same love, united in heart, thinking one thing. Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his own interests, but everyone for those of others.

Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed upon him the name that is above every name... (Phil 2:1-9).

St. Paul's observations about Jesus' humility are followed observations on his own journey to self understanding.

If anyone else thinks he can be confident in flesh, all the more can I. Circumcised on the eighth day, of the race of Israel, of

the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrew parentage, in observance of the law a Pharisee, in zeal I persecuted the church, in righteousness based on the law I was blameless.

But whatever gains I had, these I have come to consider a loss because of Christ. More than that, I even consider everything as a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have accepted the loss of all things and I consider them so much rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having any righteousness of my own based on the law but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God, depending on faith to know him and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his suffering by being conformed to his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead (Phil 3:5-11).

Furthermore, Paul asserts that his spiritual development is dynamic and ongoing. A humble person can never say that he has acquired this virtue.

It is not that I have already taken hold of it or have already attained perfect maturity, but I continue my pursuit in hope that I may possess it, since I have indeed been taken possession of by Christ Jesus. Brothers, I for my part do not consider myself to have taken possession. Just one thing: forgetting what lies behind but straining forward to what lies ahead, I continue my pursuit toward the goal, the prize of God's upward calling, in Christ Jesus. Let us, then who are "perfectly mature" adopt this attitude. And if you have a different attitude, this too God will reveal to you. Only, with regard to what we have attained, continue on the same course (Phil 3:12-16).

St. Vincent believed that he discovered his life's work as a priest when he preached a sermon on general confession to the people of Folleville on the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul. St. Paul was clearly his role model as a man who was given the grace of conversion and then called by Christ to offer the same gift to others. Both St. Paul and St. Vincent modeled themselves after Jesus. What they first learned from him, they then put into practice themselves before preaching to others. This is what St. Vincent proposes in Chapter I of the Common Rules.

We read in sacred scripture that our Lord, Jesus Christ, sent on earth for the salvation of the human race, did not begin by teaching; he began by doing. And what he did was to integrate fully into his life every type of virtue. He then went on to teach, by preaching the good news of salvation to poor people, and by passing on to this apostles and disciples what they needed to

know to become guides for others. Now the little Congregation of the Mission wants, with God's grace, to imitate Christ, the Lord, in so far as that is possible in view of its limitations. It seeks to imitate his virtues as well as what he did for the salvation of others (CR I, 1).

PRACTICAL VIRTUE

St. Vincent was inspired by Jesus, St. Paul, the great saints and some of his contemporaries, like St. Francis de Sales, to put faith into action. He was not interested in a kind of perfectionism that was separated from the great commandment of the love of neighbor as a requirement for the love of God. Humility was the foundation for such effective charity in keeping with biblical teaching:

You have been told, O man, what is good, and what the Lord requires of you: Only to do the right and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God (Mi 6:8).

We are used to this biblical and religious wisdom but it has contemporary secular expressions as well.

*Humility just might be one of the most overlooked attributes in leadership, but it just might be one of the most important attributes a leader can possess. Humility is a strand between leader and follower that underscores one common element: our humanity. Humility is not taught in management courses or many leadership courses, for that matter. And you can understand why. Organizations want their leaders to be visionary, authoritative, capable and motivational. Nowhere does it say anything about being "humble." Still, most successful leaders understand that a sense of humility is essential to winning hearts and minds. Humility is a visible demonstration of concern and compassion, as well as authenticity. Leaders who are to be followed must be leaders who understand the human condition, especially their own (JOHN BALDONI, "On Leadership Communication," in *Darwin Magazine*).*

These contemporary sentiments dealing with effective management skills that lead to a more successful business reflect those of St. Vincent in the *Common Rules*.

We should make a great effort to learn the following lesson, also taught by Christ: "Learn from me because I am gentle and humble in heart." We should also remember that he himself said that by gentleness we inherit the earth. If we act on this we will win people over so that they will turn to the Lord. That will not happen if we treat people harshly or sharply. And we

should also remember that humility is the route to heaven. A loving acceptance of it when we are humiliated usually raises us up, guiding us, as it were, step by step from one virtue to the next until we reach heaven (CR II, 6).

A “loving acceptance” of humiliations that guides us to acquiring other virtues also has a contemporary spin, but one that offers us sage advice in our ministry of effective evangelization.

“Turn failures into lessons.” Mistakes give rise to the need for humility. Instead of trying to cover mistakes up, leaders need to publicize them. Not for the sake of retribution, but for the sake of education. According to the Wall Street Journal, Eli Lilly, the pharmaceutical company, took a second look at a cancer drug that had failed in human trials. Researchers at Lilly understand that the scientific method involves a degree of trial and error as well as failure analysis. The result is that mistakes can be turned into successes; the failed drug was modified and is now used to treat another form of cancer (BALDONI, Darwin Magazine).

One of the practices of many religious congregations common at the time of St. Vincent and even up to the time of Vatican Council II was the “chapter of faults.” This practice of publicly confessing ones faults (but not ones sins) and having them then pointed out by others was understood to be an effective means of developing humility and therefore equipping one for more effective ministry and community life. This practice has probably died out for the most part. Today we would more likely talk about “fraternal correction” or “open and honest communication” with each other. But the underlying idea of honesty with self and others remains an important concept in contemporary life.

Humility is admission of humanity, a sense that leader and follower are in this together. That deepens a sense of trust. Better to admit a shortcoming, or a limitation, than to lead blindly onto the unknown (BALDONI, Darwin Magazine).

THE SPIRITUALITY OF IMPERFECTION

Every year on Ash Wednesday we Christians are reminded that we are made of dust and with death will return to that state. We are marked with dust, or ashes, as a reminder of this essential truth. The rest of Lent engages us through prayer and other practices to remember this fundamental fact and then practice the works of mercy, especially almsgiving, as a symbol of our human solidarity. All of us are in need of the loving and saving mercy of God and will always remain so. Saints never think of themselves as beyond the

need of God's mercy. As the saying goes, "A saint is a saint unless he knows that he is one." Ashes worn as an expression of piety is an expression of pride and Lent will get us no further along the path of holiness and discipleship.

Alcoholics Anonymous or "A.A." is an important spiritual movement of the 20th century and has successfully assisted millions of alcoholics discover the way to sobriety and from there the accomplishment of important life goals, even Christian holiness. But it starts out with the recognition that no one is or can be perfect.

*According to the way of life that flows from this insight, it is only by ceasing to play God, by coming to terms with errors and shortcomings, and by accepting the inability to control every aspect of their lives that alcoholics (or any human beings) can find the peace and serenity that alcohol (or other drugs, or sex, money, material possessions, power, or privilege) promise but never deliver (E. KURTZ - K. KETCHAM, *The Spirituality of Imperfection*).*

Those attending A.A. meetings always identify themselves as alcoholics, "My name is John; I'm an alcoholic," even if they have been sober for many years. The history of A.A. notes that this recognition that "once an alcoholic always an alcoholic" was central to maintaining sobriety, no one could refer to himself as an "ex-alcoholic." Rather, one humbly took one day at a time to remain faithful to grace that led him to sobriety.

*The point of Humility is to find a "balance," that place in the middle of life's teeter-totter that allows one foot to reside on the side of "god/saint/angel" and the other side of "worm/sinner/beast."... But Humility connotes not only "balance" but "right ordering"... a choosing of priorities, a putting into practice of "First Things First." And so, in the tradition one accepts "beast" but that does not exclude cherishing and fostering those attitudes and activities that flow from "angel."... Humility's "right ordering," like humility's balance has to do first with oneself.... A humility that begins with the acceptance of self as imperfect will not be interested in judging others: "To be humble is not to make comparisons." And so it is that because Humility chooses to look first, and indeed only, at one's own defects and shortcomings, it serves as the foundation for another powerful spiritual reality: Tolerance (KURTZ - KETCHAM, *The Spirituality of Imperfection*).*

The 19th Century American humorist Mark Twain noted that "I am no more humble than my talents require." Humility is a foundational virtue, both to acquire for one's own spiritual

development as well as to carry on our ministry in service of others. But it cannot be faked.

*One day a rabbi, in a frenzy rushed in before the ark, fell to his knees, and started beating his breast, crying, "I'm nobody! I'm nobody!" The cantor of the synagogue, impressed by this example of spiritual humility, joined the rabbi on his knees, saying: "I'm nobody! I'm nobody!" The shamus (custodian) watching from the corner couldn't restrain himself either. He joined the other two on his knees, calling out, "I'm nobody! I'm nobody!" At which point the rabbi, nudging the cantor with his elbow, pointed at the custodian and said, "Look who thinks he's nobody" (quoted in KURTZ - KETCHAM, *The Spirituality of Imperfection*).*

We can begin each day knowing that there will be many opportunities to grow in humility but only if we are present to the day as we are doing what we do great or small. No one of should think he has to be Jesus, St. Paul or St. Vincent. In the Church and in the Congregation we join together, each contributing his part. Helen Keller, an American sage born deaf, dumb and blind reminds us Vincentians of an important truth that is critical to our vocation as it has been passed on to us from St. Vincent to our own time.

I long to accomplish great and noble tasks, but it is my chief duty to accomplish humble tasks as though they were great and noble. The world is moved along, not only by the mighty shoves of its heros, but also by the aggregate of the tiny pushes of each honest worker.

St. Paul has sage advice for us in this pursuit — at the beginning of each day of our Vincentian lives in ministry and community life, during each day and at the end of each day.

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do. And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection. And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in work or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Col 3:12-17).

My Gospel.... Let then Simplicity Live...¹

by Richard McCullen, C.M.

Province of Ireland

Introduction

1. Some two years ago there was published a book entitled *The Times Book of Saints*. A selection was made of more than 300 saints and the editor gave a brief résumé of the life and works of each saint. A distinguishing feature of the volume is the inclusion of a short extract from the writings of each saint, if such writings exist. St. Vincent finds his place in the volume and it was with a certain eagerness that I searched out the two pages devoted to our Founder, curious to know what passage the editor would have selected from the writings of M. Vincent. It would surely be an extract from one of his impassioned addresses to the community of St. Lazare or to his beloved Daughters of Charity on the urgency of evangelisation and the importance of service of the poor. To my surprise this is what I read:

Jesus, the Lord, expects us to have the simplicity of a dove (Mt 10:16). This means giving a straightforward opinion about things in the way we honestly see them, without needless reservations. It also means doing things without double-dealing or manipulation, our intentions being focused solely on God. Each of us, then, should take care to behave always in the spirit of simplicity, remembering that God likes to deal with the simple, and that he conceals the secrets of heaven from the wise and prudent of this world and reveals them to little ones.

However, while Christ recommends a dove's simplicity, he also tells us to have a serpent's prudence. He means that we should speak and behave with discretion. We ought, therefore, to keep quiet about matters which should not be made known, especially if they are unsuitable or unlawful. When we are discussing things which it is good and proper to talk about, we

¹ SV XI, 286.

should hold back any details which would not be for God's glory, or which could harm some other person, or which would make us foolishly smug.

In actual practice this virtue is about choosing the right way to do things. We should make it a sacred principle, admitting of no exceptions, that since we are working for God we will always choose God-related ways for carrying out our work, and see and judge things from Christ's point of view and not from a worldly-wise one; and not according to the feeble reasoning of our own mind.²

2. The choice of this piece as illustrative of the life and mission of St. Vincent is interesting. It is, of course, taken from the Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission which St. Vincent had printed in 1658, two years before his death. The choice made by this editor — Bert Ghezzi, a layman — is particularly significant. It would seem that he perceived that M. Vincent's grasp and appreciation of the virtue of evangelical simplicity and prudence was the secret of the flowering and growth of that great and dense forest of works which — as Daniel Rops remarked — hides the man Vincent de Paul as in a fog. Bert Ghezzi's perception of the secret of the fecundity of the life of Vincent de Paul is rooted in that virtue which the Saint himself describes as *my gospel*. "*God has given me such a high esteem of simplicity that I call it my gospel.*"³

3. One of the first references M. Vincent makes to the virtue of simplicity occurs in the Rules drawn up for the Confraternity of Charity in November-December 1617. We read that the members are to *take care in practising humility, simplicity and charity, each deferring to her companion and to others, performing all their actions for the charitable intention of persons who are poor and with no human respect.*⁴

That passing reference to the three virtues of humility, simplicity and charity is like the first trickling of a river over ground, a river that, with the passing of the years, would become wide and broad and deep in the mind and heart of M. Vincent. The trinity of virtues — simplicity, humility, and charity — are those to which the saint most often refers in his conferences to the Daughters of Charity, while to simplicity he assigns the primacy of place in the rule for both the Daughters of Charity and the members of the Congregation of the Mission.

² *Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission*: Chapter II, nos. 4-5.

³ SV IX, 606, or, English edition, 9, 476.

⁴ SV XIII, 435, or, English edition, 13b, 19.

The rock from which you were hewn...

4. The young Vincent did not imbibe simplicity with his mother's milk. Indeed, being a Gascon, he would have soon learned that a goodly measure of astuteness along with a cultivated shrewdness was necessary if one was to advance one's interests in society. A later letter of M. Vincent points to this indigenous Gascon trait. When a member of his community, Firmin Get, had withheld from M. Vincent some rather important details about a financial matter, the Saint administered the following rebuke:

*I must confess, Monsieur, that this has surprised me more than anything that has happened to me for a long time. If you were a Gascon or a Norman, I would not find it strange. To think, however, that a straightforward man from Picardy, whom I consider one of the most sincere men in the Company, would have hidden that from me — how can I not be surprised at that, and just as surprised at the means used to meet those demands?*⁵

A flash of the Gascon trait surfaces again when within two weeks of the Saint's death. M. Gicquel, who kept a close eye on the Saint during the final days of his life, records in his diary that M. Vincent, when issuing instructions to M. Dehorgny on how he should communicate the news of the appointment of the Sister chosen to succeed Mademoiselle le Gras, remarked:

*M. Dehorgny, have them [the sisters] assemble and, after the conference announce to them the choice God has made of Sister [Marguerite Chétif] as Superioress. Tell them beforehand that they will all kiss her hands as a sign of acknowledgment, and she will embrace them; take a look around at the faces and expressions of the members of the Community, especially of the two or three who were officers and who perhaps had it in mind.*⁶

5. M. Vincent was not one — to quote Isaiah — *who would forget the rock from which you were hewn, and the quarry from which you were dug.*⁷ The Daughters of Charity were the beneficiaries of his reflection on the virtues that he saw in

good village girls because I know them by experience and by nature, since I'm the son of a humble tiller of the soil, and

⁵ SV V, 199.

⁶ SV XIII, 180-181, or, English edition, 13a, 196-197. See also, T. DAVITT in *Colloque* 5:16.

⁷ Isaiah 51:1.

*lived in the country until I was fifteen.... So I can tell you, dear Sisters, that the spirit of true village girls is extremely simple — no slyness, nor words of double meaning; they're not opinionated nor obstinate because in their simplicity they believe quite simply what they're told. Daughters of Charity should be like that, Sisters, and you'll know that you're really so, if you're truly simple, not attached to your own ideas but accepting those of others; if you're candid in your speech and if your hearts aren't thinking one thing while your lips say another. I can well believe that of you, dear Sisters!*⁸

The City and the Court

6. Through labyrinthine ways Vincent, the newly ordained priest, after leaving the languid lands of the *Landes*, would eventually settle down in the sophisticated world of Paris. Those first ten years of his priesthood, intent as he was on carving out a comfortable niche in the ecclesiastical world by securing a lucrative benefice or even an episcopal appointment, had ended in failure.⁹ Disillusioned, he was slowly making the discovery that would be reflected in phrases of the rule he would write some 50 years later. Purely human wisdom avails little in the domain of spiritual principles. Indeed, human prudence can prove counterproductive in harvesting that genuine fruit which the Lord of the Vineyard guaranteed would remain.¹⁰ The young priest Vincent would seem to have only made that discovery after many of those human agents upon whom he had pinned his hopes had failed to procure the ecclesiastical advancement he had dreamed about. There is a ring of deep conviction in a phrase such as this written two years before his death:

*Let each of us accept the truth of the following statement and try to make it our most fundamental principle: Christ's teaching will never let us down, while worldly wisdom always will.... And that is why the Congregation should always try to follow the teaching of Christ himself and never that of the worldly-wise....*¹¹

The principles of worldly wisdom had failed Vincent, and it would be in Paris, through his contacts with a constellation of theological and spiritual luminaries, that he would come slowly to the realisation that *Christ's teaching will never let us down*.

⁸ SV IX, 81, or, English edition, 9, 67-68.

⁹ J.M. ROMÁN, *St. Vincent de Paul: A biography*, pp. 55-89, English edition.

¹⁰ Jn 15:16.

¹¹ CR II, 1.

7. The eight years that intervened between M. Vincent's first arrival in Paris and the year of the Folleville Mission had brought him into a world in which he saw *worldly wisdom* displayed in the court of Queen Marguerite. Contemporaneously he was beginning to breathe the purer air of the mountain of the Lord to which he had been led by De Bérulle and Duval. A refining and purifying of motive for action was taking place. It is the pure of heart who will see God.¹² With a growing purity of heart the vision of M. Vincent was being sharpened to see the presence of the crucified and risen Christ *in ten thousand places, lovely in eyes, lovely in limbs not his*¹³; to see Christ particularly where one would least expect to find him — in human minds and bodies that poverty and suffering had broken and distorted.

... And the Church...

8. It was while ascending the mountain of the Lord in the second decade of the 17th century that M. Vincent met a bishop whom he would recognise and acknowledge as having a profound and lasting influence on his life. One will find more than 150 references to St. Francis de Sales scattered like seed throughout M. Vincent's correspondence and conferences. To judge from the approving warmth of his references to the *dicta* of the gentle Bishop of Geneva, M. Vincent looked to him as a spiritual role model. In later years, when the memory of St. Francis de Sales crossed his mind, he liked to designate him as *Our Blessed Father*. The two celebrated works of St. Francis de Sales, *A Treatise on the Love of God* and *The Introduction to the Devout Life* would have been familiar to St. Vincent, the latter work being frequently commended by him as spiritual reading.

9. The importance of the virtue of simplicity was accepted by authorities on the spiritual life in 17th century France. St. Francis de Sales, in his correspondence, makes reference to an anonymous Flemish work entitled, *La Perle Evangelique*, which markedly influenced Benet of Canfield and Francis de Sales.¹⁴ Although not found in the Annecy edition of the works of Francis de Sales (and hence not accessible to St. Vincent) St. Francis de Sales wrote:

To understand what simplicity is, it is necessary to know that there are three virtues which are so like one another that it

¹² Mt 5:8.

¹³ G.M. HOPKINS in *As kingfishers catch fire*.

¹⁴ MICHEL DUPUY, PSS in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, Volume 12, part 2, coll. 1159-1169.

*seems there is no difference between them, namely truth, purity and simplicity. Truth makes us seem exteriorly what we are interiorly... purity cannot endure any sin however slight, or any impure intention which does not tend to God's glory, but simplicity surpasses these in as much as it has only a simple regard for God.*¹⁵

10. Even though four decades had elapsed, clear echoes of these observations of *Our Blessed Father* are to be heard when, in 1659, St. Vincent was addressing his community:

*I know well that simplicity in general is taken as truth, or purity of intention: truth in so far as it makes our words and other expressions conform to our thoughts; purity of intention, because it makes all our acts tend straight to God. But, when one takes simplicity as a particular virtue and in the proper sense, it includes not just purity and truth but also the property it has of excluding from our words and actions all deceitfulness, ruses and duplicity.*¹⁶

11. As M. Vincent continued to scale ever higher the mountain of the Lord, and to breathe its pure air, his vision of *the God of gods in Sion* became more focused and penetrating. St. Thomas Aquinas predicated of the virtue of humility its power to give *unhindered access to spiritual and divine goods*.¹⁷ M. Vincent was enlightened by grace to see that through the practice of simplicity the Lord gave *unhindered access* to the hearts of little ones, while at the same time unveiling some of the deep mysteries of God. The short prayer of praise which Jesus offered to the Lord of Heaven and earth for revealing *hidden things* to little ones was often quoted by M. Vincent in his conferences and directions to individual correspondents.¹⁸

The virtue I love most...

12. The virtue of simplicity was to become, what later M. Vincent would call, *my gospel*.¹⁹

Simplicity is the virtue I love the most and to which, I think, I pay most attention in my actions; and, if it is permissible for

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Volume 14, col. 914, "Sermon pour la fête de Saint Jean porte latine," in *Œuvres complètes*, Paris 1821, t. 2, p. 181.

¹⁶ SV XII, 172.

¹⁷ II-IIae 161, 5 ad 4.

¹⁸ Mt 11:25.

¹⁹ SV IX, 606, or, English edition, 9, 476.

*me to say so, I would say that I am practicing it with some progress by the mercy of God.*²⁰

This confession from the lips of M. Vincent, who was invariably reticent about his personal spiritual experiences, must carry special weight and be valued as a special key to the interpretation of his monumental life. From later observations made by the Saint about the high place simplicity occupies in the hierarchy of virtues which he proposed to his two communities (and the references are multiple²¹), a question could be proposed. Was his strong conviction on evangelical simplicity born solely from his experience of the efficacy of the virtue in attaining practical and successful results in the ministry of evangelizing and serving the poor?

13. It must be said that M. Vincent's starting point for presenting simplicity as one of *the faculties of the soul* of the Congregation of the Mission was based not on sheer pragmatism but on theological foundations.²² Repeatedly the Saint refers to the truth that God likes to communicate with those who are simple.²³ In the conference which he gave to his own community on the virtues of Simplicity and Prudence, after citing some relevant Scriptural passages, he recalls the theological truth that God is simple.

*God is a simple Being, who receives nothing from another. He is a sovereign and infinite essence, excluding all admixture. He is a pure Being, never undergoing change. Now this quality of the Creator is to be found in some of his creatures. It is communicated to them and exists after the manner indicated in our Rules.*²⁴

14. Authentic simplicity makes for direct communication with God. It facilitates a growth in faith which is a created participation in the knowledge God has of himself. Faith gives limited vision, until the perfect is come with the direct vision of God.²⁵ Was it the practice of simplicity that enabled M. Vincent to grow stronger in faith, to see

²⁰ SV I, 284, or, English edition, 1, 265.

²¹ See, for example, ROBERT MALONEY, C.M., in *The Way of Vincent de Paul*, p. 39.

²² I am indebted to Fr. Bernard Koch, C.M., for drawing my attention to this point, and indeed for other precisions which he kindly brought to my notice. I am also indebted to my confrere Fr. Myles Rearden, who read the proofs of this piece and made a number of helpful suggestions.

²³ SV II, 341; XII, 170 and 302.

²⁴ SV XII, 172; cf. 299. See also, DODIN, *Entretiens*, p. 915 citing Abelly: "God is very simple. Rather God is simplicity itself. Where there is simplicity, there also God is to be met."

²⁵ Cf. 1 Cor 13:12.

with the eyes of Christ, to judge persons and events with the mind of Christ?²⁶ To M. Vincent was given the charism of seeing the features and the person of Jesus Christ beneath the broken bodies and the agitated minds of the poor. Purity of heart and purity of intention are constitutive parts of the virtue of simplicity. The French writer, Georges Bernanos, is credited with the observation: "Ask for the only thing you need — a star and a pure heart." The star for M. Vincent was the living person of Jesus Christ. The gaining of an ever purer heart was sought through prayer, daily examen of consciousness (as distinct from conscience) and the blood transfusions from the risen Christ in the sacraments of Eucharist and Reconciliation.

*Each one in every single thing he does, especially in preaching or other ministries of the Congregation, should make an effort to have, to the best of his ability, as pure an intention as possible of pleasing God alone.*²⁷

As the eyes of servants... so too our eyes...

15. Simplicity presupposes an awareness of the presence of God. To be simple is to focus one's intentions *solely on God*.²⁸ A practice which M. Vincent encouraged very frequently, particularly when addressing the Daughters of Charity, was that of recalling the presence of God. In teaching the sisters how to pray he indicates that at the beginning of prayer it is important to recall the presence of God and that for some sisters that may be difficult, and may even cause headaches.²⁹ So he proposes four other means of facilitating the centring of the mind and heart on the presence of the living God. It is clear that development of an awareness of the presence of God, even outside the times of formal prayer, would make the service of the poor more easy and more single-minded. Hence the numerous references to this practice in the Conferences given to the Daughters of Charity.

*Sister is giving us an almost infallible means of loving God; she says that it's to walk always in His presence. That's very true; the more we see someone who is the epitome of good, the more we love him. Now, if we often imagine having God before our eyes, who is beauty and perfection personified, there's no doubt that the longer we look at Him, the more we'll love Him.*³⁰

²⁶ Cf. CR II, 5.

²⁷ CR XII, 2.

²⁸ CR II, 4.

²⁹ SV X, 457.

³⁰ SV IX, 471, or, English edition, 9, 370.

What image of God?...

16. It is interesting that M. Vincent here evokes the God of beauty, adding that *the more we look upon Him the more we shall love him*. If one is to live in the presence of God and refer one's activities of thought, word and action to God, what image of God is to be cultivated? A God of beauty, a loving God, is the suggestion of M. Vincent at that particular conference. The image of a God as a severe taskmaster, intent on inculcating servile fear, will not favour growth in simplicity. The renowned German-born scriptural expert, Joachim Jeremias, published in the 1960s a small work entitled *The Central Message of the New Testament* in which he highlighted the Fatherhood of God as central in the revelation of Christ. Becoming a true child of our loving Father is an indispensable condition for entering the Kingdom of Heaven.³¹ Philip the apostle — at once curious and fascinated by the frequent references our Lord made to his Father — asked that Jesus would show them the Father.³² The reply, *Philip... whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, "Show us the Father"?* Only a short time before Philip would have looked at our Lord on his knees before him as he began to wash his feet. So our God is a God who puts on an apron, goes on his knees and washes feet. The God of Jesus Christ is a self-emptying God, a serving God. He is supremely the God of Vincent de Paul. Goodness for M. Vincent was not merely something to do but Someone to love. His God was a serving, loving God. And this God had emphasised that greatness comes from within, that the value of actions lies in the intention.³³

*Hence the really acceptable offering of purification of the spirit is that which is rendered not in a man-made temple but in the temple of the heart, where Christ the Lord is pleased to enter.*³⁴

Why are you fearful?

17. Fear must be considered as one of the obstacles to the growth of the virtue of simplicity. A present-day English contemplative nun has noted that *most men and women spend their lives running away from fear or, to express it dramatically but none the less really, from feeling unimportant*.³⁵ Fear that is born of human respect or from an excessive spirit of competitiveness can propel us into inauthentic

³¹ Mt 18:3.

³² Jn 14:8-9.

³³ Mt 6:4, 6, 18.

³⁴ St. Laurence Justinian as quoted in the Office of Readings of the Memorial of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

³⁵ RUTH BURROWS, O.D.C., in *Guidelines for Mystical Prayer*, p. 84.

ways of acting and of speaking. M. Vincent would have seen much of it in the Court circles and in the aristocratic stratum of society that he entered after his arrival in Paris.

*We hardly meet anyone at the present day who speaks as he thinks. The world overflows with duplicity.... It is essential that we be on our guard against appearing crafty, clever, wily and, above all, using double-meaning language.*³⁶

When in August 1659 M. Vincent spoke those words, one wonders if he was recalling his experience of working with Cardinals Richelieu and Mazarin, who were not only familiar with Machiavellian theory but practitioners of it, and would have projected themselves to M. Vincent as *crafty, clever and, wily*.³⁷

18. *The kingdom of the arrière pensée is where all human debates occur*, observed Paul Valery,³⁸ and few must have been as aware as M. Vincent of that truth. Not only in Court circles and among the politicians of his day but in the world of ecclesiastics he would have noticed the hollowness and the veneer that often masked the unspoken thought. Nor was the pulpit an artificiality-free zone. The parading of an array of classical learning was frequently substituted for the word of God and basic simple catechesis. *The hungry sheep look up and are not fed.*³⁹ M. Vincent was well aware of the artificiality of much preaching in his time. The antidote which he vigorously proposed to his missionaries was simplicity in thought and expression.

*We should be more careful to practise it (simplicity) during missions, especially when we proclaim the word of God to country people, to whom, because they are simple, God speaks through us. For this reason our style of preaching and catechising should be simple.... We should take care not to preach any far-fetched or too subtly contrived ideas or pointless distinctions from the pulpit of truth.*⁴⁰

³⁶ SV XII, 302-303.

³⁷ In a lecture delivered in Rome in November 2004, Fr. Timothy Radcliffe OP spoke of a “crisis of truthfulness” in Western society. A few weeks previously, Radcliffe said, a British study found that 67% of the public did not expect to be told the truth by members of parliament, and 70% expect to be lied to by government ministers. The only professional groups that fared worse were real estate agents and journalists. Fr. Radcliffe wryly commented “Thank God, they did not ask about the clergy....”

³⁸ Quoted by F. VARILLON in *L'Humilité de Dieu*, p. 96.

³⁹ JOHN MILTON in *Lycidas*.

⁴⁰ CR XII, 5.

Stripping one's vines...

19. Rather like the River Nile which, flowing between its banks, succeeds in irrigating hundreds of hectares of land, making them fertile, so the virtue of simplicity will flower in a variety of forms.⁴¹ More than an attitude, simplicity is a spirit that presupposes an ensemble of virtues. In authentic simplicity one will find humility, sincerity, truth, modesty. A constellation of such virtues will generate a certain spontaneity and ease of approach to others that can facilitate greater openness in them. One thinks of Blessed Pope John XIII and his disarming simplicity that put people so much at their ease in his presence. In his *Journal of a Soul* he wrote:

*The more mature I grow in years and experience the more I recognise that the surest way to make myself holy... lies in the constant effort to reduce everything, principles, aims, position, business, to the utmost simplicity and tranquillity; I must always take care to strip my vines of all useless foliage and spreading tendrils, and concentrate on what is truth, justice and charity, above all charity.*⁴²

20. In an age of consumerism a simplicity of lifestyle, motivated by the Gospel of Jesus Christ, can be compelling and prophetic. The modern world, for all its complexity and technology, seems to experience a thirst for simplicity in word, in lifestyle, in action. Such simplicity of lifestyle is silently eloquent of the all-sufficiency of trust in the God who clothes with beauty the lilies of the fields, providing food for the birds of the air and counseling humans not to be anxious for the morrow.⁴³ Such simplicity when lived authentically can radiate a serenity that is a healing therapy for the poor.

The mother and mold of all moral virtues

The virtue of evangelical simplicity is indissolubly united in St. Vincent's thought with the virtue of prudence. He sees the marriage of simplicity and prudence as blessed by Jesus Christ who would have his disciples *wise as serpents and simple as doves*.⁴⁴ Were he living in today's world he would note the popularity of the present-day cult of transparency that flourishes (or often does not!) in the world of business, politics, administration, and accountability.

⁴¹ T.S. ELIOT in his poem, *Four Quartets - Little Gidding*, writes of "a condition of complete simplicity (costing not less than everything)."

⁴² *Journal of a Soul*, Retreat 1948 (53).

⁴³ Cf. Mt 6:25-27, 34.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 10:16.

The cult may have arisen as a reaction to the widespread adoption of the tactics of dissemblance and cover-up in our present-day culture. M. Vincent's endorsement of such transparency would not be a full approval of what is known today in some countries as "political correctness." He would note, too, that in the Western culture there prevails at the present time a certain mercilessness in arriving at the truth through exposure that is not always consonant with the supreme rule of *speaking the truth in love*.⁴⁵ Hence the need of the virtue of prudence which, according to Aquinas, is *the mold and mother of all the moral virtues, while charity molds even prudence itself*.⁴⁶

21. That St. Vincent was familiar with the teaching of Aquinas on the virtue of prudence is evidenced by a little phrase which he cites in the paragraph devoted to prudence in the Common Rules for his missionaries.

*In actual practice — he writes — this virtue is about choosing the right way to do things.*⁴⁷

This is a clear echo of the *recta ratio agibilium* (*the right reason of doing*) which St. Thomas links to the virtue of prudence.⁴⁸ Immediately St. Vincent raises the question to the supernatural plane as he continues:

*We should make it a sacred principle, then..., that since we are working for God we will always choose God-related ways for carrying out our work, and see and judge things from Christ's point of view and not from a worldly-wise one; and not according to the feeble reasoning of our own mind either.*⁴⁹

22. It is clear that St. Vincent is here writing of supernatural prudence, and in this context Josef Pieper makes a profound assertion.

The highest and most fruitful achievement of Christian life depends on the felicitous collaboration of prudence and charity.... Charity, being participation by grace in the life of the Trinitarian God, is in essence a gift ultimately beyond the power of man's will or reason to bestow.... The divine love conferred by grace shapes from the ground up and throughout

⁴⁵ Eph 4:15.

⁴⁶ Quaest. Disput. 14:5 ad 11.

⁴⁷ CR II, 5.

⁴⁸ JOSEF PIEPER in *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, Notre Dame Press, 1966, p. 29.

⁴⁹ CR II, 5.

the innermost core of the most commonplace moral action of a Christian, even though that action may be “outwardly” without special distinguishing characteristics.... In proportion to the growth of the theological virtue love there unfolds in the man who has received grace the sevenfold gift of the spirit; in the same proportion human prudence receives, more tangibly and more audibly, the aid of “the gift of counsel,” “donum consilii.” The gift of counsel corresponds to prudence, helping and perfecting it.⁵⁰

Two good and inseparable sisters

23. In the conference on Simplicity and Prudence given on 14 March 1659, M. Vincent treats at some length the virtue of simplicity before taking up that of prudence. When in the second half of the conference he turns to the virtue of prudence, there are clear resonances of St. Thomas Aquinas’ treatment of that virtue, but they are coloured by M. Vincent’s own convictions as well as by his sensitivity to the group of priests and brothers to whom he was speaking.⁵¹ At one point he states that there is no difference between the two virtues.

Prudence and simplicity tend to the same end, which is to speak well and act well, and one cannot exist without the other. I know, however, that a difference will be found to exist between them by a distinction of the reason; but, in reality, they have only the one and the same substance and object.... They are two good and inseparable sisters.⁵²

Throughout the conference one finds a pendulum-like swing between what natural prudence suggests and the prudence that is shot through with the *agape* of God. Our invariable rule must be *to judge all things as our Lord has judged them; and I say always and in all things, and to ask ourselves on occasions: “How did our Lord judge this? How did he act in the like case?”*⁵³ Examples are taken from the gospel to illustrate the virtue of prudence: the reply of our Lord on the question of tribute to Caesar and that given to the accusers of the woman caught in the act of adultery.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38; See also *Summa Theologica*, II-II 52, 2.

⁵¹ Simplicity, as expounded by St. Vincent, would relate to truth in St. Thomas’ treatment of the moral virtues. Simplicity is a facet of truth which in turn is related to justice. Simplicity completes truth in so far as that it connects with rightness of intention, which will exclude all duplicity.

⁵² SV XII, 176.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 178.

25. While M. Vincent considers that simplicity and prudence cannot be separated,⁵⁴ he treats simplicity more expansively in his conferences and correspondence. This is particularly so when he is addressing the Daughters of Charity. When talking to the Daughters of Charity about simplicity, he invariably states that the virtue of humility is its inseparable partner, while with the missionaries he tends to emphasise that the virtue of prudence is the complement of simplicity. In the final chapter of the Common Rules, which one could regard as a sort of Founder's spiritual testament in which the features of the Congregation of the Mission receive their definitive lines, M. Vincent returns once again to the virtue of simplicity, as if to underline once more its importance. He sets down the principle:

*As simplicity is the principal and most characteristic virtue of missionaries, we should show it at all times and in all circumstances. We should be more careful to practise it during missions, especially when we proclaim the word of God to country people, to whom, because they are simple, God speaks through us.*⁵⁵

What he enunciates in the remainder of this paragraph about clarity of exposition would be fully endorsed by any school of modern media communications or a professional in the art of public relations. Perhaps the only difference would be M. Vincent's presenting of Christ, the Lord, as the supreme model of all good communication.

Two centuries later...

26. Almost two centuries after the death of St. Vincent, the Danish Christian philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard, published a work entitled, *Purity of heart is to will one thing*.⁵⁶ The work has become a classic. Its title would have seized the imagination of M. Vincent who gave so much thought to purity of heart and of intention in all that one does and thinks and says. Furthermore the work would have greatly interested him for the reason that that a consequence to willing one thing by a heart that is pure leads infallibly to the accomplishment of the will of God. And is not the accomplishment of the will of God through Christ Jesus a cardinal feature of St. Vincent's spirituality and the summit of all holiness?

27. In his introduction to the English translation of Kierkegaard's work, Douglas Steere alluded to another brief work of Kierkegaard's

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 184.

⁵⁵ CR XII, 5.

⁵⁶ English translation by Douglas V. Steere, published by Harper, 1938.

entitled, *The Difference between a Genius and an Apostle*. Summarising Kierkegaard's thought Douglas Steere writes:

The apostle may be a commoner, a fisherman, a one-talent man by nature, or he may have ten talents — yet all that he has is dedicated to the service of the Eternal and as such is lifted up. The genius speaks with brilliance and charm. The apostle speaks with authority. The way of the genius is a way closed to all but a few. The way of the apostle is a way open to all as individuals — even to the genius himself if he can forsake the absorbing satisfactions of a brilliant self-sufficiency and be ready to will one thing.

It has been the glorious distinction of M. Vincent that he proved himself to be both a genius and an apostle. To this genius and apostle, *Le grand saint du Grand Siècle*, let us leave the final word.

Now, if there is any community that ought to make profession of simplicity, it is ours, for, see this well, my Brothers, duplicity is the bane of a Missionary; duplicity deprives him of his spirit; not to be sincere and simple in the eyes of God and men is the venom and the poison of the Congregation of the Mission. The virtue of simplicity, then, my Brothers, simplicity, my Brothers, ah, how beautiful it is!⁵⁷

⁵⁷ SV XII, 303.

The Virtue of Mortification

by Michael Ngoka, C.M.

Vice-Visitor of Nigeria

Introduction

No one would deny the fact that science and technology have blossomed almost out of proportion in the 21st century. Technology has grown at an immeasurable rate. The effects of technological advances have brought so much comfort, luxuries, pleasures, and have, for certain, made life worth living and long life desirable. The human person, no doubt, is the immediate target of these effects and therefore the direct beneficiary. Human beings get so fascinated by the “latest in town.” The thirst for the latest cars, watches, clothes, handsets, is unimaginable, as it is almost uncontrollable. This threatens what we know as “simple lifestyle.” Possession has become a means of self-identification and recognition in the larger society. Since the love of having increases by having, the result is an uncontrollable passion to acquire, possess and own.

If the current trend were all positive, there would be no need to speak of mortification. But St. Vincent de Paul, ahead of his time, recognized mortification as a powerful tool to sanctity. Mortification is one of those five virtues introduced by St. Vincent de Paul for the members of the Congregation of the Mission. These five virtues are values, which we, as members of the Congregation, pledge ourselves to cultivate and express in our manner and style of living.

St. Vincent on Mortification

St. Vincent’s teaching on mortification is contained in his correspondence. Borrowing from the Latin word *mortificare*, which means, to put someone to the test, St. Vincent taught that mortification is an act that entails denial of the exterior senses: sight, smell, touch, taste and hearing; and the interior senses: understanding, memory and will. For this reason, St. Vincent encouraged continence of seeing, hearing, tasting, speaking, and once again, inordinate desire to know all things (*scientia inflat*).

The conference given by Vincent on 2 May 1659, on mortification, is a reflection on chapter two, articles eight and nine of the Common Rules, on the Maxims of the Gospel. Vincent’s idea of mortification is based on Christ’s condition of discipleship. “If

anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily” (Lk 9:23). St. Paul, in similar spirit, adds: “If you live according to the flesh, you will die, but if by the spirit you put to death the deeds of the flesh, you will live” (Rom 8:13). Thus, St. Vincent concludes: “Each one, therefore, should be most conscientious in accepting the overruling of his personal wishes and opinion, and in disciplining the gratification of each of his senses” (CR II, 8). In article nine of the same chapter of the Common Rules, mortification entails also renouncing immoderate love for relatives and parents.

St. Vincent explains mortification on two levels: “There are two things to be done: The first is to deny yourself, that is, to leave the old Adam. The second is to bear your cross and that daily” (cf. Pierre Coste). As the means of this denial, Vincent continues: “There are four ways of denying oneself: judgement, the senses, the will and to renounce one’s relatives and parents” (ibid.). The judgement to be denied includes knowledge, intelligence and understanding. Practically, for instance, to deny ourselves is not for a confrere to refuse to say what he thinks; rather, Vincent says: “He should submit his will... true disciples of Jesus Christ, and true missionaries, ought to submit to God, to our rules, to holy obedience, to holy vocation, to the vow of stability and, out of courtesy, to all men” (ibid.).

In his developed teaching, Vincent says that mortification is about the scrutiny of passion to give reason its proper place in human living. This makes humans different from animals. The fulfilment of passion makes humans behave like animals, while reason, the higher faculty, directs one to God. St. Vincent de Paul emphasized that the practice of mortification is goal-oriented. It is a discipline aimed at detachment from things that disrupt one’s healthy relationship with God. To this end, Vincent said: “... Gentlemen, let us keep this example before our eyes, let us never lose sight of the mortification of our Lord, seeing that to follow him we are obligated to mortify ourselves after his example. Let us model our affections upon his, so that his footsteps may be the guide of ours in the way of perfection. The saints are saints because they walked in his footsteps, renounced themselves and mortified themselves in all things” (SV XII, 227).

A Contemporary Look at Mortification

Our introduction clarified that we live in an age where the challenge of the virtue of mortification is ever increasing. What this means is that the relevance of the virtue of mortification, to both pastoral agents and spiritual life in general, cannot be overemphasized.

Mortification stands as a watershed to counter the unbridled quest for material possessions with which we live. Underscoring this virtue will be of immense help to help check the quest for material goods and comfort. This does not mean, however, not having the frugal comfort which is a natural and inalienable right of individuals.

Obviously, we live in an age where Christian identity is being edged out by unrestrained secularism. It is little wonder then that Pope Benedict XVI insists on restoring the Christian identity as the goal of his papacy. Christ gave mortification as the condition for discipleship (cf. Mt 16:24). This means that mortification will go a long way to restoring the Christian identity in society. People of restraint are living witnesses to the Gospel teaching.

Our age will look at values and life, from a shifted horizon, from that of Vincent in the 17th century; yet this virtue is still (and more so) an important tool to check our pleasure tendencies. If we do or get all that we desire, then there might be a chaotic, “unprioritized-value society,” and a breakdown of moral order. St. Paul puts it succinctly, “I am allowed to do everything, but not everything is good for me. I am allowed to do anything but I am not going to let anything make me its slave” (1 Cor 6:12). The virtue of mortification is the solution to this human dilemma. Mortification says to us that not every passion will be expressed.

Our age has great regard and appreciation for the beauty of nature, and life in particular. Thus, there is the challenge of a new way of living a mortified life without idolizing these natural beauties. Some uphold the divine gift of sex as the “god of our age.” But, Vincent’s teaching on mortification, which is deeply rooted in the Gospel, requires the divine gift for a divine purpose (cf. Rom 11:29). Sexuality is God’s blessing, realised as such in mortification.

Further still, Vincentian pastoral agents need this virtue of mortification in order to be relevant. Our age needs witnesses and will listen to preachers if they are witnesses as well. Mortification says to me: be free from the comfort of the home, in order to experience the “discomfort” of the mission. It says to me: be free from the sweet-scented and highly connected wealthy people, in order to experience the often repulsive body odour of the poor, the sick, the prisoners and the patients of HIV/AIDS. Mortification frees me to renounce immediate gratification for the sake of more important goals, rather than to seek solely what pleases me in the here and now. It says to me: be free to let go of your taste and desire from the natural tendency of having it all your way. Consequently, a Vincentian living a mortified life at any level speaks all that Christian living entails and *ipso facto* re-establishes his/her relevance in our day. The world no longer looks for theorists and speakers. The world intensely looks for witnesses.

As virtue always stands in the middle, contemporary mortification helps Christians, who might misunderstand the virtue and resort to strict asceticism on the one hand, or seek to instil the Vincentian spirit of charity on “the haves” on the other hand. Mortification has charity as its goal (Lk 21:1-4), and indeed makes pastoral agents light for the mission. As our age continues to witness an ever-widening and yawning gap between “the haves” and “the have-nots,” mortification will help restore some form of equity and social justice especially in the third world countries.

According to Robert Maloney, mortification is always for the sake of something or someone else. We give up good things not because we think they are bad. We acknowledge that they are good even as we give them up, because we want something better. This is made explicit in the choices we make daily. Mortification is all about making choices and the goal for our choices. In the Vincentian context, choices are made in solidarity with and for the poor. A confrere who decides to fly economy class instead of first class, when he can afford it, for instance, does so in solidarity with the poor.

In all, mortification comes into play much in the daily choices that we make. Better and luxuriant alternatives are forgone in response to the inner promptings to grow in this virtue.

Conclusion

The position of Vincent that true disciples of Jesus and true missionaries ought to live by submission to God, our rules, holy obedience, holy vocation, stability, and courtesy to all people, remains ever true. Mortification will be a veritable instrument that makes obedience, though dialogical, reflect God’s will as concretised in the superior’s action and option. When the rules are obeyed, a harmonious community built on fraternal love results. Mortification will help pastoral agents and missionaries remain firm and undaunted in the face of difficulties (cf. Jn 16:33).

Vincent’s teaching and insistence on the necessity of mortification makes him a man of all ages. The teaching has an increased relevance in an age like ours where pleasure is enthroned beyond the limits that Christianity admits. Authentic spirituality is that which is rooted, lived and centered on the person of Jesus. The need to embrace the virtue of mortification lies in the fact that Jesus made it a condition for discipleship. Our age needs this virtue now.

Pastoral agents need mortification in parish ministry for there is an ever-growing need to build a true participatory Christian community. Prison chaplains have to withstand the ungrateful nature of the oppressed prisoners, and the unhygienic nature of the environment in some third world countries. Formators will instil this

virtue on those formed only when they live it out themselves. The missionaries working in very difficult countries need mortification to keep up with the challenges. Those in schools, hospitals, and other apostolates need this virtue. Not even those fighting to restore social justice are left out. Thus, what we need is to be another Vincent and Christ in witnessing to this virtue. This is the clearest and universal language of our time today.

Meekness

by Noel Mojica García, C.M.

Province of Cuba

I. The Actual Situation

The experience of meekness is discovered in our experience of peace. Throughout history peace has always demanded great effort, yet the results of these efforts have been very limited. John Paul II, in his Message on the occasion of the celebration of the World Day of Peace in 2005 stated that: *peace is the outcome of a long and demanding battle which is only won when evil is defeated by good* ("Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace," 1 January 2005, No. 1). The panorama is dramatic: confrontations, fratricides, incredible suffering and injustice. There is only one option: to detest the horrors of evil and to cling to that which is good. *Peace is a good for individuals, for families, for nations and for all humanity* (Message, No. 1). Evil passes for human freedom and has a face and a concrete name: men and women who freely choose it. *Evil is a tragic rejection of the demands of love. Moral good, on the other hand, is born of love shows itself as love and is directed toward love* (Message, No. 2). This idea is beautifully expressed by St. Paul in his letter to the Romans, a passage that inspired the Pope's message: *If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink... do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good* (Rom 12:20-21). Evil is not overcome by evil. Those who act in this way, allow themselves to be overcome by evil. The Pope notes that *the human family urgently needs to preserve and esteem that common patrimony of moral values bestowed by God himself... and ever greater commitment and responsibility in ensuring that the life of individuals and peoples is respected and advanced* (Message, Nos. 3 and 4). The common good has a transcendent dimension because God is the ultimate end of humankind. We are a human family and are *citizens of the world* (Message, No. 6). We are all responsible for the common good, but political authorities and the international community, each one at its own level, have a special responsibility to confront the evils that thwart the establishment of peace.

Pope John Paul II exhorts us to cultivate this *invincible hope* that is proper to Christians and *sustains their efforts to promote justice and peace* (Message, No. 11). *Love is the only force capable of bringing fulfillment to persons and societies, the only force capable of directing*

the course of history in the way of goodness and peace (Message, No. 12). Despite the fact that he was not listened to, Pope John Paul II, up until the time of his death, always shouted out: *No more war that kills our sisters and brothers!* It is the same cry as that of Christ who died on the cross: the triumph of Love that gives life. We continue to make war that ultimately kills ourselves because we do not know what we are doing and because we do not truly believe in Jesus Christ. We do not allow Jesus to enter our hearts and to give us the light and the strength to sweep out the rubbish of selfishness and violence that we carry within ourselves. This trash obscures not only the panorama of our external world but also the beautiful panorama of the Kingdom of God which, day by day, can become more deeply rooted in our hearts if we allow ourselves to be enlightened and freed by Jesus Christ.

II. Vincent de Paul's vision of meekness

Fr. Robert Maloney, after presenting St. Vincent's doctrine on meekness in his study of our five characteristic virtues, reminds us that the fundamental motive for living meekness is the example of Jesus Christ and the power of his saving love. Jesus is not only the model of meekness, but he is also the loving Savior for each one of us. For St. Vincent the virtue of meekness is intimately connected to the love of Jesus who desires to save us. Jesus' gift of salvation, on a personal level as well as an ecclesial level, is an heroic, progressive and slow process. The existence of evil in us and in the world, as well as the awareness of its historical roots — all this helps us to understand our need for Jesus Christ who became the history of salvation by becoming man, dying on the cross and rising to new life. Jesus did all this because he loved us. In the midst of our daily struggles, we need to listen, again and again, to Jesus' invitation: *Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest. For my yoke is easy and my burden light* (Mt 11:28-30).

The practical wisdom of St. Vincent with regard to meekness, a wisdom learned from Jesus Christ, is beautifully presented by Fr. Maloney in four important forms for today:

- a) Meekness entails the ability to handle anger positively;
- b) Meekness implies approachability and gentleness, especially important qualities in ministers;
- c) Meekness involves the ability to endure offenses with forgiveness and courage;
- d) Meekness should be seen as a way to build peace. This is especially true today when we are called to give witness to Jesus' gentleness, to proclaim the Kingdom of Peace,

to educate for peace and to promote justice and development (cf. ROBERT P. MALONEY, C.M., *The Way of Saint Vincent de Paul* [New City Press: Brooklyn, New York, 1992], pp. 60-61).

These four forms imply and provide a basis of unity for each person who attempts to live this virtue of meekness. They also provide a basis for our union with the person of Jesus Christ, the root and source of authentic Christian and Vincentian meekness.

I believe it is useful to study Jesus' meekness, that is, his meekness as it is revealed in some of the Biblical passages. In this study I will refer to some of the studies of Augusto Jorge Cury, scientist, researcher, sociologist-psychiatrist, who has undertaken a wonderful initiative to study, in a scientific way, the intelligence, emotional life, and in general, the life and the love of Jesus Christ. These are very helpful human efforts that assist us in our personal journey with Jesus Christ. Jesus continues to teach us today how to live this meekness in a concrete way.

III. Jesus' meekness and ours

The general attitude of Jesus toward his disciples, the Jewish community and today, his attitude toward us, is that of the sower: he plants seeds in the mind and heart. Jesus realizes that these seeds will take time to grow: seeds of freedom and responsibility, seeds that enable us to soften our anger, envy, hatred, fear and pride. Little by little we come to a greater knowledge of ourselves, we realize our limitations and we are able to lift ourselves up and begin again. We learn not to depend on what others do or think about us. Before the proud, rigid, moralistic Jewish authorities, Jesus presented himself with simplicity, with no airs about him, a close friend of the poor, sinners, prostitutes and those living on the margins of society. At the same time Jesus was admired for his teaching, his works and miracles. He was not afraid to say what he thought about the Pharisees nor was he afraid to criticize the leaders of the people. He disturbed the learned with his wise answers. Some admired him but the majority of people viewed Jesus as an enemy and wanted to kill him. Jesus was not afraid of death, rather he walked toward death, encouraged by the Father's love and the love of humankind. Jesus explained to the people his thinking and encouraged them to think and act rightly in their lives. Above all, Jesus unconditionally loved and pardoned others.

Jesus taught people to think before acting. The Pharisees presented to him a woman caught in the act of adultery. They asked Jesus: *Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such a woman. So what do you say?* (Jn 8:5). Jesus remained silent and wrote on the

ground. The Pharisees were insistent and wanted an answer. So Jesus responded: *let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her* (Jn 8:9). He continued to write on the ground. The Pharisees left, one by one, beginning with the eldest. Jesus then asked the woman: *Has no one condemned you? No one sir. Then Jesus said: neither do I condemn you. Go [and] from now on do not sin any more* (Jn 8:10-11). Jesus taught his disciples and the Pharisees to free themselves from prejudice and violence and to learn to walk according to the interior movements of their hearts and to recognize their own faults: *remove the wooden beam from your eye first, then you will see clearly to remove the splinter from your brother's eye* (Mt 7:5). The Pharisees listened and embraced Jesus' wisdom: they dropped the stones and left. Jesus' meekness toward the woman caught in adultery is clear: *has no one condemned you?* (Jn 8:10); then rise up, for you have great value. Thus peace was established in the hearts of the Pharisees and the woman and peace was also established between the different individuals involved in this event.

The cleansing of the Temple

The Jewish Passover was drawing near. Jesus found people selling oxen, sheep and pigeons in the temple, as well as others changing coins. He made a whip of cords and drove everyone from the Temple, as well as the sheep and oxen. He knocked over the tables of the money changers, spilling their coins (cf. Jn 2:13-15). He told those who were selling doves: *get them out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market place* (Jn 2:16). The Jews responded: *what sign can you show us authorizing you to do these things?* (Jn 2:18). Jesus told them: *destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up... actually he was talking about the temple of his body* (Jn 2:19-21). Jesus took possession of his Father's Temple and expelled those sellers who had profaned the Temple. Jesus revealed his plans: the physical Temple that had been built some time ago, is now transferred into Jesus' interior: *destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up* (Jn 2:19). Through his death and resurrection, Jesus opened the way so that every person thereafter could become the new temple of God. The architect of the universe of billions of galaxies became so small that he came and dwelt among us as a human person, a lowly human creature. This was Jesus' dream. He began it and we are called to make it a reality in ourselves and in others. Yet we still cultivate discrimination, selfishness and business as usual more than love.

This is the only time that Jesus expressed his anger in this way. His anger was not directed against people but against the behavior and the disrespect that was shown to his Father's house. He was not afraid to speak the truth even though he would have to die for the

truth. Jesus fulfilled the thinking of Aristotle: *it is difficult to be angry at the right moment, for the right motive and in the right way.*¹ We need to learn from Jesus how to cleanse the temple of our interior, the Father's house, the Church of sisters and brothers who come together in prayer and love: to turn over the tables of our negative thinking, to root out the fear and anxiety, to examine our rigidity and view the superficiality with which we react to the events of life. We are the new People of God, reconciled by the death of Jesus.

Jesus at the Last Supper

Jesus said: *I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer* (Lk 22:15). Jesus had planned to die during the Passover. Others had attempted to kill him before, but *his hour* had not arrived. This was the high point in his mission, a moment he had eagerly desired. The disciples were unable to understand this secret of eternity. Jesus washed their feet and thus established a new form of human relations. This was an expression of tolerance, a form of acceptance of another and a form of sharing love by washing the uncleanness from another person. People become more mature as they become more tolerant and less rigid in their judgments of others. Jesus also washed the encrusted dirt from the feet of Judas, the traitor. Then Jesus took the bread, gave thanks to the Father, and said: *take and eat this is my body... this is my blood... which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins* (Mt 26:26-28). In this way Jesus gave a meaning to his sacrifice and death which would occur the following day.

Jesus *gave thanks* (Mt 26:27) to the Father: the Father was his interior world, his life, his love, his strength. Then he looked at his disciples, one by one, including his enemies, and gave them the love that he himself had received from the Father, namely, his Body and Blood, a gift that went beyond the limits of material reality. Jesus offered his life and his blood to the Father as instruments of justice and forgiveness of the human person. Jesus was asked to shed his blood in order to justify us before the Father.

Freud and psychologists understand the terrible weight of recalling negative realities of life and history, realities that are part of one's unconsciousness. How many years of effort are needed, on the part of both psychologist and patient, to heal the psyche and enable one to deal with human life! Yet Jesus said to his disciples: *whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day* (Jn 6:54). These are unexpected and surprising words. Never before had someone planned something like this: to use

¹ Translator's Note: I do not know the source of this reference.

death in order to heal the world of its miseries and thus elevate human life to a level of eternal life. We are often filled with sadness because of small, inconsequential sufferings. Jesus walked toward death and promised his disciples immortality. He celebrated a supper with joy, eagerness, and a desire to live and give his life. He excluded no one from the banquet, not even Judas. Jesus did not allow himself to be disturbed by the offenses and weaknesses of those around him. Jesus lived the present moment with great intensity. Thus *after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives* (Mk 14:26).

We make our emotional life a garbage dump: any offense against our person is stored up in our memory and we allow these offenses to disturb us for extended periods of time. We need to learn from Jesus how to live the present moment with great intensity and not waste our energy on negative realities. We need to learn how to live the beautiful and difficult moments of our daily life with joy and a sense of community. We need to learn to live with an openness to the One who is beyond our hope and imagination: the Father.

Jesus' words of farewell

John transmits these words to us and we must remember that John was a privileged witness who never forgot these words that he wrote much later. The intimate, close and gentle environment of Jesus with his disciples was most impressive. *As I have loved you, so you also should love one another* (Jn 13:34). This is a love that destroys the seeds of individualism and cuts the roots of loneliness. *In my Father's house there are many dwelling places... and I go there to prepare a place for you... so that where I am you also may be* (Jn 14:2-4). He prayed to the Father for his disciples. He expressed the depths of his being and his most intimate feelings. He prayed so that his disciples would not be sad, depressed or anxious, but rather so their *joy may be complete* (Jn 15:11). *I pray that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you* (Jn 17:21). Jesus wanted his disciples to learn to walk in the way of love. These were times when love was not spoken about — times in which power, dominion and selfishness were dominant.

Jesus foresees the errors of his disciples

Jesus foresaw that Judas would betray him and that Peter would deny him and that all would abandon him. Jesus communicated this to his disciples but we might ask: why?

1. To relieve their own sorrow for their faults. He wanted to give them an emotional defense for their frustration. Jesus loved and offered himself for humankind, but

he knew that people are weak and therefore, he could not expect much from them.

2. Jesus not only foresaw their failures but publicly told the disciples about this. He did this not to humiliate or discourage them, but to prepare them to continue their own journey. He wanted to show them that he demanded nothing of them. He taught them to overcome their fear, conquer their anxiety and work through the pains and failures in life.
3. He wanted to point out to them that they did not know themselves and needed to mature and recognize their weaknesses in stressful situations, stresses that prevented them from thinking clearly, stresses that impelled them to act erroneously. Jesus used these mistakes of his disciples to lead them to a greater knowledge of themselves and make them responsible for their own lives. He never abandoned them, even though they abandoned him.
4. Jesus wanted to prepare them so that they would not hate themselves when they fell. He did not want them to be overcome by feelings of guilt and discouragement. Jesus knew that they would suffer greatly when they fell. He wanted to protect and educate them so that they would rise up and grow in wisdom and love. He taught them the art of thinking even though it might be at the cost of terrible mistakes.

The sufferings of Jesus caused by his disciples

1. The Teacher is not helped by his disciples when he asks for help

When they arrived at the Mount of Olives, Jesus said to his disciples: *pray that you may not undergo the test* (Lk 22:40). Then *he took along Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to feel sorrow and distress. Then he said to them, my soul is sorrowful even to death. Remain here and keep watch with me. He advanced a little and fell prostrate in prayer, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not as I will, but as you will"* (Mt 26:37-39). He returned to his disciples and found them asleep. He spoke to Peter: *So you could not keep watch with me for one hour? Watch and pray that you may not undergo the test. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. Withdrawing a second time, he prayed again* (Mt 26:40-42).

Jesus trusted his friends and communicated to them his sadness at the thought of death. They never thought that he would need their help and companionship. This fact caused them greater stress and they fell asleep. The doctor, Luke, noted that even though the disciples were strong men, nevertheless Jesus *found them sleeping*

from grief (Lk 22:45). Jesus separated himself from the disciples because he needed to pray to his Father and prepare himself for the impending suffering that would befall him that very night. Despite Jesus' tension and anxiety he did not become irritated with his disciples. He simply invited them to pray to the Father so that they might be strong in the situation of pain that life would bring them. He also confidently asked them for help.

2. Judas' betrayal

Jesus prayed and awaited the moment of his arrest. When *the hour* arrived, he awoke his disciples: *Behold the hour is at hand... Look, my betrayer is at hand* (Mt 26:45-46). Many soldiers arrived, but what most pained Jesus was the fact that *Judas his betrayer was also with them* (Jn 18:5). This was more painful to him than the blows of the soldiers. Yet even here Jesus protected Judas. He had shared his life with the traitor and never excluded him. Judas gave him the traitor's kiss and Jesus called him, *friend* (Mt 26:50) to encourage him to reflect on his attitude. Jesus loved Judas to the end. Jesus' primary commitment was with his own conscience, and not with the consciences of others, even though he loved them all. This was the powerful teaching that Jesus shared with his disciples, but Judas did not learn the lesson.

3. All abandoned him

Jesus had announced this abandonment: *I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be dispersed* (Mk 14:27). The disciples were attracted to Jesus and trusted in his power. They fought among themselves to obtain the first place in his kingdom. It is easy to support the powerful person, but glory and power are traps. Jesus taught them that life, the human person, love, and conscience are more important than power and appearances. Jesus criticized the attitude of the Pharisees, namely their attitude of wanting to look good in the eyes of others, and pointed out to them that interior attitudes of the heart and mind are more important. The disciples would learn this lesson.

4. Peter denies Jesus

Peter had a strong personality. His encounter with Jesus was the highlight of his life. He left everything to follow him because *even the winds and the sea obey him* (Mt 8:27). But when Jesus' power was stripped away, Peter's strength disappeared. He took out his sword and very courageously defended Jesus. He cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest and it was only because of the quick intervention of Jesus that more injuries did not occur. He secretly followed Jesus to the house of the High Priest and observed the humiliations and blows that were inflicted on Jesus. He could not believe the violence of these individuals or the passivity of the

Teacher before these aggressors. He had witnessed Jesus' courage, wisdom and power when confronted by his enemies but had no knowledge of this other courage that human beings possess: the courage to confront pain, disparagement and public humiliation in silence. Peter was filled with fear of being associated with someone who was so violently attacked and humiliated. He could not think and so again and again he denied Jesus. For a moment Jesus became a source of embarrassment to Peter. This triple denial of Peter caused Jesus more pain than the blows and spittle of the soldiers. Peter denied all that he had lived with Jesus. When Peter denied Jesus a third time, Jesus turned toward him with a captivating glance and removed Peter's fear and enabled him to reflect on what was occurring. Peter remembered that he had promised his Teacher that he would die for him (cf. Jn 13:37) and that Jesus had told him that he would deny him (cf. Jn 13:38). Peter left discouraged for he had never betrayed his word in such a shameful way. But Jesus looked at him in a way that was not condemning but encouraging — encouraging him not to condemn himself but to believe in love and humbly recognize his limitations so that he could overcome these limitations. Peter cried as never before and he became stronger as a result of his fall: stronger in his ability to forgive, stronger in his ability to understand human frailty and stronger in his ability to give another chance to those who fall. Persons who are very rigid and critical of others are those who have the least knowledge of their own person. Jesus, the Teacher of Life, chained and humiliated, encouraged his disciples with a look of love, encouraged his disciples not to allow themselves to be overcome with their failures — he was suffering there precisely for that reason.

The Jewish trial of Jesus

1. The social motives for which Jesus was tried by the Jews

Jesus' behavior toward the Pharisees, the teachers of the Law and the priests stirred in them a hatred toward Jesus. They were more concerned for appearances than reality. In contrast to Jesus who became the least of all, the last and the servant of all, the Jewish authorities sought power and the first places. Jesus strongly criticized this pharisaical hypocrisy: *they tie up heavy burdens [hard to carry] and lay them on people's shoulders, but they will not lift a finger to move them* (Mt 23:4). Jesus valued every human person, especially those who were poor and despised by society: the sick, lepers, sinners, prostitutes. He did not want these people to feel inferior before the injustice and contempt of others or before their own illnesses and weaknesses. Those persons who accepted their weaknesses and recognized their illness, felt more strongly the warmth and love of Jesus. For this reason the self-sufficient moralists

were unable to accept Jesus when he spoke the truth: *you cleanse the outside of cup and dish, but within you are filled with rapaciousness* (Lk 11:39); *why do you notice the splinter in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own eye?* (Mt 7:3). Only those who have the courage to look at the interior of their hearts and change their interior dispositions, only those persons are able to change the course of history. The Jewish authorities saw themselves as representatives of God on earth. They could not accept Jesus because he was born as a poor person, among a despised people. He was a poor carpenter, the friend of publicans and sinners. Jesus was the antithesis of the image that they and all Jewish people had concerning the Messiah who was to come. For this reason Jesus was rejected by the Pharisees and the Sadducees and Herodians. When the High Priest asked Jesus during his trial: *Are you the Messiah, the son of the Blessed One?* (Mk 14:61), Jesus replied: *I am; and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven* (Mk 14:62). The High Priest tore his garments and said: *you have heard the blasphemy* (Mk 14:64), and the Sanhedrin replied: *he deserves to die* (Mt 26:66). They had decided on a speedy trial because Jesus was well known and they feared the people. Therefore, they also decided that the responsibility for his death had to fall on the hands of the politicians, namely, the Roman Empire. Jesus facilitated the process. The Jewish authorities wanted to kill Jesus. Jesus wanted to die on the cross. Jesus did nothing to escape the humiliating tortures.

2. Jesus in the house of Annas

From the Mount of Olives Jesus was brought to the house of Annas. It was night. They feared that the people already knew that Jesus was imprisoned. Thus they *questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his doctrine* (Jn 18:19). Jesus responded: *I have spoken publicly to the world. I have always taught in a synagogue or in the temple area where all the Jews gather, and in secret I have said nothing. Why ask me? Ask those who heard me what I said to them. They know what I said* (Jn 18:20-21). In reality, Annas did not want to interrogate Jesus but only wanted to find a motive to kill him. Jesus knew that this was the beginning of his trial and that Annas had no interest in what he thought or in his mission. Many people besieged him but very firmly and without fear Jesus responded to the pressure of Annas: *I have spoken publicly to the world.... Ask those who have heard me* (Jn 18:20-21).

It is normal that a challenge would be timid in a courtroom. Jesus has no lawyer. But Jesus opened the windows of his enemies' intelligence and confounded them. They wanted to kill him and Jesus wanted to hand over his life. Jesus knew that his trial was theatre and that no one was interested in the truth of his words. The soldiers

knew that the Jewish leaders wanted to kill Jesus but had been unable to do so. Now, hatred influences their decision. Jesus' response to Annas unleashed violence — a strong soldier who had been trained to beat people, struck Jesus violently and without warning on the face. Jesus accepted the traumatic and painful blow. A scar formed on his face and he felt dizzy. Jesus responded: *if I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong; if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?* (Jn 18:23).

Jesus' reaction to this first blow points out three brilliant characteristics that Jesus would continue to show in all the tortures inflicted on him:

1. Jesus thought before reacting;
2. He never returned the aggression of his attackers;
3. He was able to make his attackers penetrate their interior and rethink the true motives of their violence.

A person who is offended is seldom able to think before reacting. To regain control of the thinking process, the *I* has to control negative thoughts, call them into question and critique them. In this way one can be master of oneself. When we are under stress, we react instinctively and not as rational human beings. Our unconscious memory produces reactions of fear, anger, hatred, desperation, etc., which obstruct the ability to think. Jesus did not allow himself to be disturbed in this way. The same courage that he used to speak the truth, he used to protect his emotions when faced with these stressful situations. The only thing that dominated him was love.

We lose our patience, especially with those with whom we are most intimate and in such situations we injure ourselves and others. We live in the worst prison in the world; namely, we are slaves to our unconsciousness, which causes us to react with ill-conceived and negative thinking. Jesus never reacted in a violent way against others. In response to the soldier's blow, Jesus, through love, struck at the heart of the soldier's aggressiveness and made him rethink his position and enabled him to see that his aggression was harmful to himself as well as others. He could see that he acted unjustly in order to gain favor with his superiors and did not honor his own conscience. He was stimulated to think and thus free himself from the prison of his selfishness and hatred.

3. Jesus in the house of Caiaphas

The whole Sanhedrin had gathered together. It was early morning. They had fabricated false testimony and there was no consistency in their words. Their hatred and desperation to condemn Jesus made them irrational. Jesus remained stone silent while others became tense and anxious. Jesus was unafraid and rose above this

trial. The problem of inconsistency among the Pharisees was the result of their psycho-adaptation, that is, *they acted on the emotional level and unwittingly destroyed the simplicity, creativity and ability to learn and contemplate and create that which is beautiful.*² This is the ability of the emotions to adapt to painful or pleasing stimuli. It is important for the normal functioning of the mind and if it is not well controlled, it imprisons people, especially those who are engaged in intense intellectual work. We lose our sensitivity when faced with these stimuli because of frequent exposure to such situations. Psycho-adaptation is positive when we desire to understand some science or art, for this stimulates us to further growth or study; or when we realistically confront losses, the weight of suffering is diminished by psycho-adaptation. On the contrary, psycho-adaptation can be prejudicial when it makes us insensitive to the pain of others, to the prejudices, discriminations, injustices and violence that is inflicted on others; or insensitive to our own lies, misery and mediocrity; or when it makes us lose pleasure in living, in relating to others, in working and in rejoicing in the simple and beautiful things that happen to us or that we are able to do.

The unconscious motive of the Jewish Holocaust during the Second World War was negative psycho-adaptation: Nazi propaganda and focused psychic tension acted on the unconsciousness of the soldiers in a way that made it possible to reject the Jewish people and to place an irrational value on the Arian race. As the war continued, the soldiers lost all sensitivity toward the suffering of children, women, and the elderly who eyes had become sunken by terror. The same phenomenon contributed to the downfall of the Jewish people because the Jewish authorities murdered Jesus. During the trial they bombarded Jesus with questions. Jesus did not respond because all of these questions were irrelevant. Jesus only responded when the High Priest, in the name of God, asks him if he is the Messiah, the Son of God. He confirmed the fact that he was the Messiah, even though this response occasioned sadistic violence and death. Yet he went on to say that even though they might kill him, he would overcome death; even though at this moment he was humiliated and condemned, he would one day come to judge humankind, including those who at this time judged him and condemned him. He had the audacity to say that he would sit at the right hand of the Almighty, the source of all power (cf. Mk 14:55-62). The Jewish authorities tore their garments and were scandalized by the blasphemy. They ridiculed this *false son of God* (cf. Mk 14:63-65). They were unable to see that God was hidden in the flesh of a man.

² Translator's Note: In the Spanish text the words in italics are in quotation marks but no reference is given except those writings that are listed in the bibliography. I do not know what work is being cited here.

The calm, tranquil and serene behavior of Jesus upset his enemies and increased the degree of violence inflicted on him. But Jesus fulfilled what he had taught his disciples: *do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna* (Mt 10:28). This explains how in the midst of pain, Jesus achieved the height of meekness. This also explains why Jesus extends to us the most beautiful invitation: *Come to me, all you who are labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest... learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart... for my yoke is easy, and my burden light* (Mt 11:28-30).

Jesus teaches us, in the most difficult moments of our life, to trust in the Father and his love, to live life and live in love in the midst of all obstacles and live as children of God and never detest ourselves, our conscience or the truth.

One of the illnesses of our present society is the *accelerated thought syndrome*. This occurs most often in those who are engaged in intellectual work. It is the difficulty of balancing the construction of our thoughts. There is a super-production of thoughts: anticipated thoughts, remembrances, anxieties, fears, existential dissatisfaction, emotional fluctuations, inability to concentrate, migraines, intense physical weariness because we are unable to slow down the thinking process and conserve the psychic and physical energy that is being expended. Teachers have more difficulty teaching today than in previous times because students today think with a more rapid rhythm than in previous ages. Students and teachers are in two different schools and move in two different rhythms. Anti-depressants and social anxiety medication help but do not produce serenity, peace and a joy in living. The true solution is found in what Jesus taught us: to look into the very roots of our being, to turn toward God and find rest and peace and strength that flows from God. Step by step, at every moment during his passion, Jesus was intimately united with his Father and he found strength and peace. With Jesus, our crosses and burdens are made lighter and easier to bear because they are changed into the cross and burden of Jesus himself who leads us to the Father: *my yoke is easy, and my burden light* (Mt 11:30).

The Roman trial of Jesus

The Roman Empire was represented in Judea by Pontius Pilate and in Galilee by Herod. The Jewish authorities had to convince Pilate to crucify Jesus. Pilate did not want to be responsible for Jesus' death and the Jewish authorities, because of their fear of the people, also did not want this responsibility. The Jewish death penalty was carried out by stoning, a less cruel method than the Roman method

of crucifixion that was reserved for slaves and hardened criminals. The Jewish authorities presented three accusations against Jesus: he stirred up the nation, he prohibited the payment of taxes to Caesar and he said that he was king. Pilate was convinced of Jesus' innocence but the Jewish authorities pressured Pilate who insisted: *I find no guilt in him* (Jn 18:38). He knew that Jesus had been handed over to him because of envy. Pilate asked Jesus if he was king. Jesus, who had moved Pilate to think and carry on a just trial, responded: *Do you say this on your own or have others told you about me?* (Jn 18:34). Pilate did not understand and stated: *I am not a Jew, am I?... What have you done?* (Jn 18:35). Jesus responded: *My kingdom does not belong to this world. If my kingdom did belong to this world, my attendants would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews* (Jn 18:36). So Pilate said to him: *Then you are a king?* (Jn 18:37). Jesus responded: *You say I am a king. For this I was born and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth* (Jn 18:37). There is another world, distinct from this physical and temporal world. There, in that other world, Jesus is king. He came into this world to teach the truth, to teach people how to live and love. For this reason Jesus rejected the privileges of the kings of this world.

Pilate did not understand Jesus' truth. When he discovered that Jesus was from Galilee, he sent him to Herod who had killed John the Baptist. Human life had no value in the hands of such an individual. Herod asked Jesus many questions, but he remained silent. Herod ridiculed him and dressed him as a king and sent him back to Pilate (cf. Lk 23:6-11). Many take advantage of the pain that is inflicted on the poor. Jesus, in silence, looks, suffers, forgives and loves all with the love of his Father.

Pilate, wishing to free Jesus, presented an option to the Jews: Jesus or Barabbas. The Teacher of life and love was cast aside by the plans of God and the people asked for the liberation of Barabbas. Jesus remained silent in order to teach us not to fall into emotional traps and not to gravitate around what others think or say about us.

Pilate, cruel and proud, would not give in to the pressure of the Jewish authorities. He expressed his anger at the way he had been challenged. He gave an order to whip Jesus and then free him. The Roman soldiers now satisfied their violent appetite and beat Jesus with a whip. This beating tore apart Jesus' flesh. It is difficult to imagine the pain that Jesus experienced when these brutal blows were inflicted on him. Only the mysterious union with his Father enabled him to remain lucid and loving. He prayed and conversed with his Father as each blow cut into his flesh. The soldiers, observing his resistance and knowing that he was accused of proclaiming himself to be a king, mocked him as a false king and placed on him a crown of thorns. Psychological analysis of human

behavior reveals that people, when they are angry and in public, react like animals and they try to prove to one another that they are crueler. Mel Gibson's film, *The Passion*, points out to us the reality of the violence, sadism, ridicule and taunts that the Roman soldiers directed against Jesus. Never before had anyone paid such a great price for the unconditional love of humankind.

Behold the man! (Jn 19:5), said Pilate as he presented Jesus to the Jews. He had no semblance of a human being and appears to be part of a masquerade. Pilate wanted to move the Jews to compassion, but for the first time the Sanhedrin told Pilate that Jesus ought to die because he had said that he was the Son of God. Pilate panicked and asked Jesus, *where are you from?* (Jn 19:9). Jesus did not respond. Pilate spoke again: *Do you not speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you and I have power to crucify you?* (Jn 19:10). Jesus responded: *You would have no power over me if it had not been given to you from above. For this reason the one who handed me over to you has the greater sin* (Jn 19:11). From that moment Pilate tried to free Jesus and was bewildered by him. Jesus had received authority *from above*, from an authority higher than Rome. In fact, that challenge conferred authority upon the judge. There is a power in the universe that is the source of all other powers. Pilate and the Jewish authorities had been defeated, but Jesus remained undefeated. When Jesus had almost no physical strength left, he defeated the thinking of Pilate. Only a person who had dominated all the roots of fear, could be so free. Pilate was afraid of an uprising by the Jewish leaders, who in turn were afraid of the multitude if Jesus were freed. Pilate was afraid of Tiberius Caesar, the Emperor. This was the card that the Jewish leaders played even though they hated being subjected to the Roman authorities. They told Pilate: *we have no king but Caesar* (Jn 19:15). If he did not crucify Jesus, then Pilate would be admitting that there was another king in Israel, one not designated by the Empire. This was the scene, conscious and unconscious, that dominated the greatest trial in history. Pilate, intimidated and pressured, gave in because he was afraid of losing power. Jesus could have appealed to Caesar but he made no such legal claim. He simply waited for the conclusion of his trial. Pilate relented against his own conscience. To soothe his guilt feelings, he made a gesture that has become famous: he washed his hands (cf. Mt 27:24). The dirt on one's hands is removed with water. One's conscience is cleansed by recognizing the truth of one's errors and learning to be faithful to the truth of one's conscience. Jesus never acted contrary to his conscience. We, however, frequently act against our conscience. Jesus never used his power to pressure anyone. He waited for the moment to air out and illuminate the dark recesses of their minds and lives, but he gave people the freedom to make mistakes and then correct them.

Jesus and the cross

Jesus was arrested secretly at night. His brief trial took place during the early hours of the morning. On Friday morning, the sentence was handed down. Jesus did not focus on his pain or the aggression of those who abused him. He was constantly motivated by his love for the Father and his love for all people, his sisters and brothers. It is difficult for us to understand this because we do not know how to deal with life's inherent difficulties that tend to paralyze us rather than free us for a greater love. Many small and great pains will accompany us during our existential journey. Jesus teaches us how to convert the pains that knock on our doors into excellent tools that can shape our souls. Jesus carries his cross to the place of crucifixion by the power of the Spirit rather than the little physical strength that remained after so many tortures. He lacked physical strength and the soldiers asked Simon, a Cyrenian, to help Jesus. This is an additional pain for Jesus who did not want to cause pain to anyone, but Jesus thanked Simon for his help. In the multitude that followed Jesus, some women cried when they saw Jesus. He consoled them and took on their suffering, suffering that would later befall them and their children. Jesus' friends learned from him that they need not be afraid to cry and to love; there was no need to be afraid to express their feelings like Jesus did. If in the past we experienced discrimination, rejection and humiliation, we need to put these experiences into a different perspective so that we do not become victims but authors of our history. We need to learn how to protect our emotions like Jesus did. With love we can avoid hatred, rejection and humiliation of others and penetrate their hearts. When Jesus arrived at Golgotha, he was not allowed to die with his clothes on. He was crucified in the nude, the height of social embarrassment. On the cross was placed, in mockery, his title as king and this was written in three languages. In reality, Jesus is the king of love, the king of himself, and the lord of those who are fragile, fearful, slaves of selfishness and violence. From a psychological point of view, it is humanly impossible to produce altruistic thoughts from the cross. Jesus defies these psychological principles: at the height of physical and emotional pain, he produced the most beautiful poetry of solidarity: *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do* (Lk 23:34). From the beams of the cross Jesus revealed the existence of an invisible person who was the primary spectator of this chaos. The Father is the main actor. Jesus had always been with the Father. This supplication of the Son expressed the depths of his love for humankind.

Jesus consoled a criminal when he said: *today you will be with me in Paradise* (Lk 23:43).

He also consoled his mother: *Woman, behold your son* (Jn 19:26) and then consoled John: *Behold your mother* (Jn 19:27). Crying out to God, not the Father, he exclaimed: *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me* (Mk 15:34).

I thirst (Jn 19:28). Jesus spoke these words after being on the cross for hours — his lips and tongue were split because of a lack of water. The soldiers gave him vinegar which produced in him a burning sensation because the acetic acid penetrated the open sores in his mouth.

It is finished (Jn 19:30). Jesus planned his life and death. The cross is an absurdity for those who do not understand this reality.

Father, into your hands I commend my spirit (Lk 23:46). Jesus returned to the Father, the Beginning and the End of all.

From that moment, almost 2000 years ago, humankind began to walk in a new direction. A silent revolution began in the hearts of millions of people who followed Jesus, meek and humble of heart. Today, Jesus helps us to shape this meekness in our heart and to do this at a time when we are most in need of this virtue.

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³ Brazilian psychiatrist and researcher. He has written five books on Christ, mentioned here in the bibliography. The author has made use especially of the books on emotion, love and life.

Zeal for the Salvation of Souls

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Province of Mexico

Introduction

Zeal is a fundamental virtue in the life of the Vincentian missionary. It gives a distinctive touch to a person who is in love with God and who is desirous that He be known, loved and served by all.

Zeal for the salvation of souls, today as yesterday, has powerful enemies: the comfortable life of the missionary, individualism and spiritual apathy.

The comfortable life is agreeable, middle class; in a word, selfish; and we justify it by saying we live a culture of wellbeing. The contrary sounds like the dark ages, savage and uncultured. Another enemy is the fear of mortification. For many, just hearing the word “mortification” sounds old fashioned and unsuited to a civilized modern person. Zeal in our days is very much like an eagle that is afraid to launch itself skyward because its vision is blurred and its wings folded in by fear and the lack of hope, of ideals, of faith and love.

Individualism is another enemy. It puts the brakes on communal efforts and can go so far as to damage our apostolic dynamism. It ties the missionary down by reducing him to the space of his own self, and it closes the doors and windows to the Holy Spirit.

Some consecrated people suffer from spiritual apathy which prevents them from moving forward in the way of Jesus with audacity and confidence. A solid interior life is necessary: *“Without an interior life of love, which attracts the Father, the Word and the Spirit towards one (John 14:23), there can be no eyes of faith; life gradually loses its sense, the face of the brothers becomes blurred and it becomes impossible to recognize the face of Christ in them. The events of history remain ambiguous when not hopeless, the apostolic and charitable mission degenerates into a diffuse activity.”*¹

¹ CONGREGATION FOR THE INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, *Instruction Walking with Christ: A Renewed Commitment to the Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium*, Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 2002, no. 25.

But turning the coin over we find missionaries who are lively, generous, filled with lofty ideals, with the keen look of Jesus, able to detect the greatness of every person and what Jesus has done for that person and the goal to which he wishes to lead him. Like St. John, they realize how much the Father has loved the world, so much as to hand over his own Son to save it... how much each person is worth, insignificant as he may seem, for the very Son of God became man to make him happy, even at the cost of shedding his blood, of feeling rejected and suffering death itself at the hands of those He loved so much.

We have in the Congregation missionaries in love with their vocation who live in difficult situations in order to evangelize the poor. Generous missionaries who hand over their lives in order to go wherever their superiors tell them. Missionaries who, each day relight the fire of their zeal for the salvation of souls in the Eucharistic celebration, firing themselves with the words of Christ: *“Do this in memory of me.”*

“We are all witnesses of the lives lived in the interest of charity of many of our brothers; their conformity to the will of God and the joy which they radiate is the best testimony of their faithful love of the crucified Lord and of their collaboration in the spreading of his kingdom. In the infirmaries of our houses are hidden veritable treasures and models of dedication to the evangelizing mission of the church. Previously they worked, perhaps with great acceptance by the people, in the mission fields to which they were assigned; now they share the sufferings of Christ confined to their beds or seated in a wheel chair. From there they demonstrate their faith in Him Whom they themselves once taught, Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”²

Terminology

Meaning of the word “zeal”: etymologically it comes from the Greek word *zelos* or *zeal*; *zeloo* or *to be zealous* or *to be jealous*; *zelotes* meaning *enthusiastic* or *fanatical*.

From the time of the Greek tragic authors, the word *zelos* has meant the *affective inclination towards a person, idea or thing*. Depending on the object desired, we can distinguish two concrete meanings: in the positive sense, *zelos* has the idea of *vehement aspiration, emulation or enthusiasm, admiration* and at times, *praise or glory*. In the negative sense, *zeal* takes on connotations of *jealousy, envy*. According to the context, the verb *zeloo* can be translated to *watch over, to praise, to aspire to, to envy, to be jealous*.

² ANTONIO ORCAJO, *Caminar desde Cristo*, in *Annals* (2002), pg. 443.

In the Septuagint, this group of words describes human feelings only in the later writings, as in Prov. 6:34: *“A husband is never angrier than when he is jealous”*. More frequently the zeal of God himself is spoken of, i.e. the intensity, the seriousness of the commitment God has acquired with human beings. In Ex. 20:5 God presents himself as *jealous*: *“Do not bow down before any idol, because I am the Lord your God, and I tolerate no rivals I am a jealous God.”* In the context of this passage the twofold way of acting of the divine zeal is brought out: on the one hand, it is directed at evil doers, to punish them; on the other hand, it is directed toward those who fear God, to show them his mercy (Is. 63:15). The exclusive character of God’s relationship with Israel is manifest in that he feels *jealous* in the face of Israel’s infidelity (Ez. 16:38; 23:25) which is often presented under the image of adultery.

The New Testament does not just criticize reprehensible zeal from an ethical point of view, but also zeal for the Law. So St. Paul distances himself from his former zeal *“devoted to the traditions of our ancestors”* (Gal. 1:14). It was precisely his zeal for God (Acts 22:3) that made him a persecutor of the church (Phil. 3:6). Looking backwards, he recognizes that in acting like a pious Israelite, he acted wrongly, as did the majority of the Jews of his time (Rom. 10:2).

So then, what is condemned is not zeal itself. On the contrary, Paul himself urges people to be zealous because zeal is good if it is for Christ; Christ himself was zealous for God: *“His disciples recalled that it was written: zeal for your house devours me”* (John 2:17). Thus missionary zeal that concerns itself for others is explicitly praised: *“It is good to have such deep interest if the purpose is good”* (Gal. 4:18). And in II Cor. 11:2 Paul shows a jealous love for the church of Corinth, analogous to Yaweh’s for Israel (Deut. 4:24). He affirms: *“I am jealous for you just as God is; you are like a pure virgin whom I have promised in marriage to one man only, Christ himself.”* There is also another kind of zeal which concerns itself with the welfare of others (II Cor. 7:7, 9:2), and for their good behavior and good works.

Zeal in St. Thomas Aquinas

To understand it we will study the three elements that make it up according to St. Thomas: its cause, its formal reason (essence) and its effect.

Its **cause** is charity itself or the love of God and the neighbor, for zeal has to do with both. But not all charity or love produces zeal as its fruit: this divine plant only produces flowers and fruit when its life is vigorous and brimming with sap. Or as Thomas says: the intensity, the fervor and the strength of love are the cause of zeal.

Its **formal reason**, or its essence, is the sadness which that fervent affection causes us when we see the goods that are lacking when love is so deep-to God or to the neighbor. Thus the soul of zeal, its great suffering which increases as zeal grows, is not seeing in the loved one all the goods and interior perfections which our love so strongly desires for it.

Zeal considered as the **effect** of that great charity and of that sadness can be defined as: "*A movement of the irascible appetite against that which the good of the other entails.*" It is resolved in the struggle to acquire for the beloved those goods desired for it, and therefore, in the combat against all those who offend or despise the goods and perfections of the loved one.

There is no variety of love, if it is strong and passionate, that does not produce zeal: *concupiscent or carnal love* produces jealousy, the unleashed fury which enters into a fight to the death against those who dispute the total possession of the heart where you have placed your delights and pleasures. *Self-love*, love of one's own glory and excellence, engenders its own brand of jealousy. The serpent of envy which poisons and corrodes the heart with the dark pain of seeing another triumph and achieve the happiness and honors which you do not have, but ardently wish for. The *noble love of benevolence and friendship* is crowned by the royal diadem of true zeal: the generous sorrow of seeing a friend, a loved one, deprived of some good or prerogative, or something owed to him by right.³

Truly Christian love of God and neighbor is not the movement of the sensitive appetite toward a useful or desirable earthly object, nor the mere tending of the rational will toward an honorable good of God or man. It must be pure affection, i.e. we love God and our fellow man because of the previous choice of our intelligence; we have chosen to love these two objects because of the appreciation and the high esteem we have for them, both for them and for the goods we desire for them. It is not a question, then, of wishing for them goods or temporal or earthly advantages, in themselves so worthless that charity does not apply to them; but rather divine goods and treasures whose value is immense and infinite.

For God, the external good of his glory and honor among his intellectual and free creatures and the fulfillment of his most holy will-both of which things are frequently lacking among men who offend and insult him. And for man, eternal life and grace, goods which he may not possess or lose.

The different functions of zeal consist in extending among men the glory of God and the accomplishment of his holy will and leading

³ Cf. ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologica*, 1, 2, question 28, Article 4.

souls to their ultimate end. Jesus Christ condensed all these ideals in the "Our Father": cause God's name to be sanctified, his reign to come to us, his will to be done on earth as in heaven, that he forgive our sins as we forgive others, and that he not allow us to fall into temptation.

There is in the gospel no event, word, gesture or step of the Redeemer that is not directed to these ends. The infinite activities of the God-man, summed up in saving souls and extending the reign and glory of the eternal Father. And today, seated at the right hand of God in the highest "*he intercedes for us*" (Rom 8:34), and he will only abandon this work after having placed the enemies of God and of souls as the footstool under his feet.

Zeal needs initiative, attack, the ability to face different kinds of situations, to understand a world that thinks differently, to interpret the need of those who seem far off, to enter into the profound desire for truth, justice and God there is in every person and make it explicit. This activity is specified here and there in the New Testament.⁴

Zeal springs up from the recognition of de-Christianization, from the desire of Jesus Christ who came to bring fire to the earth and wishes that it spread.

Zeal comes from being illumined and on fire with the love of Christ. That light radiates rays. A person illumined by the doctrine and life of Christ can arouse in another person the desire to know and to live as the other lives.

Zeal is dynamism. Being a witness of the faith is making known our own relationship to Jesus Christ to the person we are speaking to.

Zeal comes from appreciation one has of the other person and from the power used in defending and protecting him above any situations. Zeal makes talents and gifts of God more powerful and fruitful.

Zeal is not to be confused with ambition or exhibitionism. The person who is zealous for the glory of God and the salvation of people is grounded in love and humility.

"Zeal gives rise to the energy to promote the reign of God; it awakens an affective and effective enthusiasm to evangelize the poor."⁵

⁴ Cf. CARLO MARIA MARTINI, *El evangelizar en San Lucas*, Paulinas, Bogota 1983, pg. 18.

⁵ CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION, *Instruction on Stability, Chastity, Poverty and Obedience*, in *Vincentiana* (1996), 6.

Zeal in St. Vincent de Paul

If it is true that in the early years of his youth, Vincent de Paul was not seeking the glory of God and the salvation of souls, but rather his own and his family's interest, it is also clear that once he entered upon the road of ongoing conversion, he progressed in such a way that he reached the greatest heights in his transformation into "another Christ."

He kept the example of Our Lord Jesus Christ always before him. It was his rule, the measure of his thoughts, words, actions, omissions, feelings, loves, intentions, etc. He used to say to his missionaries: *"What a great enterprise it is to put on the spirit of Christ."* And he added that the Spirit of Christ is the Holy Spirit poured into the hearts of the just, who lives in them and creates in them the dispositions and inclinations that Christ had on earth: *"When it is said: 'The spirit of Our Lord is in this person or those works', how should we understand this? Does it mean the Holy Spirit has poured himself out upon them? Yes, with regard to his person, he pours himself out on the just and dwells personally in them. When it is said the Holy Spirit acts in a person, that means that this Spirit, while residing in him, gives him the same inclinations and dispositions that Jesus Christ had on earth, and these help him act, I don't say with the same perfection, but according to the measure of the gifts of this divine Spirit."*⁶

The zeal born from the love for God moves us to hand over our life: *"Whoever wishes to save his life, my brothers, will lose it: Jesus Christ himself assures us of that when he tells us there is no greater act of love than giving one's life for a friend. And what? Do we have a greater friend than God? Are we not to love all that he loves, and have, for love of him, our neighbor as our friend? Would we not be unworthy of the life God gives us, if we refused to use it for so worthy a motive? Surely, as we recognize that we owe our life to his generous hand, we would commit an injustice if we refused to use it and consume it according to his designs, in imitation of his Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ..."*⁷

"St. Vincent learned from de Berulle that his priesthood was much more than a way to guarantee himself an easy life. But later he learned, led by the Spirit and its demand, something that never passed through Berulle's learned head: that the priest, participating in the eternal priesthood of the Incarnate Word, is, just as the Incarnate Word was, responsible for man's material and spiritual redemption. Or, in other words, that the priest is not just the man for the liturgy, common

⁶ SV XII, 108; ES XI, 411.

⁷ SV XI, 49; ES XI, 739.

prayer and the sacraments, but rather he is responsible for the true material and spiritual good of society.”⁸

St. Vincent writes to the Canon of Saint-Martin: “The priests of this age have every motive to fear the judgments of God, because, aside from their own sins, he will hold them responsible for the sins of the people; for they have not tried to appease his justice as they were obliged to do. And what’s worse, he will hold them responsible for the punishments he sends because they do not oppose the plagues that afflict the church such as the epidemics, war, hunger and heresy.”⁹

In a conference St. Vincent praised the zeal of Fr. Jean Le Vacher. He had been expelled from Tunis; and when it was known that he had returned he says: “He has returned, and the poor went out to meet him. Those poor people did not know what to do to show him their joy. He is their savior; he is their savior. And if there are angels the Lord sends to purgatory to console the souls, in the same way, etc.... Fathers, whoever says missionary says savior; we have been called to save souls. That is why we are here. Are we fulfilling this obligation as we should? Are we saving souls?”¹⁰

For St. Vincent, zeal consists in imitating Christ the Redeemer: “Whoever says missionary, says a man called by God to save souls; because our purpose is to work for their salvation in imitation of Our Lord Jesus Christ who is the only true redeemer who perfectly fulfilled the meaning of that sweet name of Jesus which means Savior. He came from heaven to earth to carry out that task; and he made it the purpose of his life and death, continually exercising the quality of Savior by the communication of the merits of the blood he poured out. While he lived on earth, he directed all his thoughts to the salvation of men, and still has these same sentiments for that is where God’s will lies. He came and he comes for this every day; and by his example he has taught us all the virtues necessary to his quality as Savior. And so let us hand ourselves over to Him, so He might continue that same quality in us and through us.”¹¹

St. Vincent insists on living a zeal which means being disposed to lose everything and give one’s life: “Here is a beautiful field of endeavor which God opens for us both in Madagascar and in the Hebrides as well as other places. Let us ask God to inflame our hearts with the desire to serve Him; let us give ourselves to Him to do whatever He wants. St. Vincent Ferrer was encouraged thinking that

⁸ JAIME CORERA, *Diez estudios vicencianos*, CEME, Salamanca 1983, 302-303.

⁹ SV V, 568; ES V, 541.

¹⁰ SV XI, 321; ES XI, 217.

¹¹ LOUIS ABELLY, *La Vie du Venerable Serviteur de Dieu Vincent de Paul*, Book III, ch. 8, sec 2, pgs. 89-90.

priests would come who, with the fire of their zeal, would inflame the whole world (Luke 12:49). If we do not deserve that God grant us the grace to be those priests, let us beg him that at least he make us their images and precursors; but, come what may, let us be certain that we will not be true Christians until we are willing to lose everything, and to give up even our lives for the love and glory of Jesus Christ, determined with the holy apostle to choose torment and death ahead of being separated from the love of our Divine Savior” (Rom. 8:35-39).¹²

Praise of Missionary Work

“Our Lord, with the words ‘Seek first the kingdom of God’ (Mat. 28:19) recommends to us that we have God reign in us and then cooperate with Him to extend and broaden his reign for the conquest of souls. Is it not a great honor for us to have been called to carry out such a great and important work? Is it not doing the work of angels who work only and continually to make God’s kingdom grow? Is there a condition more desirable than ours since we are to live and work for no other reason than to establish among us and to increase and make grow the kingdom of God? What reason could there be, my brothers, for not responding worthily to such a holy and sanctifying vocation?”¹³

In the conference of August 22, 1659 which treats of the five fundamental virtues of the missionary, he speaks of zeal in this way: “Zeal is the fifth maxim and it consists in the pure desire to become pleasing to God and useful to our neighbor. Zeal for extending God’s kingdom, zeal for procuring the neighbor’s salvation. Is there anything in the world more perfect? If the love of God is a fire, zeal is its flame; if love is a sun, zeal is its ray. Zeal is what is purest in God’s love.”¹⁴ And he added: “Let us place our hand on our heart. Do we feel this desire within us? If we do, what happiness! If we do not feel it, let us be ashamed and recognize that we are not missionaries, for true missionaries are simple, humble, mortified and full of zeal for the work”¹⁵

Vices Contrary to Zeal

For St. Vincent, the vices that go against zeal are many: insensibility, comfort, laziness, idleness and half-heartedness.

In the conference of August 29, 1659 on the maxims contrary to the gospel maxims, he says: “Insensibility means that the corporal and

¹² LOUIS ABELLY, *op. cit.*, Bk. III, ch. 10, pg. 101.

¹³ LOUIS ABELLY, *op. cit.*, Bk. III, pg. 32.

¹⁴ SV XII, 307.

¹⁵ SV XII, 308.

spiritual miseries of our neighbor make no impression on us; one has no charity, no zeal; one does not feel the offenses against God. Let us not be among those missionaries who have no zeal. When they send them to the missions, they go. When they must work with ordinands, they work. When they work with retreatants, they do so. But how do they do it? Where is their zeal? Their zeal is extinguished by insensibility. Let us strive, then, to fill ourselves with the spirit of zeal; let us carry out all the works of our institute and let us do so with zeal, with courage, with fervor. Let us be compassionate to so many souls who are perishing and let us not permit insensibility and laziness be the cause of our perdition.”¹⁶

To a cleric of the Congregation, Jean De Fricourt, who wrote to St. Vincent telling him he was full of doubts and had no feeling either for the rules or the exercises, he answers: *“To my way of thinking, this is cowardice of the will and laziness of the spirit for the things God asks of us. This does not surprise me since all men are naturally in this situation. And if you ask me: what is the difference between them, since some are zealous and others slack, my answer is that the former overcome better than the latter the repugnance of nature, and that the latter do not make the effort to overcome them; that the former live in peace since their heart is not divided because they have given it all to God, while the latter are restless since, while wanting to love God, do not cease loving other things that are not God; and these other things are the satisfactions of the body which make the soul resistant to the practice of virtue. This is what produces and nourishes laziness which is the vice of ecclesiastics. It is the state which most appalls God. Surely half-heartedness is a state of condemnation. My dear brother, how many motives do we not have to tremble, you and I, knowing that he is damned who negligently does God’s work. So decide once and for all, my dear brother, to overcome your lack of interest. Frequently ask God for the grace to subjugate your lower nature. Retreat time is coming; I hope yours helps you to distance yourself completely from the pleasures of the present life and motivate yourself to reach eternity.”¹⁷*

After his experience in Folleville-Chattillon, St. Vincent feels the joy there is in evangelizing the poor. Zeal for him is the joy of sharing. *“What happiness, Fathers, what happiness! To do that which Our Lord came from heaven to earth to do.”¹⁸* *“We have been chosen by God as instruments of His great and fatherly love, which is to reign and grown in souls. If we but knew what this holy surrender is! We will*

¹⁶ SV XII, 321.

¹⁷ ST. VINCENT, *Lettre*, Vol. 4 (1658-1660), Imprime par Pillet et Domoulin, Paris 1880, Sp. 100-101.

¹⁸ SV XIII, 4 324.

*never fully understand it in this life, for if we understood it, we would act very differently, at least I, miserable as I am, would! Therefore our vocation consists in going not just to one parish or one diocese, but to the entire world. What for? To inflame the hearts of all men, to do what the Son of God did, who came to bring fire to the earth and inflame it with his love. What more could we desire but that it burn and consume everything? My dear brothers, reflect upon this a little. It is true that I have been sent not just to love God, but to make Him loved. It is not enough for me to love God, if my neighbor does not love Him.”*¹⁹

Zeal's burning love has no limits because it imitates the heart of Jesus Christ: *“Fathers and Brothers, we are to have within us this disposition and this wish to suffer for God and for the neighbor, to consume ourselves for them. How happy are those to whom God gives these dispositions and desires! Yes, Fathers, it is necessary to place ourselves totally at the service of God and the service of the people... consume ourselves for this, give our lives for this, strip ourselves to clothe ourselves anew.”*²⁰ *Let us ask God to give the Company this spirit, this heart that will make us go anywhere, this heart of the Son of God, this heart of Our Lord which disposes us to go as He would go and as he would have gone if his eternal wisdom had judged it necessary, to go to preach conversion to the poor nations. That is why he sent the apostles and he sends us to them, to bring his fire everywhere.... Let us all ask God for this spirit for the Company, a spirit that carries us everywhere, so that when one sees one or two missionaries, he can say: ‘Here are apostolic men willing to go to the four corners of the world to bring the word of God.’”*²¹

The Heart of Zeal

Entering into the heart of people full of zeal for the salvation of all, people like Vincent de Paul, Louise de Marillac, Francis Xavier, Therese of the Child Jesus, Francis Regis Clet, Jean Gabriel Perboyre, Frederick Ozanam, Mark Antonio Durando, etc., we find something common to all of them: the missionary spirit. This is the spirit Jesus promised to his disciples: *“Remain in the city until you are clothed with the power from on high”* (Luke 24:49). He told them to await the promise of the Father *“... you will receive the force of the Holy Spirit which will come upon you and you will be my witnesses... to the ends of the earth”* (Acts 1:4-8). Jesus explained his power with these words: *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; He has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor”* (Luke 4:18). *“Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned*

¹⁹ SV XII, 262; ES XI, 553.

²⁰ SV XI, 402; ES XI, 281.

²¹ SV XII, 286-287; ES XI, 190.

to the banks of the Jordan and let himself be lead by the Spirit through the desert... Jesus returned to Galilee with the power of the Spirit" (Luke 4:1-14). John the Baptist carried out his mission with great zeal because "he was full of the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb" (Luke 1:15). On Pentecost morning the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4-41). Paul of Tarsus became the apostle of the Gentiles after Ananias imposed hands on him and prayed that he be filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17).

The Second Vatican Council began to work after Blessed John XXIII asked the whole church to open the windows to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the soul of the church, the one who keeps the flame of zeal alive and burning in the hearts of missionaries and urges them on to carry out the work of the integral evangelization of all. It is he who gives the courage, the decision, the generous action, the strong and constant impulse to be in the vanguard of evangelization in the church. And so zeal can be called courage to evangelize, missionary impulse, love capable of everything, creative spirit, love without limits. "Zeal gives rise to the energy to promote the kingdom of God, it awakens an affective and effective enthusiasm for the evangelization of the poor."²²

Zeal has to do with celibate love. "By celibacy, the missionary renounces sharing his life with just one person, so in that way he can dedicate himself more fully to the mission: 'In this way we open the heart more fully to God and the neighbor'" (C 29 & 2). "In this way we are freer to fulfill the demands that the evangelization of the poor supposes. The commitment to chastity consists in using that freedom to dedicate oneself fully to the end of the Congregation, for (that commitment) helps us to channel our physical, spiritual and affective energies towards an effective dedication to the preaching of the gospel and a closer personal relationship with the poor."²³

Evangelii Nuntiandi warns us about the ties that can hold back apostolic zeal: "Do not let the bonds of flesh and blood, nor the affection you justly feel for the homeland where you were born and learned to love Christ become ties which diminish your freedom."²⁴

Apostolic zeal leads to the acceptance of the pain which the loving solidarity with our brothers who suffer brings about, making us one with them and bringing the gospel to them even to the giving of our life, working for the kingdom of God. "In the light of revelation and Christian experience, spiritual formation possesses the

²² CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION, *Instruction on Stability, Chastity, Poverty and Obedience*, in *Vincetiana* (1996), pg. 6.

²³ CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION, *op. cit.*, pg. 23.

²⁴ PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, December 8, 1975, no. 69.

unmistakable originality which derives from evangelical 'newness.' Indeed, it 'is the work of the Holy Spirit and engages a person in his totality. It introduces him to a deep communion with Jesus Christ, the good shepherd, and leads to the total submission of one's life to the Spirit, in a filial attitude toward the Father and a trustful attachment to the Church. Spiritual formation has its roots in the experience of the cross, which in deep communion leads to the totality of the paschal mystery.'"²⁵

Meditative and prayerful reading of the word of God. It is humble and loving listening that becomes eloquent. Indeed, in the light of and with the power of the Word of God one discovers, understands, loves and is able follow his own vocation and also fulfill his own mission.²⁶

Communion with God is a gift and a fruit of the sacraments; and, at the same time, it is a duty and responsibility the sacraments entrust to the freedom of the believer, so that he may live that communion in the decisions, options, attitudes and actions of his daily life. In this sense, the "grace" which makes Christian life "new" is the grace of Jesus Christ, who died and rose, who continues to pour out his Holy and Sanctifying Spirit in the sacraments.²⁷ The Spirit moves us to draw inspiration for our missionary life from the example, first of all of Jesus, and afterwards, to imitate the example of so many brothers, near and far, who have lived and are living their missionary zeal without hypocrisy in the simple, humble, faithful and persevering exercise of their missionary ministry wherever obedience has sent them. Prayer is the oxygen for the missionary's lungs. It leads him to contemplate the face of Christ, the missionary of the Father, and to receive from the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit, the love which warms his missionary soul.

(JOSEPH V. CUMMINS, C.M., translator)

²⁵ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, March 25, 1992, no. 45.

²⁶ Cf. *Ibidem*, no. 47.

²⁷ Cf. *Ibidem*, no. 48.

VINCENTIAN

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INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF JMV

Procesos formativos y desembocadura en JMV

Published by La Milagrosa, Madrid, 2005, 32 pages

“This is a well-written document, easily understandable, which reflects the basic human, Christian, Marian and Vincentian orientations of the Association. I am certain that it will be a great help for formation teams. In the countries who have recently joined the Association, it will be an ample source of information about the dynamics and stages of JMV, while for those that are already on the way, they can use it for their renewal and to find new challenges in their advancement in the formation process” (Fr. Gregory Gay, Director General of JMV, in the presentation). The Second General Assembly of JMV (Paris, August 2005) recognized the importance of this document for the working of the Association in the next five years and committed it to all its members. Reading it will be useful for every member of the Vincentian Family interested in the formation of youth.

JOSÉ MARÍA ROMÁN, C.M.

Saint Vincent de Paul. Biographie

Published by Alzani, Pinerolo (Italy), 2005, 822 pages

Why was this life of St. Vincent by Fr. José María Román not translated into French sooner? It was translated into other languages long ago. Why this long French wait? The fact is that it was necessary to wait almost a quarter century to discover this life of St. Vincent. This book is the French translation of *San Vicente de Paúl: Volume I, Biographia* by José María Román, C.M., published in September 1981, by the BAT, “Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos,” of Madrid. The second volume was devoted to the spirituality of St. Vincent and

proposed a choice of writings. The Visitor of the CM Province of Madrid authorized the publication of this translation. We know José María Román well. He was a great expert and lover of St. Vincent. In 1981, he was one of the best experts of the Founder of the Mission and his time. He gives us here the fruit of his research on St. Vincent and the 17th century. As the Spanish editor says: *“The author endeavoured to let the saint speak, whenever possible. Most of the time it is Vincent himself who tells us his story. It is he especially who transmits his message to us: make charity the mission of your life.”* This life — the nth of the lives of Vincent — is a historical and critical study. It is the fruit of a long association with the Founder of the Mission; all the assertions and quotations are supported by documents and scientific research. This biography was written 23 years ago. Since then, researchers have continued their investigations and new documents have been found, in particular by Fr. Bernard Koch, C.M. Here or there corrections or additions would be called for; for example, on the captivity in Tunis, the state of the city and parish of Châtillon, the St-Léonard-de-Chaume priory. Fr. Román, without any doubt, would have subscribed to these precise details, his historical rigour was so much in the vanguard of the scientific discoveries. However, by choice and respect for the major work of its life, we wanted to preserve the text of Fr. Román in its integrity and thus to enhance the memory of the priest who left us in February 2002. The translation of this important work, whose quality and smoothness the reader will appreciate, was carried out by French confreres: André Sylvestre and the late Jules Vilbas, with the whole harmonized by Jean-Marie Lesbats. Let thanks be given for their work and their perseverance for our greater happiness. It can be purchased from: Procure de la Mission, 95 rue de Sèvres, 75006 Paris, France and Economat, 140 rue du Bac, 75340 Paris Cedex 07, France.

PEDRO OPEKA, C.M.

Combattant de l'espérance: Autobiographie d'un insurgé

Published by J.C. Lattès, Paris, 2005, 350 pages

This autobiography of our confrere Pedro Opeka, C.M., missionary in Madagascar, has just appeared. “Enough of ambitious plans, of abstract considerations, now is the time to act!” The man who pronounced these words, knew about what he spoke. In 1989, he settled in the immense garbage dump of Tananarive. He does not have a penny, but he promises the poorest, “Together, we are going to get out of this.” The result, 15 years later: 250,000 people are cared for, helped and welcomed; 8500 children are sent to school. Fr. Pedro

has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize and, at the time of the disorders in Madagascar in 2002, his position in favor of democracy was very largely heard. Confronted with such success, some will speak of a miracle. Others, on the contrary, could cast a critical glance. That is not the essential. He shows us concretely why life is lived in relationship with others. The difference is not the fact that he went to see beings rejected on a heap of refuse, but rather that he remained there. The other message of Fr. Pedro is that of a rebel. From a word on a garbage dump was born a movement of international dimensions. It is worth it to listen to this exceptional voice and yet one only concerned about everyday life ” (taken from the book’s presentation).

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**APPLICATION
FOR THE SYSTEMIC CHANGE AWARD 2006**

How does the project fit the criteria of the Systemic Change Award?
Provide a brief history of the project.

What is the goal of the project?

A "goal" is a simple, one-sentence statement about the general purpose of the project that addresses the specific need stated above. Example: "To train members of the Vincentian Family to give missions in St. Vincent's Parish."

What are the objectives for the project?

The "objectives" are specific, concrete and measurable results that accomplish the goal of the project. Example: "To hold missionary training workshops for 5 consecutive Saturdays in the parish hall."

If the project should receive the Systemic Change Award, how will the award money be utilized to meet the goal of the project?

If the project should receive the Systemic Change Award, who will be responsible for submitting the report to the Superior General on how the award money was utilized? Please note that the second half of the award money will not be distributed unless this report has been received.

Signature of the Visitor or Vicevisitor

Date

APPENDIX 1

Work in Prisons
(Sheet for each prison)

Continent:

Country:

Service as Vincentian Family: YES NO

Branch of the Vincentian Family:

Number of persons involved:

Number of persons assisted:

Type of activity (mark with an X):

- Hospitality to prisoners with permission for leave or ex-prisoners
- Regular visits
- Material assistance (food, clothing, etc.)
- Correspondence with prisoners
- Legal assistance
- Other

Brief description of the work:

Person in charge:



Rome, 10 October 2005

To all the Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission

Dear Father,

May the Grace and Peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your heart now and forever!

I am writing to inform you that after consulting the various provinces, at the session of the General Council of 5th October, we have decided to hold the **International Meeting of Visitors at Mexico City on June 4 to 15, 2007**. (Please arrive on June 3 and leave on June 16).

For the appointment of the Preparatory Commission for the meeting, I wish to consult you on its members. I ask that you send two names in the order of preference, taking into account that the confreres should speak at least three official languages, that they be creative and possess the capacity to organize.

You can return this form by mail, fax or you can personally give it to me during the meeting at Lima. The answers should arrive at the General Curia before November 20, 2005. We will name the members of the Commission during the Tempo Forte in December.

Thank your for your kind attention.

Your brother in St. Vincent,



G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General

**Candidates for the Preparatory Commission
of the International Meeting of Visitors**

1. _____

2. _____

Province of _____

Visitor _____