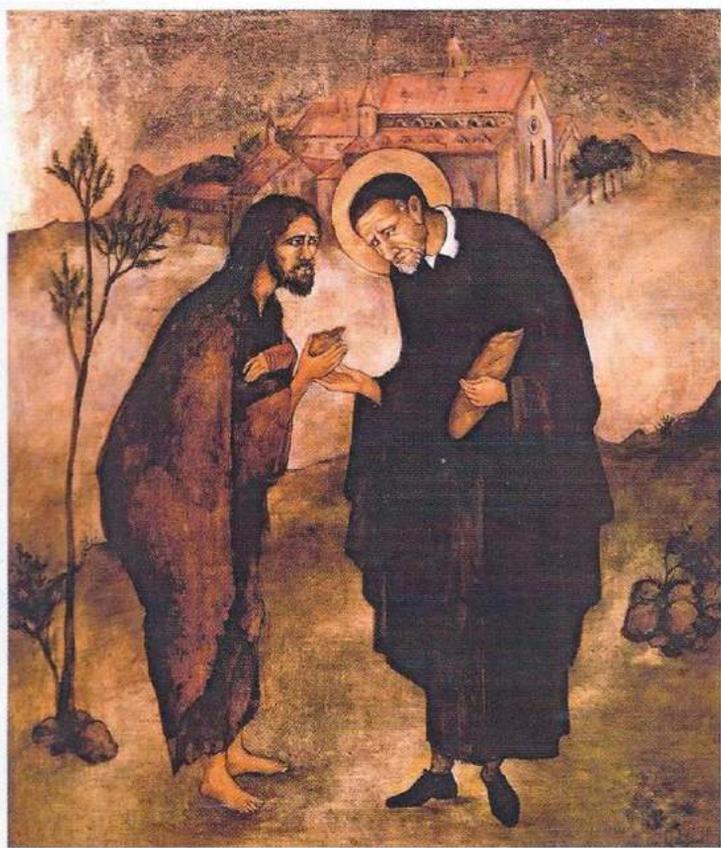


VINCENTIANA

50th YEAR - N. 5

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2006



Some “Lesser-Known” Confreses (II)

CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION
GENERAL CURIA

GENERAL CURIA

Rome, 5 April 2006

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!

As I communicated to you in my circular of 15 March, the Commission for Confreres in Difficulty held its first meeting during our last *tempo forte*. It worked hard to specify the objectives and criteria of its service to the Congregation.

After different meetings with the members of the General Council, the Commission placed before us, for our consideration and approval, the letter and questionnaire that I am sending you.

The replies to this questionnaire will be a first step in the process of preparing the international session, which we will hold in Rome, from 9-17 January 2007. The information gathered from all the provinces will be essential for the work and reflection of the Commission, which will meet again at the General Curia in the beginning of October in order to put the finishing touches on the preparations for the international session.

I believe, confreres, that we are taking the steps necessary to find direction and practical resources that will help us live our missionary vocation with greater fidelity and will serve confreres who are undergoing difficult experiences to overcome them and to be happy in carrying out their ministry.

I invite you, then, to participate in this survey, assuring the collaboration of the former Visitors who are able to do so and, above all, the confreres whom you consider to be living, at present, separated from our fraternal communion.

Your brother in St. Vincent,



G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General

Rome, 5 April 2006

To all Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission

Dear Confreres:

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be always with us!

We have been asked by the Superior General and his Council to prepare a workshop about our confreres in difficult situations. It is not an easy task. We are aware that many of those confreres are really our confreres. To prepare ourselves and all who will be present, we propose to you a few questions.

We hope not to burden you with an impossible task but to learn from your experience, even the painful experiences. Please answer the questions consciously and carefully. We hope that your advice can be of great help to our confreres who have to care for confreres in difficult situations and those confreres themselves.

We ask you to have the formators in your province complete the questionnaire and return it. Please assist us by copying the questionnaire and give it to your formators.

We are sending this letter to current Visitors and their predecessors to obtain a perspective for a longer period of time. We hope that everyone will answer personally these questions from his own experience.

Perhaps you know confreres who have left the community. It could be helpful if they give us their ideas as well. Please send the enclosed questionnaire for members who have departed to them.

We ask you to return the completed questionnaire to Father Varghese at the General Curia no later than June 30.

Thank you for your assistance in this difficult task. Our hope is that this work will result in serenity and happiness for our confreres in these situations and help to you in your ministry.

The Commission for Confreres in Difficult Situations

Varghese Thottamkara (Procurator General)

Wiel Bellemakers (Holland), Carlos Albeiro Velásquez (Colombia)
and Michael Joyce (USA - Midwest)

Questionnaire for Visitors, Previous Visitors, and Formators

The Commission for Confreres in Difficult Situations is trying to learn about these confreres so that we can assist the Visitors in working with such confreres. The Commission asks the following people to answer the questionnaire:

1. The Visitor,
 2. The previous Visitor,
 3. Formators.
-
1. How many cases did you have of confreres in difficult situations during your mandate?
 2. What are the reasons that confreres left the community during your mandate?
 3. What the most difficult cases you experienced in finding a solution?
 4. When did the confrere begin to experience difficulties?
 5. When a confrere began to experience difficulties, to whom did he go for help, with or without the knowledge of the Visitor?
 6. Do confreres in difficult situations participate in the regularly scheduled spiritual exercises of the Province?
 7. What attempts did the community make to help the confrere at the local level and at the provincial level?
 8. How does ongoing formation assist confreres who are living and working in difficult situations to avoid having major problems?
 9. In your ongoing formation program do you have someone who accompanies young confreres as a mentor?
 10. How has your mentoring program helped confreres from developing major problems?
 11. Do you ask confreres about their use of a spiritual director during your canonical visitation?
 12. What kind of knowledge does the Visitor or local superior have about confreres' use of spiritual direction?
 13. How many confreres in difficult situations are on a legitimate leave of absence or exclaustation?
 14. How many confreres in difficult situations are illegitimately absent?
 15. What action is being or was taken in the Province during your mandate about those who are illegitimately absent?

16. Do you or one of the confreres have contact with the absent members?
17. How do you facilitate confreres who are absent to normalize their situation either by returning to the community or by seeking a canonical process for departure?
18. What suggestions do you have about preventing confreres from developing major problems?

Please Return by June 30

The Commission for Confreres in Difficult Situations

Varghese Thottamkara (Procurator General)

Wiel Bellemakers (Holland), Carlos Albeiro Velásquez (Colombia)
and Michael Joyce (USA - Midwest)

Questionnaire for Members who Have Departed and for Confreres in Difficult Situations

The Commission for Confreres in Difficult Situations is trying to learn about these confreres so that we can assist the Visitors in working with such confreres. This questionnaire is being sent to

1. Members who have left and whose situation has been regularized,
 2. Members who are currently experiencing difficulties.
-
1. What was helpful for you as you were leaving the community?
 2. What kind of guidance did you seek as you were making the decision to leave the community?
 3. Please identify the main reason that motivated you to leave the community.
 4. To whom did you turn for help when you began experiencing the difficulty that led to your departure from the community?
 5. Are you happy in your present situation?
 6. Are you grateful to or angry with the community about the process it used if it legalized your situation canonically?
 7. What kind of help should the community offer to those who are thinking of leaving the community?
 8. Do you have other suggestions for the community regarding its approach to confreres who are having difficulties with their vocation in the community?

Please Return by June 30

The Commission for Confreres in Difficult Situations

Varghese Thottamkara (Procurator General)

Wiel Bellemakers (Holland), Carlos Albeiro Velásquez (Colombia)
and Michael Joyce (USA - Midwest)

Rome, 24 June 2006
Birth of St. John the Baptist

To all 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!

Please consider this to be the official invitation to participate in the Visitors' Meeting in Mexico City in June 2007. The theme of the meeting will be: "Ongoing Formation for a Vincentian Missionary Today."

Attached you will find a letter from the Preparatory Commission, with some of the initial details for that gathering. So that the meeting itself can be well-prepared and successful in its execution, I ask you to collaborate in every way possible in responding to the questions that the Preparatory Commission has prepared for your consideration.

The objects of the gathering are the following:

1. To strengthen and celebrate the unity of the whole Congregation with its diverse provinces through the Eucharist, common prayer and shared experiences;
2. To share with one another the life-giving events of our continuously changing world and how we should respond to them, as missionaries, in the steps of Jesus, Evangelizer of the poor;
3. To study together, as Visitors, how to foster and accompany the continuing growth of our confreres with the proper ongoing formation;
4. To exercise co-responsibility for the life of the Congregation, offering suggestions about various topics proposed by the Superior General and his council;
5. To provide time for the annual meeting of the various continental Conferences.

The meeting itself will have a variety of different activities. First of all, there will be the development of the theme through two presentations. One will deal with the topic of ongoing formation for the Vincentian missionary today in a general way. The second presentation will deal with different levels of ongoing formation, that might be beneficial for the growth of each age grouping of confreres.

In the middle of the meeting, we will have the opportunity to gather in prayer with a retreat morning. There will be lots of time for recreation among ourselves, as well as some excursions in and around Mexico City.

There will also be time to treat other business matters in regard to the ongoing life of the Congregation of the Mission; such as, a follow-up on some of the postulata from the 2004 General Assembly and presentations given by some of those responsible for the different services that the Congregation provides. There will be ample opportunity to dialogue with the Superior General and his council, both in a large-group gathering, as well as individually.

Members of the Preparatory Commission themselves will be the different facilitators of each day's activities. Beforehand you will be receiving materials to help you prepare for the event itself. Among these materials will be various excerpts from documents from the Congregation of the Mission, as well as materials dealing with Vincentian ongoing formation and some material from the Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, which deals specifically with the topic.

To help facilitate our work and to give us feedback about what is being said, we will have two synthesizers from the beginning to the end of the gathering. They will listen to our conversations and discussions and then they will report back to us what they have heard to help us see where we are going.

I am certainly looking forward to having the opportunity to be with all of you so that, together, we might deepen our commitment to following Jesus Christ, evangelizing the poor.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "G. Gregory Gay, C.M." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General

Preparatory Commission for the Visitors' Meeting

Rome, 24 June 2006

To all the Visitors in the Congregation of the Mission

Dear Visitors,

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

We, the members of the Preparatory Commission for the Visitors' meeting scheduled for June 2007 in Mexico City, met for the first time at the General Curia in Rome on 12-16 June 2006 and began its work. Our task is to prepare in the most creative way possible the forthcoming Visitors' Meeting in Mexico City with the theme: Ongoing Formation for a Vincentian Missionary Today.

After having dialogued and reflected in detail, the Commission decided to contact you immediately with some information and also some questions, which will help the Commission to continue its work.

As you already know, we expect you to arrive in Mexico City on 3 June 2007 and plan to depart on 16 June. If you wish to arrive before 3 June or depart after 16 June, you have to make your own arrangements. The Technical Commission for this meeting will contact you in due time with regard to other details like visas, airport pick up, weather, lodging, etc. But now, to help us move forward, we request that you reflect on and answer the following questions and return your responses to this Commission **by 31 October 2006**, at the following address: cmcuria@tin.it

1. How is the ongoing formation organized in your province?
 - a) Do you have a commission for this?
 - b) What are its objectives?
 - c) What are its activities in the past five years?
2. What is your opinion about the ongoing formation of the confreres in your province?
 - a) How have you taken into consideration issues arising from human conditions such as age, psychological maturity, stages of life, etc, in setting up the ongoing formation programs for your confreres?
 - b) Have you taken into consideration also the external conditions (assignments, pastoral environment, changing political and economic situations, etc.)?

- c) What have you found most challenging in fostering the ongoing formation of your confreres?
3. Which institutions in your country or region that have been helpful in providing ongoing formation for your confreres?
4. Have your confreres benefited from the services offered by the CM such as CIF, SIEV, Delegate for the Vincentian Family, International Missions, etc, for their ongoing formation?
5. What suggestions do you have for the ongoing formation in the CM?

Confident that our services might be useful to you and the entire Congregation, we remain, your devoted confreres,

Daniel BORLIK,
Antonius SAD BUDIANTO, Francisco SOLÁS SÁNCHEZ,
Yves BOUCHET, Michael NGOKA

Rome, 30 July 2006
St. Justin De Jacobis

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!

With great joy I write to you today as we celebrate the feast of St. Justin De Jacobis, missionary *par excellence* in Ethiopia and Eritrea. I pray that, through his intercession, God may give us the grace to continue to deepen our missionary spirit in the world where we are called to evangelize especially the most abandoned.

At this time I would like to announce **the recipients of the Mission Award for 2006**. They are from the Provinces of Ethiopia, North India, Slovakia, Rio de Janeiro and Zaragoza. Below, I give a brief description of these projects, indicating how they show missionary creativity in the evangelization of the poor. Each project recipient will receive US \$ 20,000. Because of the size and nature of the projects submitted, the General Council has once again decided that all the award money will be given to the recipients in 2006, instead of awarding the money over a two-year period, as was described in the application form received by all the Visitors.

1. PROVINCE OF ETHIOPIA

This project fits the objectives of the Mission Award because it will help in the development of lay Catholic leadership in Ethiopia.

Just a few years ago in Ambo we built the St. Justin De Jacobis Chapel with the dream of more fully utilizing our facilities there as a retreat/spirituality center. In the spirit of St. Justin De Jacobis, who helped bring the Catholic faith to Ethiopia, it is fitting that this center, named in his honor, continues to promote the growth of evangelization throughout this region.

We will offer programs for the development of catechists so that they can come here for an intensive training period or for refresher courses in the teachings of the Church. We will also use this center to reach out to youth, by offering weekend programs to develop good strong leadership among them. This center will also be a place for youth to come to discern how God is calling them to serve the Church in lay or religious life. This center will be a place of prayer for the various Catholic parishes throughout the region.

The goal of the project: To provide a spiritual center to enrich, develop and train Catholic Ethiopians to help in the development of the Catholic Church in Ethiopia.

In addition to the objectives already mentioned above, the center will promote the work and collaboration of the Vincentian Family by hosting two workshops each year on the spirituality of St. Vincent de Paul for the members of the large family of St. Vincent.

2. PROVINCE OF NORTH INDIA

History of the project: Vincentians from Spain came to India for evangelisation in the year 1922. What followed was a true unfolding of God's blessings on human efforts. In 1975, we made a bold move towards the evangelisation of the Soura people, a primitive tribe of about a million people. They are now on a path to education, development and progress. By 1980, our expansion drive crossed the frontiers of Orissa to other states of India making our presence felt mostly among the rural poor.

Background for launching this creative popular mission program: The groups with whom the Vincentians work are mainly Dalits (socially and economically backward people). Evangelisation has brought a lot of changes in them. In the year 2000 the members of the North Indian Province deliberated together and identified two important areas to which we now need to pay closer attention. These are: 1) faith formation of the Catholic community, and 2) formation and training of lay leaders to become effective agents for evangelisation. For this purpose we formed a centre known as Navjeevan Retreat Centre, Allada, Gajapati District, Orissa. The core group of this centre consists of a Director, an Assistant Director, one Daughter of Charity and six lay leaders.

The main thrust of the centre is to train catechists or lay leaders who will work for evangelisation. It also has a group of preachers to assist the priests in missions. The mission preaching includes popular missions and charismatic retreats accompanied by attractive music and use of audiovisual aids. These have brought about a lot of positive changes in the people. Besides popular mission preaching and charismatic retreats, we have formed a prayer group in the retreat centre. People from various parishes come to the centre for these prayer meetings. Facilities for counselling are also provided. The retreat centre conducts the following programmes every year:

- 1) Three hundred couples are trained in four intervals. The training lasts for five days.
- 2) Special programmes are organised for the youth and children twice a year.

- 3) A Bible convention, in which 7000 or more people take part, is conducted. The convention last for four days.
- 4) Four training programmes for catechists are held. Each programme lasts for one week and has a participation of some 80 catechists.
- 5) We also arrange retreat programs for various groups every month. These include retreats for married couples, youth, Church leaders, and catechists.

The goal of the project: The purpose of the project is to train and involve lay leaders in the evangelisation process. It also visualises the faith formation of the Catholic community. There are training programmes for some 120 catechists for one month each year. These catechists are selected from villages and are the leaders of the local Church. They are the best instruments in dealing directly with people in the villages. We conduct 25 retreat programmes in various parishes of Orissa in a year.

3. PROVINCE OF SLOVAKIA

The confreres of our province work in the Czech Republic, where the religious situation is very tragic. There are fewer and fewer Christians; for example, in 1950 there were 93% believers; in 1991, 43.9%; and in 2001 only 32.2% were believers and this number continues to fall.

The bishops of the country have asked for urgent help. The confreres have prepared a **project of New Evangelization** as a response to the necessities of the country. The project seeks to involve members of the Vincentian Family and other willing laity. The confreres want to create a missionary formation center and prepare laypersons who can function as animators during the popular missions in the parishes, but also continue the ongoing catechetics for adults, who, in many cases, do not have fundamental knowledge of the Christian truths.

How to respond to the criteria of the Mission Award: Through formation of the Vincentian Family laity, Vincentian sisters and other laity, so that they become active collaborators in the New Evangelization during the preaching of popular missions adapted to the local situation and in continuing the evangelization in the parishes after the popular missions.

Methodology: Formation of the laity through the ongoing preaching of catechesis for adults as a response to a call that Pope Benedict XVI addressed to the bishops of the Czech Republic during their *ad limina* visit to Rome last October.

Purpose of the project: The creation of a center for evangelical formation and the formation of members of the Vincentian Family so that they might participate in the New Evangelization in the Czech Republic, especially through ongoing catechesis for adults.

Specific objectives of the project:

- 1) Preparation of the space for the formation center.
- 2) Organization of missionary formation meetings on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays twice a month for at least a year.
- 3) Organization of regular meetings for animators who are already working in the parishes where there have been popular missions.
- 4) Organization of meetings of future animators of the parishes where the popular missions are being prepared.
- 5) Organization of regular meetings with pastors of the parishes where ongoing catechesis is already done.

4. PROVINCE OF RIO DE JANEIRO

The holy popular missions of the Vincentian Family are a new concept of evangelization today. These are initiatives that the community has taken in order to strengthen the faith, as well as to become aware of our call to evangelize, produce fruits and plant new seeds of fraternal life, here and throughout the whole world.

They are derived from an initiative that began in 1997 with a Missionary Team of the province. It was entitled, "Daily Missions." It attempted to involve our seminarians, some priests, the Daughters of Charity and the active participation of the laity from Vila Popular of the Menino Jesus Parish in Diadema, São Paulo.

The evaluations were highly positive on the part of the team. This indicated that such an experience ought to continue. That is how the Popular Missions of the Vincentian Family were born.

Why are they **holy**?

- Because they continue the very mission of Jesus Christ, holy, anointed and consecrated by the Holy Spirit: "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" (Lk 4:18-19).
- Because they take place in a favorable time, par excellence, a time full of grace.

Why are they **missions**?

- Because it is a time of going out, walking, meeting people, sharing, helping, allowing oneself to be helped, to be received, to receive, to laugh, to cry, to be happy, to be enthusiastic but, above all, it is a time of commitment.
- Because it is gathering, being sent to all peoples, above all the most needy, those who do not live the happiness of community because they are abandoned, excluded, etc.
- Because the mission, before being a job to be accomplished, is life to be lived in communion; because the most important thing in the life of each human being is to be able to meet with and relate to others as persons, to be well in one's own life and to live with dignity.

Why are they **popular**?

- Because they spring up from the base, from the ground level, from the midst of the people.
- Because they are made up of simple people who opt for the poor: men, women, children, adolescents and youth, called together to be subjects of their own history. That is the work of the mission.
- Because the missions intend to redeem the culture and popular piety of the poor.

Why are they from the **Vincentian Family**?

- Because St. Vincent de Paul is the inspiration and patron of the mission.
- Because Vincent de Paul was a man deeply aware of the signs of the times, listening to the voice of the Spirit, who is the protagonist of the mission, and deeply rooted in the person of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, who is the originator of mission and the reason for our proclamation of the Word.
- Because the group is made up of different branches of Vincentian inspiration.

The purpose of the project:

- To concretize the missionary compassion of Christ for the abandoned, the downtrodden and those who suffer, so that they might be nourished by word and bread through the carrying out of the Vincentian Popular Missions.

The specific objectives:

- To strengthen the popular organization through evangelization at different levels, promoting the integral development of persons;
- To participate in some way in the life situation of the communities and of the people;
- To have direct, concrete contact with the people through home visits, in which all the houses are visited, regardless of religious belief or profession. We make ourselves present as friends;
- To hold street meetings, penitential processions, actions of solidarity and other activities;
- To carry out at least one activity related to the area of formation;
- To hold at least one activity in the area of the celebration of the Eucharist or the Word;
- To have some activities in the social domain, with regard to charity and solidarity;
- To have a major gathering of the people at the beginning and the end of the mission;
- To strengthen the popular organization;
- To awaken and strengthen lay leadership;
- To develop social, recreational and formative activities for children and youth;
- To support the family structure.

5. PROVINCE OF ZARAGOZA

Formation of Agents for Pastoral and Missionary Animation.

The renewed history of the missions to the people in our province began in 1982 at a meeting of six Vincentian missionaries with the Visitor, Fr. Rafael Sáinz, in which the organizational bases were established.

Lay missionaries began to be incorporated in March 1984, in the mission of Segovia, in which we collaborated with the Province of Madrid. More than 80 laypersons have worked as active missionaries on the team: men and women, married and single, representing all age groups. There is a fixed number of about ten collaborators, some of whom have been with us since 1984.

The missionary team is composed of Vincentians, Daughters of Charity and Vincentian Lay Missionaries. The province designates an average of six confreres to serve permanently, and others occasionally, each year.

The team usually gives 12 missions per year. These normally last for one month, but in some areas, where the population is small, the missions last only two to three weeks. We have also worked in different countries of Latin America, especially in Honduras.

We have worked in parishes which have special difficulties. As St. Vincent said, we have tried to help the most needy. Because the secular clergy has seen us as a positive element over the years, we have never had to offer ourselves; we have always been sought out or requested. Part of our purpose (C 1, 3°) is to “help the clergy and laity in their formation and lead them to a fuller participation in the evangelization of the poor.”

The purpose of the project:

- 1) To convert the different parishes where we mission into evangelizing parish communities with affective and effective influence toward the poorest;
- 2) To help the priests, as well as the laity, in this work.

The specific objectives:

The work begins by motivating those who are closest in order that they might be capable of going out to evangelize, helping them make an accurate analysis of the reality and planning with them the action of the important moments of the mission. We have periodic meetings of three days or more. We call this the preparation time.

Afterwards comes a month of important time (which in our tradition and documents has been called “mission”), in which principally:

- We go out to meet everyone in the community by way of visits according to the style of Christ, who came down and drew close to us;
- We develop, through daily meetings, a communal sense of prayer, converting these moments into real prayer “workshops”;
- We invite the community to celebrate joyfully daily;
- We proclaim the good news by age groups;
- We prepare the greatest number possible of laity from the community itself to be animators of the faith;
- We attempt to raise the awareness of the communities in order to develop charitable works and services to abandoned persons. We promote help for the third world;
- We organize continuity with the people. We continue to accompany them, motivating them in this work. This is one of the services most appreciated both by the laity and the pastors.

In closing, I would like to remind all of you of the **object of the Mission Award**: “To acknowledge and support specific projects developed by individual or groups of confreres that promote in a noteworthy way their missionary work.”

I want to thank the recipients of this award for their missionary creativity in their processes to evangelize the poor. I hope that all the projects presented above will help to stimulate missionary creativity among confreres in other provinces.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "G. Gregory Gay, C.M." The signature is written in black ink and is positioned centrally on the page.

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General

Rome, 8 October 2006

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!

On 24 January of this year, I wrote you a long letter in which I invited you to reflect on the actual situation of the absences and departures of confreres. The analysis of this reality led us to establish an International Commission that has worked on the preparation of a formation meeting, which will seek to train confreres of various provinces in the management of absence and departure cases.

Today I am writing to invite you to participate in this formation meeting that will be held in Rome from 10-16 January 2007 (arrival on the 9th, departure on the 17th). You, as Visitors, are most welcome, but our wish is that you select at least one confrere from your province to be present at the meeting in order that he might assist you in dealing with confreres in difficulty.

During this meeting, we will have some excellent talks, given from the point of view of psychology, spirituality and Canon Law, that will deepen our understanding of the reality of priests in difficulty. The participants will have the opportunity to apply their knowledge by means of workshops, which will follow in the Conferences. Our interest is that the confreres who participate might help the Visitors to assist, with greater attention, those who are absent, or those who need to regularize their situation in the Congregation.

I am attaching a letter from the Preparatory Commission with details for obtaining a visa, in case one is needed, and other aspects.

I trust that this initiative will benefit all the provinces of the Congregation and, in particular, the confreres in difficulty. I hope for the participation of a large group of confreres next year. I would be grateful to have your responses by 31 October.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "G. Gregory Gay, C.M." in a cursive script.

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.

Superior General

Rome, 18 October 2006
Feast of St. Luke, Evangelist

To the members of the Congregation of the Mission

The Community is continually responsible for its own development, especially as we renew the principal elements of our way of living and acting: following Christ the Evangelizer as a community... the evangelization of the poor... prayer... holding our goods in common (C 25).

Tempo Forte (2-6 October) Circular

Dear Brothers,

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

We began our *tempo forte* meeting of October with an ongoing formation session given by Dr. Giancarlo Gallici, member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, who spoke to us on "The Vincentian Charism in Our Contemporary Culture."

In this circular I would like to highlight some of the more relevant issues that were discussed and decided on in this *tempo forte* meeting.

1. The Superior General will participate in a **meeting of the Provincial Councils of Italy**. The general theme will be interprovincial collaboration. Together the Superior General and the members of the council listed various recommendations for the consideration of the Visitors: cooperation in the area of apostolate, community, formation and the Vincentian Family.
2. As of this *tempo forte* meeting, the General Council assumes officially the **History Project of the Congregation of the Mission**. We have asked Fr. John Rybolt to be the coordinator of this project. He will continue to solicit the collaboration of other members of the Congregation in writing the history. We want to thank John and other members of the Congregation for the contributions they have made up to this point in this very important undertaking.
3. The members of the commission preparing the **Workshop for Confreres in Difficulty** met with the General Council and continued planning efforts for this meeting. It will be held from 10-16 January 2007 in Rome. We have asked Fr. Manuel Ginete to be the Moderator of the workshop. By this time, all the Visitors will have received the invitation to be present at the

meeting themselves and/or another confrere designated to help in these processes.

4. The final draft of the **General Council Project 2006-2010** was presented and approved. It will appear shortly on the CM Global website: www.cmglobal.org. The project is from and for the Superior General and his council. It is to be understood as a work project and not a declaration of intention. The various topics are: 1) spirit and identity, 2) mission and ministries, 3) community, 4) formation, 5) solidarity, 6) Vincentian Family, 7) General Curia Offices, and 8) General Council. Each topic includes convictions, objectives and actions to be accomplished.
5. **Procurator and General Archivist.** We made the decision to contact a professional archivist, who will be asked to diagnose the situation of our archives in the General Curia. We have asked Fr. Alfredo Becerra to assume the function of General Archivist, as well as librarian for the General Curia. Fr. Giuseppe Guerra will assume the function of Procurator General *ad interim*. Fr. Guerra has assumed this responsibility since the departure of our former Procurator General, Fr. Varghese Thottamkara, who was named Visitor of the Province of South India.
6. The General Council approved the creation of a **Development Office**. The official appointment of the confrere responsible for this office is pending.
7. We had a report from the **Vincentian Solidarity Office**. It continues to be quite successful in helping to obtain financing for macro and mini projects being carried out by the poorer provinces of the Congregation.
8. There was a report from the **webmaster** with various projects of special interest to the Congregation. One of these is the *Online Study of the Constitutions Pilot Project* (<http://famvin.org/onlinestudy/>). This online study is in English and Spanish. There are a total of 24 videos in both Quick Time and Windows formats. This is a project of the Visitors' Conference of the United States. It fulfills one of the commitments they made during the 2004 General Assembly.

With the approval of the General Council, Fr. John Freund has hired an executive assistant. Her name is Sr. Gail Reith, RSM. Among the things she will be doing is preparing some formation PowerPoint presentations.

Another significant development mentioned in the webmaster's report is that St. John's University will be providing the webmaster with a new and greatly improved server, which will dramatically increase the ability to stream movies and projects, such as the *Online Study of the Constitutions Project* and *Where in the World is the Superior General*. Thank you, St. John's.

9. The Executive Secretary of **SIEV**, Fr. Alexander Jernej, sent us his report. He will be sending out to the Congregation, as well as to the Vincentian Family, more detailed information regarding SIEV's projects. Here I want to highlight only a few of these. The council approved a manual for formation in Vincentian Studies, which will be made available to the entire Vincentian Family. The proposal that the meeting of young Vincentian historians be continued was of particular interest to the council too. This is a follow-up to previous efforts that were initiated to increase our pool of Vincentian historians.
10. In a report from the **CIF Program**, we received an evaluation of the newest addition to this program, that is, the Leadership Workshop, which took place this past summer. It received very high ratings from the different participants and will be continued next year on an experimental basis.
11. Fr. José Antonio Ubillús, the Assistant General for the Missions, has been working on the **Statutes for the International Missions** for the past few months. These were approved *ad experimentum* and will be sent to the international missions to be studied by the missionaries there.
12. The **International Mission in the Solomon Islands** has suggested beginning a house of formation for the Congregation of the Mission. This has been accepted by the Archbishop and approved by the General Council. We also received an appeal for missionaries from one of the bishops in a neighboring diocese. This will be presented in the Mission Appeal Letter later on this month.
13. Two of the newer members of the **International Mission in El Alto, Bolivia**, Frs. Cyrille de Nanteuil (Paris) and Fernando Sánchez (Argentina) are in Rome for a missiology course from now until the beginning of December. Fernando has been working for a few months now in El Alto and Cyrille will be departing for there for the first time after the course finishes.
14. We also discussed the **volunteers** who responded to the Mission Appeal Letters of previous years. We considered seven possible candidates. One will be placed immediately in the Vice-Province of Mozambique. He is a missionary from the Province of Ethiopia. Another from the Province of South India will be missioned to Tanzania. We will have further information for the other candidates after our *tempo forte* meeting in December.
15. There is one final point which was not decided during the *tempo forte* meeting, but was announced during these days; that is, the new superior and assistant superior of the Curia House: John Gouldrick and Alfredo Becerra, respectively.

O Lord, grant us the grace to be open, available, and loving in doing your will. God, our liberator, we beg this of you with confidence. Grant us freedom of mind and will so that nothing keeps us from carrying out your commandments. By working in this way, we know you will take us by the hand. You will help us to be faithful to your plan and you will lead us to glory. We ask this through Christ, Our Lord. Amen (SV XII, 242-243).

Your brother in St. Vincent,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "G. Gregory Gay, C.M." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General

Mission Appeal
Rome, 22 October 2006
World Mission Sunday

To all the members of the Congregation of the Mission

I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God.

(Luke 4:43)

The same Jesus Christ has ordained that God be known, served, and loved so that his kingdom and his justice may be sought above all things. Therefore, if Our Lord exhorts us and orders us to live in this way, he will surely give us the grace to accomplish this task, and indeed, will increase grace in us according to the measure that we are faithful to our mission (SV XII, 139).

Dear Brothers in St. Vincent,

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

Since May 2005, I have had the opportunity to visit many of the mission territories that are often presented in this Mission Appeal Letter.

In May 2005, I visited the **Vice-Province of Sts. Cyril and Methodius** for the blessing of the new Central House, called "God's Gift." At the same time, I was able to visit some of the areas of mission of the Vice-Province, but certainly not all of them because of the vast distances there are from one house to the next. The vice-province is relatively new, formed in 2001 by joining five separate missions in the territory of the former Soviet Union. The volunteers serving there at present are from the Provinces of Eastern Europe. The Vice-Visitor is from Ireland.

Also in May, just one week after my mother's death, I was in the mission of the Provinces of Italy in **Albania**, where the faith of the young people is alive and well. The people of this country had lived for years unable to freely express their faith in Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, because of a lack of missionaries, the Provinces of Italy have been forced to reduce the mission from two houses to one, in which three confreres are working to evangelize the poor. There is a solid presence of the Daughters of Charity in Albania and they certainly would like to have greater support from the Congregation of the Mission, as they carry out their duties in the service of the poor.

In December of the same year, I had the opportunity to visit the mission of the Province of Barcelona in the **Moskitia**, where I participated in the ordination of our first Vincentian from this mission territory. There are two confreres from the Province of Barcelona presently serving in this apostolate, as well as one from the Province of Central America, and two from Poland, one of whom is in Barcelona at this time preparing for the mission. The area is vast and the needs are great as our confreres and the Daughters of Charity try to make the love of Christ present among the indigenous people of the Moskitia. The bishop of this area is our own confrere, Bishop Luis Solé, who was ordained in 2005.

In February 2006, I visited our International Mission in **El Alto, Bolivia**, for the first time. I was impressed by the enthusiasm with which the confreres carry out their work, although they are dispersed. At present we have a confrere from the Province of the Orient, who accompanies our seminarians and the seminarians from two different dioceses (La Paz and El Alto); there is a confrere from the Province of Peru, who is the mission superior; there is a young confrere, who is finishing up his second year on the mission, from the Province of Madrid, Spain; and there are two newer confreres just beginning the mission, one from Argentina and the other from the Province of Paris, France. Likewise, the needs there are great. The confreres are spread out over a vast territory in an effort to respond to the needs of the indigenous people of this very isolated area.

During the month of April 2006, I visited both the **Vice-Province of Mozambique** and the mission of our confreres from Salamanca in **Nacala**, as well as the **mission** of our confreres **from the Province of Mexico**. It was shortly after my visit there that I wrote an extended, special appeal for this vice-province, which has been left shorthanded with much evangelization to be done. We received some promises from the different Provinces of COVIAM to help supply missionaries for the vice-province over the next couple of years, as well as continued support from the Provinces of Mexico, Curitiba, Rio de Janeiro, and Argentina. In the mission in Nacala there were three confreres who also shared ministry with MISEVI from Spain. One of those confreres has returned to Europe and is presently studying in Rome. The other missionary from Costa Rica will finish his commitment at the end of 2006, leaving just one missionary from the Province of Salamanca.

At the end of April and the beginning of May, on the occasion of the annual meeting of CEVIM, I visited **Istanbul**. The high school of the Province of Austria, St. George, is where one of last year's missionary volunteers from the Province of Rome is assigned. He is presently in Rome studying Islam. The current situation of relationships between Muslims and Christians, intensified by the

Pope's commentary, only highlights our need to be prepared as Christian missionaries in an area dominated by the Muslim religion.

This past August, I had the opportunity to visit our International Mission in the **Solomon Islands**, where the confreres have built up a nice community, working in the seminary, as well as in a lay formation center and rural parish. The confreres there are from the Philippines, Australia, Fiji, Indonesia, and Croatia. The confreres of the mission are beginning to attract candidates for the Congregation. They have petitioned to open a house of formation. That project is being pursued at the present time. In one of the neighboring dioceses, the bishop has asked for missionaries for parish ministry and lay formation. The Archbishop of Honiara himself encourages our presence in this missionary diocese. The majority of the seminarians who attend the seminary come from this area.

Immediately thereafter, I visited our International Mission in **Papua New Guinea**, where we have three confreres: one from the Philippines, one from Colombia and one from the Province of Puerto Rico, who is from the Dominican Republic. Their presence in this part of world has also attracted some candidates to the Congregation. At the same time, the confreres desire to extend the mission to rural, parochial ministries. There is also an invitation for confreres who are professors to teach in the Theological Institute, as well as to be formators for the major seminary.

The only other established mission that has asked for volunteers this year is the **Province of China**. It is a province that is made up of confreres from a number of different provinces of the Congregation, serving both in Taiwan and mainland China.

We have asked for volunteers for each of the above-mentioned missions on a number of occasions, both in my time as Superior General, as well as during the administration of Fr. Maloney.

There are **two new requests**. One is from the **Bishop of the Diocese of Auki, in the Solomon Islands**, as mentioned above. The other is from the **Bishop of the Diocese of Roraima, in Brazil**, which has a total of 400,000 people, having doubled in the last two years because of immigration. He has a total of four diocesan priests and a handful of religious priests from two different communities. The bishop is young, ordained a year ago. He has lots of enthusiasm and a desire to have missionaries in his diocese, both to accompany the Daughters of Charity, who work there, as well as to begin evangelization in the Vincentian tradition. My first call goes out, obviously, to the Provinces of Brazil to consider this petition. At the same time, the call is extended to all the members of CLAPVI, but would not be limited only to the confreres in Latin America, but to anyone who feels inclined to live and work in this impoverished area of Brazil on the frontier with Venezuela.

Before I give a detailed list of the needs of each of these areas of mission, I would like to share with you a dream that I have, especially after having visited, for the first time, the area of the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea. I dream that we can expand the presence of the Congregation of the Mission in the South Pacific. It is a fairly new territory for evangelization, a young Church with many needs and many challenges to confront, such as tribalism and violence. The dream was brought on because of the enthusiasm I see in our missionaries working there, as well as the vocations they are beginning to attract and the support we receive from the local bishops.

I conclude this introduction with a word of gratitude to all the missionaries of the Congregation of the Mission, not only those mentioned herein, but others working in extremely difficult missionary situations, such as Kalimantan and West Papua in Indonesia, as well as the other mission that the Province of Indonesia has in Papua New Guinea. Unfortunately, because of distance, I was not able to visit all of these mission territories this past summer during my swing through Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, but I have made plans to return between now and 2009, God willing.

INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS

El Alto, Bolivia

There are presently five missionaries in El Alto. As the mission superior told me, there is always room for more, especially since the Bishop of El Alto is asking for accompaniment, by way of formators, for his seminary. There is also a need for missionaries who want to work in rural parishes, helping to build community and overcoming the isolation that is experienced in these distant mission stations. The languages are Spanish and Aymara.

Papua New Guinea

Here there is an urgent need for a formator. Hopefully, in the not-too-distant future, we will need other pastoral agents, so that we might expand our presence beyond the seminary formation there. The language is English and the native language of the people is Pidgin and others.

Solomon Islands

I received a special petition from the Bishop of the Diocese of Auki. On 25 September, he wrote requesting the services of Vincentian Fathers in his diocese. He would like them to be assigned to do both parish pastoral work and to teach at the Diocese of Auki Catechist School. The diocese is located in the Province of Malaita. It is a rural diocese with a Catholic population of about 35,000 that

live in 220 villages, divided into nine parishes. His diocese has no religious men at present and it would be great to have the Vincentian charism at the Catechist School, where laity are trained and empowered to be leaders and teachers in their own communities. The diocese has the highest percentage of any diocese in all of Oceania as far as vocations to religious life and the priesthood go. As the Congregation contemplates accepting candidates from the Solomons, Malaita would certainly be a great source of possible vocations. He concluded by saying that he realizes that the Congregation is in great demand throughout the world, but he asks that we please consider this request. It comes from Bishop Chris Cardone, O.P.

At the same time, in our established mission in the Solomon Islands, because of the desire that our confreres have of beginning a house of formation, they will need a confrere to work in this area, as well as a professor of Moral Theology for the seminary. The language is English and the native language of the people is Pidgin and others.

PROVINCIAL MISSIONS

Vice Province of Sts. Cyril and Methodius

One of the most urgent needs for missionaries is in 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. It calls for men to witness to the love of Jesus Christ in evangelizing the poor, where Catholicism is a considerable minority. The common language of the Vice-Province of Sts. Cyril and Methodius is Russian. Many of the confreres speak Polish. CEVIM, the Conference of Visitors of Europe, has given financial support to the mission and some personnel from the Provinces of Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. But the call goes out to the entire Congregation to serve 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.

Vice-Province of Mozambique

There is a continuing need for missionaries for pastoral-social ministry in the Vice-Province of Mozambique, as well as the urgent presence of missionaries in Nacala, which is part of the Province of Salamanca. The language spoken is Portuguese and the native language of the peoples served.

Moskitia, Honduras

This is a mission of the Province of Barcelona. There is a need for more rural missionaries. The languages are Spanish and Moskita.

Albania

This is a mission of the Italian Provinces. I make a simple plea to the worldwide Congregation for missionaries to work in this very isolated part of the world in parish ministry and as a support for the Daughters of Charity. The languages spoken are Albanian and Italian.

Istanbul, Turkey

The Visitor of Austria writes: "During the last weeks many open questions concerning a mutual understanding between Christians and Muslims have become visible. In Istanbul we would need confreres willing to learn Turkish and to undertake additional interreligious studies. Languages of the community in St. George are German and English."

China

The Province of China is looking for missionaries for both Taiwan and mainland China. The languages are English, Taiwanese and Mandarin Chinese. Because of the language and political uncertainty toward the Church, this is a difficult mission. It would be good that men start learning the process of inculturation, as well as the language, at a young age, even in their years of initial formation.

Other Places

Other provinces and places which have requested missionaries in the past and whose situation has improved little since the last time I wrote are the Province of Ecuador, the Province of Cuba, and Equatorial Guinea.

Ecuador is a young province with much promise in the future, but could use the presence of some experienced missionaries. The language is Spanish.

I think we all know well the situation in **Cuba**, the smallest of our provinces. It continues to be a work that takes much patience and ability to live the gospel in a unique way. The language is Spanish.

Equatorial Guinea would be a mission of basically accompanying the spiritual needs of the Daughters of Charity who work there, as well as light pastoral ministry. A missionary who is experienced could do some work on a part-time basis, if he has no difficulty living alone. The language is Spanish.

The missionaries of the Congregation of the Mission do not, by themselves, take on an apostolic work. Rather it is the Congregation, as a whole, which accepts the task of evangelization and the responsibility for carrying on this work.

*Since the foundation of the Company, this has been a fundamental principle. From this perspective, the missionaries should make themselves available to work where obedience sends them to labor and to carry on those works which have been entrusted to the Community (cf. MIGUEL PÉREZ FLORES, C.M. - ANTONIO ORCAJO, C.M., *The Way of Saint Vincent is Our Way*, translated by Charles T. Plock, C.M., Eastern Province, 1995, pp. 133-134).*

Your brother in St. Vincent,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "G. Gregory Gay, C.M." The signature is written in dark ink and is centered on the page.

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General

SOME INFORMATION AND CRITERIA FOR THOSE WHO WRITE

1. If you should wish to volunteer, please send your letter or e-mail in time to arrive in Rome by 27 November 2006.
2. It is, of course, helpful to know the language beforehand, but it is not absolutely necessary. A period of cultural and language training will be provided for the missionaries. Details will vary according to the particular place to which a confrere is sent.
3. While we have decided that no automatic age cutoff would be established, it is surely necessary that the missionary have reasonably good health and the flexibility needed for inculturation.
4. Confreres who volunteer should inform the Visitor that they have done so. I will always dialogue with the Visitor about the matter.
5. Your letter should give some background about your person, your ministerial experience, your languages, and your training. It should also express any particular interests that you have, such as the mission in which you would like to take part.
6. Even if you have already written in the past, please contact me again. Experience has demonstrated that confreres who are available at one moment might not be available at another, and vice-versa.
7. **If you are unable to give yourself as “gift,” consider a monetary contribution for the Vincentian Solidarity Fund.**

FEATURE:

Some “Lesser-Known” Confreres (II)

Presentation

by Alfredo Becerra Vázquez, C.M.

Editor of “Vincentiana”

The work of Saint Vincent continues to be alive and active in the world. We are presenting some articles about confreres from various dioceses who, in their faithfulness to God, bring our Vincentian charism to life. Our charism is still a provocation: a proposal to the Church and to the poor. Will today’s Vincentians still be able to bring this charism to life today? We hope that these articles will be an invitation to keep our charism alive. Let us be genuine sons of Saint Vincent. Let us live intensely our vocation as Vincentian missionaries for our age.

Giuseppe Guerra, C.M., summarizes the life of **Fr. Giovanni Boccardi, C.M.**, who lived his priestly and Vincentian vocation intensely while specializing in scientific studies as an astronomer. His purpose was to sanctify his scientific activity. He faced various issues in his life but was able to combine in his pastoral ministry an expressly Vincentian way of being a missionary and a sense of community.

The life of a missionary is full of adventures. **José Francisco Ramos Cárcamo, C.M.**, offers us the life of **Fr. Julio Pineda Portillo, C.M.** He founded the Vincentian missions in El Salvador. A man of simple origins, but with a great missionary heart, he found his motivation for engaging in the missions in the situation of poverty and religious ignorance. While still a diocesan priest, he dedicated himself to the evangelization of the people. He then decided to become a Vincentian to continue this undertaking in El Salvador. His apostolic zeal brought him to work both inside and outside his homeland.

“I do not want anything; I do not need anything; all this is for the poor.” These words reflect the extraordinary sensibility of **Fr. Ildefonso Moral, C.M.**, presented by **Juan José Muñoz Martínez, C.M.** Father Moral was a confrere who promoted and accompanied the Vincentian laity in Mexico. He was able to motivate others and share his love for the Vincentian laity of his time. He insisted that the base of charity was an encounter with God. He was a tireless, but quiet and visionary Vincentian.

Pierre Vigne, C.M., was a priest, first as a Vincentian and later as a diocesan priest, with a deep love for the Eucharist. His profound experience brought him to be an extraordinary missionary. **Alfredo Becerra Vázquez, C.M.**, offers us a brief resumé of his life. He shows how his experience sustained him and brought him to found the Religious of the Most Blessed Sacrament. His spirituality was centered on three aspects: the Word of God, the Cross, and especially the Eucharist. His example remains an invitation to every Vincentian to center his life on these crucial moments, and to be effective in charity.

Yves Danjou, C.M., offers us a short biography of **Fr. Eugène Boré, C.M.**, a confrere who developed a missionary method well in tune with the Muslim countries of the Middle East. His commitment in the missions began with his work for the poor as a lay member of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. He devoted himself also to the world and culture of the Bulgarians, and he always kept alive his missionary spirit. As Superior General, he committed himself to remain faithful to the rules of the Congregation, despite the troubles of his time. He lived intensely the missionary ideal.

Knowing the story of the death of **Fr. Nicolas Van Kleef, C.M.**, as described for us by **Teodoro A. Ríos, C.M.**, helps us to know his deep conviction of working for peace, justice and the defense of human rights in Panama. Father Nico had an unconquerable spirit. His witness is an invitation to all confreres to commit themselves more seriously to defending human rights, through the building of peace and justice along with our communities. In today's world, the human rights of the poor, of women and of children are continually being violated. Fr. Nico urges us to take seriously the invitation to justice and the participation in the transformation of the world that is a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel. May Christ and the poor give new meaning to our commitment as missionaries.

The history of our Congregation has been formed out of the lives of many confreres spread around the world. They are the ones who have written the pages of the history of our provinces. It now belongs to us to build the present life of our provinces. May we be faithful to God in the poor just as Saint Vincent de Paul was.

Fr. Giovanni Boccardi, C.M. (1859-1936)

Vincentian Missionary and Astronomer

by Giuseppe Guerra, C.M.

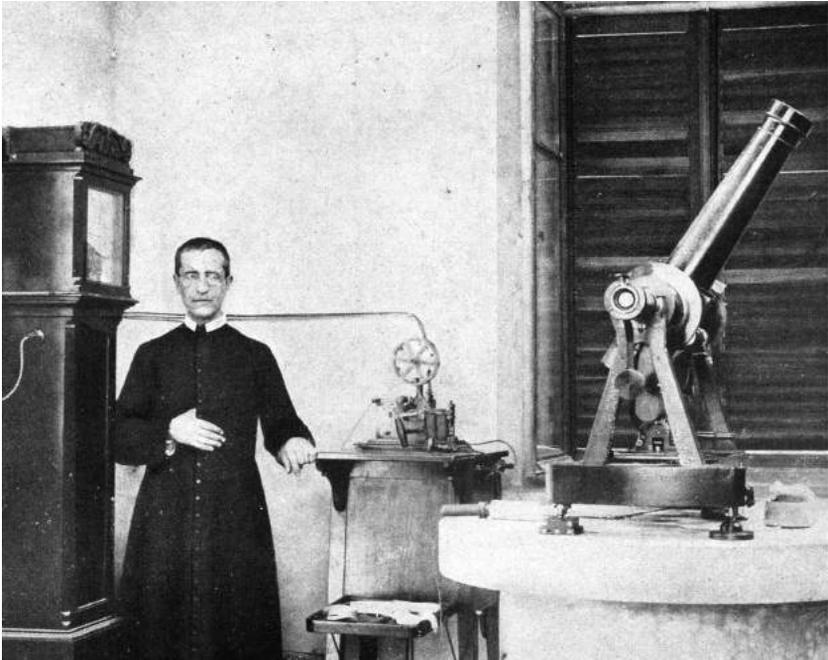
Province of Naples

On this 70th anniversary of his death, it is fitting to commemorate this famous Vincentian missionary. He was a member of the Province of Naples, but resided for many years in other cities outside the province. While living out intensely his priestly and Vincentian vocation, he specialized in scientific studies and became a renowned astronomer with a worldwide reputation.

Soon after his death, a commemorative article written by Dr. Alfredo Fresa¹ and enriched with photographs was published in *Annali della Missione* 84 (1937) 494-505. Fresa used the diary that he said he received from the confreres in Savona. This diary is composed of several notebooks, found today in the provincial archives of the Congregation of the Mission in Turin.² The diary covers the period 1891-1925; from 1915 it was written in French, and from 1924 in Latin. The period from 1926 to his death in 1936 is likewise covered in his Memoirs (see note 1).

¹ Read in the Circolo Pio VII of Savona, 7 November 1937; Roma, Arti grafiche Trinacria, 1938, and developed in the necrology of Fr. G. Zeppieri, published in *Annali della Missione* 44 (1937) 37-48. Zeppieri uses sentences found in the Memoirs: GIOVANNI BOCCARDI, *Memorie della mia vita*, ms. in 32 large pages, found at the Collegio Alberoni, Piacenza. On the first page is written: "He first wrote pages 1-27 when pressed by friends; four years later, he continued and wrote pages 28-32." These memoirs were probably written in the last ten years of his life, a conclusion based on a letter to the Superior General, written from Varazze 27 January 1929 (in the Archives of the General Curia, Rome): "I had the idea — I do not know whether it was an inspiration — of publishing my little autobiography." Perhaps this is why his diary, mentioned above, stops in 1926. The necrology of Fr. G. Zeppieri was translated for the *Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission* 102 (1937) 628-636; pages 636-645 have a translation of the necrology published in *Il Nuovo Cittadino* (Genoa) signed by Fr. G. Foddaì.

² Historical Archives, items 4892 and 4895.



In the scientific field, his name is associated with the history of the Observatory of Pino Torinese, which he founded in 1913. Both the *Lessico Universale Italiano* (Treccani, Roma 1969) and the *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (Treccani, Roma 1969) have entries with a brief sketch dedicated to the astronomer Boccardi.³

What is striking is the unity that Fr. Boccardi cultivated throughout his life between his vocation as a missionary and his scientific talents. Despite the practical difficulties that he indeed encountered, he held that it was his purpose to sanctify scientific activity,⁴ and this would give him access to the Creator. “Certainly, if

³ Already on the occasion of his ordination anniversary, in *Annali della Missione* 40 (1933) 438-441 (with a picture showing him seated at his desk), a sketch was dedicated to him by Umberto Repetti. Another one, on the occasion of his golden jubilee of priesthood, appeared in the weekly *Il Bene* published by the Pio Istituto dei Figli della Provvidenza (in the Provincial Archives of Turin, item 4901).

⁴ Letter from Fr. Fiat, Superior General, dated 4 May 1897. All the letters sent to the Superior General in Paris are now found in the Archives of the General Curia of the Congregation of the Mission, Rome (ACGR). These are all written in French, which Boccardi knew very well.

the world is to be only a ladder for us to use to mount to heaven, it is especially the study of the stars, which according to Holy Scripture speak to us continually of God, that makes our ascension to the Creator of the universe that much easier.”⁵

In a letter of 3 July 1928, written to Fr. Verdier, Superior General, Boccardi told of several conversions, the fruit of his apostolic and missionary zeal. In 1922 he traveled with six students from the Observatory in Turin to Brussels, generously helping them with their expenses, a typically Vincentian gesture. When he was 63, during the annual retreat of September 1922,⁶ he went back over his memories. He wrote: “I am also astonished to see how I was able to do the work of two men, as if two were living in me, the priest and the scholar!”

Childhood and vocation to the priesthood in the Congregation of the Mission

Giovanni Boccardi was the second child, born at Castelluccio Acquaborrana (called Castelmauro since 1885), in the province of Campobasso, on 20 June 1859.⁷ (In his Memoirs he speaks of an older brother and of another brother.)

Today, in the Piazza del Popolo of his native town, a bronze bust, dedicated in 1995, recalls its famous fellow citizen; also, in Castelmauro, a street was dedicated to him. Streets bearing his name are also found in Termoli and Campobasso; and, of course, in Pino Torinese. At Termoli, in 1962, the Istituto Tecnico Commerciale was renamed Giovanni Boccardi.

After only four years of marriage, his mother, Cleonice De Notariis, died in 1861, when her son Giovanni was barely two years old. His father, Antonio, a surgeon, moved to Naples, where he confided the education of his boy to a priest uncle. Fr. Giuseppe Zeppieri, in the account of him in *Annali della Missione* 44 (1937) 37-43, ascribes Boccardi’s “not always likeable” character to the lack of a mother figure. But Boccardi himself also admitted this: “Without a mother’s smile, without a father’s hugs, my childhood developed in dour and severe surroundings.” To compensate for such a negative situation

⁵ To the Secretary General, Fr. Milon, 24 April 1913.

⁶ Letter to Verdier, 19 September 1922.

⁷ The date varies in some registers (25 June) and the same document of vows, in his own hand, says that he was born on 22 June (Provincial Archives of the Congregation of the Mission, Naples: ACPN); but we say 20 June, on the basis of the baptismal register in the Collegiate Church of S. Leonardo, Diocese of Termoli, where it clearly says that he was born on the 20th and baptized on the 25th.

“I made use, instead, of a manly formation of will and character, allowing myself room and a continual occasion of developing myself as a warrior through struggle.” “At four years old, I was already reading and I translated from Latin the first book of the famous *Selectae*, or selections from classical authors.”⁸

At age 18 (1877) he determined to embrace the clerical state (he was then living at Salita Miradois, 6, which belonged at the time to the parish of the Vergini in Naples). He studied philosophy with Fr. Nunzio Signoriello⁹ and, as an external seminarian, attended the functions and meetings of the novices (which took place in the provincial house of the Congregation of the Mission); “as a cleric, I always lived at home and I never breathed the air of a seminary.”¹⁰

On 29 March 1879 (during his second year of theology), he received tonsure and the four minor orders. In the same year of 1879 he requested and received admission to the Congregation of the Mission and began his novitiate on 16 November 1879. He took vows on 17 November 1881, in the presence of Fr. Léon Forestier, Assistant General, who was then in Naples accompanying Fr. Fiat during a visit to Italy. Certain spiritual notes and resolutions of Boccardi’s date from his period; he always kept them, and today they are found in Turin.¹¹ There are also some notes about music that he intended to use while practicing the piano. Fresa also mentions that, besides French, he also knew various other languages.¹²

He was ordained to the priesthood in Naples, in the church of the provincial house, by Bishop Vincenzo Tagliatata, on 29 April 1883.

The first years of his priesthood (1883-1897)

After his priestly ordination, it was decided that he be sent to teach. But first, to get some pastoral experience, he was assigned to the house of Oria (Brindisi), a house of the Province of Naples.¹³ One year later, in 1884, he was put in charge of the Collegio Sisto Riario Sforza.¹⁴ This had just recently been opened in the provincial house

⁸ *Memoirs*, p. 4.

⁹ Certificate of the Office of the Clergy of Naples in ACPN, Boccardi.

¹⁰ *Memoirs*, p. 5.

¹¹ Provincial Archives of the Congregation of the Mission, Turin, item 4896: collection of spiritual writings.

¹² FRESA, *op. cit.*, pp. 401 and 476.

¹³ *Provincial Council Minutes*, Naples, 24 April 1883.

¹⁴ See *Storia dei Missionari Vincenziani nell’Italia Meridionale*, Rome 2003, pp. 112-114.

of Naples (1883), through the wish of the archbishop of the city, Cardinal Sisto Riario Sforza.¹⁵

Meanwhile, sensing the disproportion on the one hand between his inclination to teach and the sciences, mathematics in particular, to which he was being applied, and, on the other, to the works of the Province of Naples in which he felt underused, he asked to have some experiences in other provinces of the Congregation.¹⁶

For this reason, he went to Smyrna in 1887 and to Thessalonica in 1889, where he had been sent as professor of mathematics in the schools run by the Congregation. It was here, in the Middle East, while using a sextant and azimuth purchased with his own funds, that he began to develop his studies in astronomy, a passion that he had known since childhood. But along with teaching, he was also involved in pastoral ministry, as the spiritual director of a "Workers' Union."¹⁷

He led a pilgrimage of 18 youngsters from Thessalonica to Rome on the second centenary of the death of St. Aloysius Gonzaga. In a letter to the Superior General from Fr. F. Denoy, dated 21 September 1891 and published in the *Annales*,¹⁸ the writer underscored the importance of what had taken place: the first Latin pilgrimage from the Middle East to the tomb of the apostles. "In Rome, they will be lost in the crowds; but for here, in this humble corner of the world where we live, this departure was quite an event."

At a certain point, the desire of returning to Naples prevailed, and he asked repeatedly to come back. He returned in 1892.¹⁹

His character, along with some medical conditions that he always had, caused him on more than one occasion to be a huge bother and polemical. Also, on more than one occasion, he had to be treated for neurological disorders.²⁰

¹⁵ Letter of 21 February 1887 to the Superior General: "I have had the direction of the school of this house for two years."

¹⁶ *Idem*.

¹⁷ *General Council Minutes* (ACGR) vol. V, 12 May 1890.

¹⁸ *Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission* 57 (1892) 123-124.

¹⁹ *General Council Minutes*, vol. V, 12-14 April 1892, and also 25 April; diary, 6 June 1892.

²⁰ "I had scarcely started breathing the air in Turin when my illnesses disappeared." Letter to Verdier, 4 July 1927.

Naples, Sicily, Lecce

Upon his return to Naples in 1892, he was appointed superior at Acireale in Sicily in 1893. In a letter he wrote to the Superior General,²¹ he admitted the difficulties of the job entrusted to him; besides, he knew that the Jesuits were the competitors of the school confided to the Vincentians.²²

In Acireale he handled not only the duties of the superior, but also those of the professor of mathematics and of French. After scarcely a year, however, he was unhappy about how he was living²³ and, on 19 December, he returned to Naples.²⁴ Here, he was assigned to the house of Chiaia as part of a group of confreres dedicated to the provincial house of the Daughters of Charity. He thereupon became involved in the issue raised by the decree *Quemadmodum* (issued by the Holy See in 1890, which laid down certain prescriptions about the confession and the frequent communion of the sisters). Some of his confreres complained to the Visitor, A. De Angelis, and demanded a more correct application of the papal decree about the discipline of the sacraments of confession and communion,²⁵ and Boccardi, despite himself, was regarded as part of this group.

In 1895 he was sent to Lecce. There, he studied mathematical analysis and mechanics (diary, 14 October 1896); and he was encouraged by his friends to study astronomy (diary, 26-29 October 1896).

At the Vatican Observatory (Specola Vaticana) (1897-1903)

Two years later, the real scientific career of Fr. Boccardi began. Pope Leo XIII, who had founded in 1891 the Specola Vaticana in the Vatican gardens,²⁶ asked for the collaboration of Boccardi through the Procurator General to the Holy See. For this purpose,

²¹ 29 May 1893 in ACGR.

²² *General Council Minutes*, vol. V, 5 June 1893.

²³ *General Council Minutes*, vol. V, 18 December 1893 and 8 January 1894.

²⁴ Diary, 18 and 19 December 1893.

²⁵ In the provincial council of Naples, held on 2 August 1895, the Assistant General, Fr. Chevalier, who was making a canonical visit of Naples, told the members of the council that the archbishop wanted certain men removed from Naples, Frs. Francia, De Dominicis and Boccardi. The latter wrote from Lecce to the Superior General (7 June 1896) that it was not right for some to be able to consider him as seditious, since he had been expressly invited to Lecce.

²⁶ Previously, in the Tower of the Winds, near the Sistine Chapel, Pope Gregory XIII had some celestial calculations made for the reform of the calendar. In the mind of the Pope, the observatory should demonstrate with facts the profound harmony existing between Church and science. In 1935 the

Fr. Barbagli already had Boccardi come to Rome on 21 December 1896.²⁷ In a letter dated 17 February 1897, he wrote to the Superior General that the Pope had wanted Boccardi at the Observatory. It was on 8 March 1897 that the priest wrote the Superior General with the news that he had already been moved into the provincial house of Rome, Montecitorio (via della Missione). On 1 March he, with other members of the Observatory, had been received by the Pope.

As it had been in Thessalonica, his scientific activity in Rome was interwoven with preaching and priestly ministry (letter to the Superior General, 21 December 1898). He is listed in volume V of the publications of the Observatory as an adjunct member of the personnel.

He developed calculations on asteroid 416, discovered by Auguste Honore Pierre Charlois at Nice in 1896 and called, based on his proposal, *Vaticana*, in homage to Leo XIII.²⁸

To honor St. Vincent he called asteroid 366, discovered by Charlois in 1893, *Vincentina* and called another one *Pariana* (in memory of Paris, the city of the mother house of his Congregation). This was asteroid 347 discovered by the same Charlois in 1892: "St. Vincent and Paris: these are the names that make me thrill with joy."²⁹

There were some misunderstandings with the Secretariate of State about the projects of the Observatory entrusted to Boccardi, as well as those developed in scientific institutes in Paris (in a letter to the Superior General, Boccardi complains about his new titles).³⁰

After seven months at Teramo, near the Observatory,³¹ he perfected his knowledge at Paris in 1900 at the *Bureau des Longitudes*, founded in 1795. He would be unanimously elected a member on 12 January 1921, the first Italian to be so named.³² He

Specola Vaticana moved to Castel Gandolfo; then, in the 80s, the decision was made to create a new observatory in Arizona.

²⁷ Diary, 21 December 1896.

²⁸ Diary, July 1897: "Charlois answered me and authorized me to call asteroid 416 *Vaticana*." Diary, 9 July 1897: "The Holy Father had Cardinal Rampolla write to Charlois to thank him."

²⁹ Letter to the Superior General, 4 May 1899. Diary, 26 February 1899: "I got an answer from Charlois who approves with pleasure the name *Vincentina*."

³⁰ Cf. also the Diary, 16 January 1898: "If they continue to call me adjunct, I will resign from the Observatory." As we will see, he then left the Observatory because of other burdensome responsibilities.

³¹ *Memoirs*, p. 8.

³² Cf. letter from Boccardi to P. Cervia, Pino Torinese, 11 January 1921. *Annali della Missione* 86 (1921) 72-73.

followed other programs in Berlin and then was named a professor of astronomy at the University of Naples.³³

In 1900 he was named Assistant and Chief-of-Services at the Observatory of Catania. This mission entrusted to him is described in a letter of 17 December 1900 written to the Superior General from the Vincentian house near the Church of SS. Ritrovato:³⁴ “A fine lesson for the enemies of the Church. Let them now accuse us of ignorance and superstition.”³⁵ Since he had to travel ten kilometers a day to reach the Observatory, he moved next to the house of the sisters, closer to his work.

Meanwhile, the Visitor of Rome, Vincenzo Segadelli, wrote to the Bishop of Catania on 20 February 1901³⁶ stating that Boccardi depended juridically on the Province of Naples. Since he had become an expert in the calculation of orbits and in the drafting of astronomical diagrams, he wrote the *Guide du Calculateur*,³⁷ published in Paris in 1902, an important two-part manual to aid those beginning in astronomical calculations.

Director of the Observatory of Turin (1903-1926). Special permissions received from the Superior General

The activities of an astronomer and the duties connected with them clearly are not adapted to the rhythms and rules of common life. In those days, uniformity and observance were much more rigorous than today, and they did not take flexibility and adaptations into account. Nonetheless, Fr. Boccardi on various occasions asked special permissions from the Superior General and always emphasized his attachment to the Community in which he always intended to remain a faithful member. In fact, he never switched these permissions into pretexts for doing something else. The tenor of his priestly and missionary life remained very regular, severe and rigorous. Indeed, he never agreed with the advice he received to leave

³³ At Naples, naturally, he often visited the Astronomical Observatory, constructed in 1819. Diary, 30 July 1897: “After lunch, I went to the observatory at Capodimonte.” Diary, 9 November 1900: “In Naples I visited De Bernardis, the Observatory and the University.” Diary, 29 July 1903: “I have been at the Observatory, where I examined carefully all the bookshelves of the library.”

³⁴ Diary, 9 November 1900: leaving for Rome in the name of God.

³⁵ Diary, 21 February 1901: “I asked for all my things from Rome... I rented an apartment near the Observatory.”

³⁶ In ACPN.

³⁷ G. BOCCARDI, *Guide du Calculateur (astronomie, géodésie, navigation, etc.)*, 2 vol., Paris 1902.

the community,³⁸ and his comment is very meaningful: "I am prouder of being a priest than a scientist."³⁹

In two letters sent to the Visitor of Naples (Fr. G. Morino, who was from Turin) dated 7 May 1901 and 15 July 1908,⁴⁰ Boccardi spoke of the vow of poverty and of the permissions that he had received. He confirmed his membership in the Province of Naples.

He received a special permission from the Superior General to live his life as a Vincentian missionary living physically outside the Community. As he wrote in a letter in 1924, it had been 25 years, from the beginning of 1900, that he had lived outside the community, helped by an devoted elderly woman (called in the diary, 1904, Anna Bertolini) who acted as his secretary.⁴¹

In 1903 he won the competition and advanced as professor of the University of Turin and Director of the Observatory found on the terrace of the Palazzo Madama.⁴²

As he admitted himself in his Memoirs (p. 10), it was here that the most important period of his life as an astronomer developed.⁴³

He had a portable altar and a residence near the Palazzo Madama.⁴⁴ The Observatory was then moved, thanks to the work of Boccardi himself, to Pino Torinese, about 11 kilometers from Turin, and at 620 meters above sea level. The work of moving, begun in 1910, concluded in 1913. He received from the Ministry of Public Instruction more convenient lodging, in Via Po, 11.

His telescope and a radio station were furnished through a subscription sponsored by a newspaper in Turin and by another subscription taken up in his native town.⁴⁵

³⁸ Opportunities (twice he could have agreed to become a bishop) never got the better of him (letter of 5 July 1900).

³⁹ Cited in FODDAI, *art. cit.*, p. 641.

⁴⁰ Provincial Archives of Turin, item 4891.

⁴¹ Cf. letter to Verdier, dated 7 February 1924. In a letter (to Fiat ?) dated 18 December 1903, he described the situation, but emphasized the permission of the Superior General. The *Personnel* (the catalogue of the members of the Congregation) lists him, however, in 1916 as depending directly on the Superior General, and a *rattaché* to the house of Turin.

⁴² Diary, 21 July 1903: "Today I am leaving for Naples." Diary, 18 August 1903: "I have written for the death of my father." Diary, 28 October 1903: "I won the competition with 45 out of 50."

⁴³ Even if all his activity were to be forgotten, "the foundation of the new Observatory of Pino Torinese would be the greatest glory of Fr. Boccardi" (FRESA, p. 488).

⁴⁴ Letter to Fiat, 18 December 1903.

⁴⁵ Letter of 18 December 1903 to an unknown correspondent; letter from Catania, from the church of SS. Ritrovato, 17 December 1900 to an unknown correspondent.

He supervised the *Annuario Astronomico* begun in 1905. He founded, in 1906, the Italian Astronomical Society, along with its *Rivista di Astronomia*, but this had to be closed by the infiltration of individuals affiliated with freemasonry and materialistic ideas. He then founded a new society, *Urania*, with its publication, *Saggi di astronomia popolare*.

While in Turin, he continued to combine his priestly ministry with his scientific activity.

There was no lack of problems, especially from the Masonic atmosphere that was widespread and very influential in that period. "The Masonic sects hold everything in their hands."⁴⁶ He wrote: "I have had and I still have many enemies, freemasons and atheists, who, I am certain, will come together to ruin me after my death."⁴⁷ In fact, among all the titles and recognition that he received from abroad, none were received in Italy.⁴⁸

His most systematic bibliography is found in the appendix to Dr. Fresa's commemoration, and it lists 312 titles, generally concerning science. This list does not include non-scientific writings, which are more difficult to find, even if they are listed in private notes. For example, in the letter to Fr. Verdier of 11 March 1930, he mentions ten meditations done with the help of the Ladies of Lecce.⁴⁹ In a letter written 1 January 1931, he regrets the loss of 34 manuscript pages.

His last 14 years

We are already at the beginning of Fascism. As for many in Italy, enthusiasm and disappointment alternated also in the judgments of Fr. Boccardi. On Christmas 1924, while he was in France, he had written to Verdier: "I am waiting to see from a distance how the scaffolding of Mr. Mussolini, the head of the Italian brigands, is going to collapse. The debacle has already begun. We uncover crimes everywhere inspired by the Duce!" In another letter to the Superior General, 8 March 1928, by contrast, he wrote: "Fascism is a blessing for our country." He had not been able to refuse the honorary pass that had been granted him. In his memoirs, p. 3, he recounts how his university career had developed *before the sun of the Fascist regime had shone on our fatherland*. The judgment of Dr. Fresa, writing in 1937,⁵⁰ should be placed within this ambivalent context. In the midst

⁴⁶ Letters to Fr. Verdier, 19 September 1922 and 25 February 1924.

⁴⁷ Letter to Fr. Verdier, from Varazze 27 January 1929.

⁴⁸ Cf. ZEPPIERI, p. 42.

⁴⁹ *General Council Minutes*, vol. XI, 17 March 1930.

⁵⁰ *Annali della Missione* 84 (1937) 493.

of the Fascist period, he describes Boccardi as “a Fascist, and a great admirer of Mussolini, and I well recall with what enthusiasm he used to speak to me about the clever Ethiopian business.”

In 1923 he went into retirement and thus left both the observatory and the University of Turin.

Naturally, his reentry into Community was not smooth.⁵¹

On the other hand, his critical character, which had seen him as a declared polemicist against freemasons, Protestants and his scientific opponents, did not even spare his Community.⁵² Nevertheless, he always maintained, beyond critical observations, a constant bond of affection full of gratitude toward his Community.⁵³

He went to France and held scientific conferences and participated in congresses from 1924 to 1925.⁵⁴

Granted membership in the *Pontificia Accademia dei Lincei*, for his many publications, researches and calculations, he received the Valz Prize from the *Académie des Sciences* of Paris in November 1916, particularly for his research into the variations of the

⁵¹ Cf. his letter dated 17 May 1923 to the Superior General in ACGR. In the commemorative piece cited above, Fresa says that “someone” had suggested that Boccardi had thought about becoming a French citizen; in fact, someone had suggested this to him, and this was mentioned in a letter to Verdier, 17 May 1923: “It would be a proud gesture against the sects and the Italian rabble, who are doing whatever they can to exclude me from all the bodies of the wise.”

⁵² At Naples, in the provincial house, he remarked on an excessively monastic observance: “They are not Lazarists; they resemble monks.” Cf. letters to Verdier, September 1927 and 27 January 1929; he had already expressed the same opinion to the Visitor of Rome many years before, on 26 February 1901; copy in ACGR. But in a letter to Fiat, 11 December 1899, he complained also about the house of Montecitorio, which he had praised two years before, 8 March 1897. He wrote to Verdier, 1 January 1931, to criticize other confreres in the north.

⁵³ From Rome he described his apostolic work and his gratitude to the Community (to Fiat, letter of 21 December 1898). “I have nothing to reproach myself about being where I am with the permission and approval of so many ecclesiastical authorities. They well understand that the *spiritus ubi vult spirat* and that each one has to serve God in accord with the talents that he has given him.” Letter to Fr. Villette, 7 July 1916. “Doubtless, the honor that they pay me will not stop at my poor person, which will be forgotten tomorrow; but it will go to our Congregation, which enjoys so much sympathy, and to the Church, which has always favored the natural and exact sciences as the means of rising to invisible things” (to the Secretary General, Fr. Milon, 24 April 1913).

⁵⁴ Congress at Bordeaux: *Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission* 88 (1923) 262; Congress at Turin: *Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission* 92 (1927) 267-268. In 1925 he held a conference at the University of Lyons, at the Catholic faculties; *Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission* 90 (1925) 738-739, citing a report from *Nouvelles de Lyon*.

semilunar latitude. In March 1928, he was the only Italian scientist named a member of the *Washington Academy of Sciences*.

In 1933, while celebrating his golden jubilee, he sent to the Pope some publications, and received a letter from the Secretary of State, Pacelli (4 February 1933).⁵⁵

His relationships with his confreres in Naples always continued, as his correspondence with them shows.⁵⁶ But a return to Naples was not a happy one for him; after so many years spent in the north, he could not readapt to the climate and ambience, which was that of his origins.⁵⁷

In fact, he remained only briefly, and then moved definitively, after a few months in Varazze, to the Vincentian house in Savona.⁵⁸

As always, the writing of articles and scientific contributions would alternate, even in the last phase of his life, with his pastoral and missionary life. On 8 January 1932, he held at Savona a conference on “Saint Vincent de Paul and his institutions,” given to the Culture Club of the Women’s Catholic Associations.⁵⁹

In the last years of his life, he could hardly see. But prayer and a regular life lasted to the end. This would happen in the evening of 21 October 1936, when, after suffering a stroke, he breathed his last. The tombstone dedicated to him in the cemetery of Zinola (Savona) summarizes his life and work: “Giovanni Boccardi – Priest of the Mission – for 24 years professor of astronomy – at the Royal University of Turin – founder of the Observatory of Pino Torinese – member of the Accademia dei Lincei – of the Bureau des Longitudes – of the Washington Academy of Sciences – and of other numerous academies – Volta Prize 1926 – In his study of the stars – he saw more and more – the light of God – in which he lived and died – Castelmauro, 20 June 1859 – Savona 21 October 1936.”⁶⁰

(JOHN E. RYBOLT, C.M., translator)

⁵⁵ In the Provincial Archives of Turin, item 4897; *Annali della Missione* 40 (1933) 38.

⁵⁶ See, for example, the letter of Fr. S. Pane (25 October 1923) and of Fr. L. Grimaldi (7 November 1932) in the Provincial Archives of Turin, item 4891.

⁵⁷ The same Visitor of Naples, Fr. R. Rispoli, had advised him to remain in the same condition (letter from Boccardi to the Superior General, 7 February 1924); later he was told to return (Provincial Council of Naples, 26 July 1926).

⁵⁸ Letter of September 1927 to Verdier.

⁵⁹ Provincial Archives of Turin, item 4891: Collection of spiritual writings.

⁶⁰ From *Latimbro*, 29 January 1937, quoted in *Annali della Missione* 44 (1937) 48.

Fr. Julio Pineda Portillo, C.M. (1842-1900)

Founder of the Vincentian Missions in El Salvador

by José Francisco Ramos Cárcamo, C.M.

Visitor of Central America



“The Most Necessary Things Are Easily Overlooked”

Introduction

The Congregation of the Mission founded by St. Vincent de Paul, like other Congregations in the Church, has had the grace to have in its ranks sons to whom the words of Sirach 39:9 could be applied: **“Many will praise his intelligence and his fame will live for generations.”**

Fr. Julio, who was born in the smallest country of the Americas and became the first Salvadoran Vincentian, was the founder of the

Mission in El Salvador and of the Casa Misión de San Jacinto. He is one of the famous sons of Vincent de Paul who is also the glory of the Salvadoran Church.

Family, Birth and Vocation

Fr. Julio was born in the Canton Los Pozos in the jurisdiction of Arcatao on 20 December 1842 in the Department of Chalatenango in El Salvador. It was there, in the din of manufacturing indigo and the singing and dreaming of the Chalateco peasants, that the young Julio forged his life as a worker and a peasant in a way which much later would give him the strength to be a holy and zealous missionary. His parents, Don Antolín Pineda and Doña Teodora Portillo, instilled the spirit of the Gospel in him. The road to the priesthood and the missions opened up to him at a later date, thanks to the simple and generous faith which they practiced. He was baptized in the parish of San Bartolomé de Arcatao on 8 February 1843.

His earliest studies were in his hometown of Arcatao, where he grew up alternating studies with work and where he seems to have learned how to cultivate indigo. History has preserved a few stories of his youth, which reflect the character of the future founder of the Vincentian missions in El Salvador. It was repeatedly said that Julito ran away to the seminary when his mother sent him to bring lunch to his father and the other workers. Another story from his early days happened when he accompanied his mother to the river. While she was washing clothes, he went up on a large rock to preach to the people who were also washing clothes in the river, maintaining that when he grew up many people would come and make their confession to him. He carried on until his mother caught up with him and the other kids began making fun of him. The large rock remains at the intersection of the road and the river as a silent witness under the inclement sun. "The dreams of childhood... the truths of adulthood."

His father Don Antolín died of a heart attack in San Salvador during one of his regular visits to his son while he was a student in his more advanced courses.

The Socio-Political Situation of El Salvador

Conflicts between the liberals and the conservatives filled the first decades of the 20th century in the Central American isthmus. El Salvador was violently shaken by these conflicts. This profound crisis manifested itself in a vicious struggle for power. It had its antecedents in the first struggles for independence of 1821, which led to the birth of the five sister nations of Central America. It was a very bloody birth, the high price that had to be paid for life and

liberty. Economically indigo, which was at the heart of the economy of El Salvador dating back to the time of colonization, lost its value with the introduction of chemical based colors. At the same time, the Church did not have any room to act in any of these matters because of the dominance of the political powers.

The Ecclesiastical Situation

The Church during colonial times existed and grew under the tutelage of the Spanish Crown. At the time of emancipation, the five provinces formed one single ecclesiastical province with Guatemala as the episcopal see. Pope Gregory XVI with the Bull, *Universales Ecclesiae Procuratio*, erected the diocese of San Salvador on 28 September 1842, separating it from the Archdiocese of Guatemala. Its first bishop was Fr. Jorge Viteri y Ungo, who was installed on 27 January 1843. The young diocese had only 27 priests.

Lawyer and Teacher

In Fr. Julio's time it was common for students to graduate from the university in both civil and ecclesiastical law. Adorned as he was with all the gifts which every young person has, as well as a strong will and a fine intellect, as Fr. Nerio confirmed, it was easy to foresee a very bright future for him.

In the year 1862, after he had made his preparatory studies in philosophy, he dedicated his time to studying jurisprudence. He studied four years as a disciple of the eminent legal experts Dr. Pablo Buitrago and Dr. José Trigueros. He was able to hold his own in the class along side of Salvador Gallegos, Manuel de Jesús Miranda, Alberto Mena and Ricardo Moreira, who later became famous lawyers and continue to be held in honor in El Salvador. Faced with the sudden death of his father and so the loss of resources to continue his studies, from which he was gaining great benefit, he nevertheless met his difficult situation head on and succeeded in graduating as a Bachelor in Jurisprudence.

To continue his studies after the sudden death of his father, who supported him financially, the young student of law became a teacher in the Calvario district of the city.

He dedicated himself to teaching children and directing the school of the El Calvario neighborhood. His heart carried him along on this road enabling him to serve his equals by his word and example and his practice of virtue. People affectionately called him "The teacher of El Calvario," as if they had a presentiment that this modest educator was destined for an important work of the Lord.

When he was living and teaching in the El Calvario neighborhood, the local people elected him neighborhood treasurer in the

year 1868. This new experience of teaching and tangible confidence in the neighborhood, where he won the hearts of the lowly and the great alike, show us the human stature that marked the future founder of the mission of El Salvador and of the Casa Misión de San Jacinto, the neighborhood next to El Calvario. From a poor family, at the same time that he was a teacher in the school of El Calvario, he was able to assist at the classes of the seminary as an extern. It is an admirable example of answering a divine call.

Gospel Path

The record shows that Julio's path did not have too many twists, turns and surprises: *"He stopped pursuing a career as a lawyer in order to devote himself to his theological studies and enter into the clerical state. He was intelligent, had a good memory and applied himself diligently. We both assisted together at the theology courses in the National University and we were together in the seminary for perhaps a year"* (Testimony of Fr. Nerio).

Fr. Julio wrote in his first letter to the Bishop of San Salvador: *"After having thought about my vocation for many years, to which I was inclined from birth by divine providence and so without any merit on my part, in order to serve God better I have decided to embrace it by taking the cassock of a secular cleric. Therefore I ask your Excellency and humbly and devotedly beseech you to grant me the permission I seek subject to the steps your Excellency judges convenient. It is this grace that I seek with my solemn word, Most Illustrious and Reverend Monsignor,"* Julio Pineda.

A key to Julio's personality emerges from this carefully written letter, in which he expresses his desire to enter the clerical state: *"I have thought about this for many years."*

The Bishop responsible for the pastoral care of Arcatao, who showed himself solicitous in gathering information about the life and habits of Julio Pineda, replied: *"On the contrary, everyone, especially persons of sound judgment, know you to be a son from a legitimate marriage, and they have known that from your infancy your life has been adorned with virtues and good qualities which make you worthy to ascend to the priesthood."* The same ecclesiastical notary, Don Bartolomé Rodríguez, came to the point: *"He is a man with a good name."*

Fr. Julio entered by the front and only door, as a true pastor. He finished his years of theology. His professors and companions admired him. No one could say anything against him concerning the uprightness of his conduct; and the same was true for his virtues. He was in the prime of life. The year 1869 was decisive in his journey of faith and marked his life forever as a moment of human and

Christian maturity: *“After having thought about it for many years, here I am, send me!”*

Minor Orders were conferred on him in Guatemala, because the Bishop of San Salvador, Bishop Tomás Miguel Pineda Zaldaña, old and infirm, was overcome by the political and social situation of his people and by the State’s interference in the life of the Church. At the same time, the Bishop in Guatemala, Bishop Mariano Ortíz Urruela, was a well-known friend. So it was prudent to be ordained in Guatemala. What is certain is that a good number of those to be ordained went to the Tierra del Quetzal to receive sacred orders.

The order of deacon was conferred on 31 October 1869. A year passed between his diaconal and priestly ordinations. He returned again to Guatemala, where he received **the sacerdotal anointing on 17 December 1870 in the Capilla del Socorro of the Metropolitan Cathedral. He had with him the dimissorial letters issued by the Bishop of San Salvador.**

The First Fruits of His Priesthood

“The journey has begun for you” is a line from a popular song, and so it was for Fr. Julio and his ordination companion, Fr. Fernando Araujo. The journey had begun. They were already on the road to their native Chica. El Salvador was a “tierra de fuego” — a country on fire. The Church did not have the space and freedom she needed to accomplish her mission, because an anti-ecclesial, an anticlerical spirit reigned and filled the political air she breathed. The Bishop, Pineda Saldaña, was sick, tired, worn out by his struggles for liberation; the Coadjutor Bishop had resigned; and there were many other troubles. It was this totally asphyxiating climate that welcomed the new priests, who were aware of the situation, since it is where they grew up and were educated, and yet chose to be priests there. They believed they had nothing to fear, even if the waters were turbulent, because, seated in the stern of the boat, with a firm hand on the rudder, was an old and excellent Fisherman.

What was the new priest’s itinerary when he arrived in San Salvador? Considering that the whole of El Salvador was one diocese, that there was a shortage of clergy, that priests were continually expelled, that religious Congregations were forbidden to enter, we can suppose that a marathon of pastoral activities awaited him, the same situation in which the other priests found themselves. There the young apostle stood in the presence of his aged bishop, ready to carry out his wishes in order to alleviate his sufferings and lighten his pastoral burden. There the former student stood on the level of his former teachers to sow with them the seeds of the Good News of the Kingdom. There the priest stood, who much later would become the founder of the Vincentian Missions and of the Casa Misión de

El Salvador, missions which were to shine through seven decades as light for the hearts of the Salvadoran people.

His first pastoral responsibility was the Parish of San Miguel, a city in the east of the country. Later we find him in Aculhuaca substituting for Fr. Umaña, who was gravely ill. In November 1871, we find him becoming pastor, taking possession of the Vicariate of Sonsonate: "26 November 1871. On this date I turned over, by higher order, this parish, which was my responsibility, to the care of Pastor Don Julio Pineda."

Fr. Antonio Conte in his book, *Thirty Years in the Land of El Salvador*, says: "On returning to the capital, Fr. Pineda was sent to Sonsonate in the role of pastor of that extensive parish. He took possession on 26 November 1871. Tall of stature, with a robust complexion, still physically fit, his look was serious but his gaze was open and kind. He had the good fortune to be pleasing to Christians and Moors alike, because of his gentlemanliness in social contacts, his constant habit of visiting the sick, his faithfulness in the confessional and his holy independence in the pulpit. He remained five years as Pastor of Sonsonate, from 26 November 1871 until 28 April 1876."

There in Sonsonate the political sea was turbulent and the winds were in their faces. It was a locale for expulsions, but the son of the peasants of Arcatao was there. His hand was to the plough. Rising well before dawn, he was on the road before daybreak en route to distant fields. He was early each day into the vineyard. On the day following his arrival, he registered his first baptism. During the five years of his presence in Sonsonate, he was absent for several intervals. "In 1875 when the priests and sisters were expelled from Guatemala, some of them passed through El Salvador and preached missions, which later on were to have great importance for Frs. Vaysse and Gougnon. We ask ourselves: where was Fr. Pineda during these times of absence? Was it then that he began communicating with the Vincentian Fathers of Guatemala? Or, was it through these missions that Fr. Pineda came to know the missions of El Salvador? What remains beyond doubt is that Fr. Pineda, having suffered much from seeing the religious ignorance of his people, did introduce the missions among his people."

San Miguel Aculhuaca and later Sonsonate were the first fruits of Fr. Pineda's priestly ministry. It was enough time for him to take the measure of the religious ignorance of his people and the anti-ecclesial and antireligious bombardment to which they were subjected by the malice of the politicians in power; namely, the negation of eternal values, the expulsion of priests and bishops, the suspension of the Chair of Theology at the university, the laicization of education, the prohibition against founding new religious orders, etc. All this worried him and lay heavy on his heart. "Zeal for your

house will consume me” (Jn 2:17). How could his dream be reconciled with this oppressive situation, especially in the face of the new project in his life? What will his fellow priests say? How will the bishop react if he runs out on his nomination as Vicar and Administrator General of the diocese, a duty to which he had just taken an oath? An appointment and an oath would have bound someone else for sure, but ecclesiastical authority is not able, according to the law, to oppose his calling to a more perfect life, the bishop would say at a later time.

Meeting Vincent de Paul

At the point at which the city of Sonsonate believed it had a dynamic pastor in Fr. Pineda, he himself was glimpsing new and broader horizons and heard a voice which said to him: “Come up higher, son, always higher, because men of your temper never find a place to rest except on the heights. You are a son of the mountains.” The pastor of Sonsonate did not decide to wait or to ask. He immediately made contact with Fr. José Vaysse, the superior of the Vincentian Fathers in Guatemala, asking him to admit him into the Congregation of the Mission. In taking this decision he was urged on by his yearning for Christian perfection and by his ardent desire to give to his native country a group of missionaries residing in the capital, who could supply for the lack of secular priests and attend to the spiritual needs of so many sheep put on the wrong road by the dearth of shepherds.

His goal in entering the Congregation, according to Fr. Vaysse, was to give to his country, El Salvador, a missionary religious Congregation. “When the river sounds, stones move,” is a refrain of a prayer. The comings and goings of Fr. Pineda pushed the red alert button among the faithful of Sonsonate and they took action. Believing that the bishop was taking away their holy pastor, they were neither timid nor lazy in collecting signatures, and on 21 May 1876 they wrote a letter with 94 signatures to the Bishop of San Salvador, in which they expressed their progress in faith, the advances in the liturgy, and above all the virtues of their zealous apostle, “... *and for the exemplary conduct of this pastor which is rare among men and necessary in these present times.*”

The serene and penetrating gaze of Vincent de Paul turned out to be more powerful than the 94 signatures on the letter asking not to remove Fr. Pineda. The bishop also found himself disarmed in the face of the decision of his fellow worker. Two days later the bishop wrote to the people, and, among other things, he said: “*I thank you for your solicitude in pursuing the noble cause of seeking the return of Fr. Julio Pineda to Sonsonate. It is a demonstration of the appreciation your community has for him. I must say to you, nevertheless, that the*

one we are speaking about has the intention to pass over into the religious life and, according to the law, Church authorities cannot stop him from going to a more perfect state of life."

Sonsonate lost a priest and pastor of exemplary conduct, the Congregation of the Mission gained a holy and excellent missionary of the stature of the great missionaries, and El Salvador eventually saw the birth and growth of the daily work of the missionaries for more than ten decades, which has been the source of great spiritual benefit to it.

Guatemala was his new destination. Fr. Vaysse reported to the Superior General: "In 1876, Fr. Pineda, a Salvadoran priest, arrived." He arrived as a postulant to look over the terrain. He began indeed from the bottom. He made no display of his sacerdotal rank, on the contrary, he submitted to everyone as a neophyte, and when he had fulfilled all the requirements of the *Directory* and the expectations of the Directors of the Internal Seminary, he was received into the Internal Seminary 28 August 1876 by Fr. José Vaysse.

A year passed and the instructed novice had already reached his maturity in the Congregation. On 2 August 1877, the Local Council gave him permission to make his Good Purposes (proper to the Congregation), which were to precede his vows. So, "*On 24 June 1879 in the presence of Fr. Gustavo Foing, the delegate of the Superior General, and with a simple formula Fr. José Julio Pineda Portillo pronounced his holy vows.*"

The First Two Missions in El Salvador

The dreams of this zealous apostle of Sonsonate began to be realized: he was a missionary in El Salvador. Blessed perseverance! "**Fr. Gustavo Foing designated Fr. José Vaysse and Fr. Julio Pineda for the missions in El Salvador.**" Salvador now became the question. How can the missions begin if the winds are not favorable? Even the Superior General wrote at this time: "*The revolution which is convulsing the Central American States opposes and disturbs the works of the Church. The same is true in Colombia and Ecuador. I hope the disruption is passing. The anger of the parties will be disarmed by charity.*"

Neither timid nor lazy, they were up before the sun and on the road to El Salvador to put themselves at the service of their friend and companion José Luis Cárcamo Rodríguez, Bishop of El Salvador. The first mission began on 8 December 1879 with Fr. Vaysse in the center and west of the country in seven parishes along with their mission stations. It ended on 28 March 1880. The second began on Monday, 28 November 1880 and lasted until 27 July 1881. It took in 12 communities. It is good to stress that many

diocesan priests joined them in these large missionary undertakings. Among them was Fr. Ramón Peña de Opico, who later was a missionary in Colombia and died on the missions in Peru, and Fr. Guillermo Rojas, missionary in Cauca, who was the founder of the mission of Nátaga and then the first Archbishop of Panama. A third mission was held in San Jacinto during Lent 1899.

All these apostolic travels foreshadowed for Fr. Pineda a bright future. However, though the wind was at his back, the God of Vincent de Paul let him hear his voice: your undertakings are not my undertakings. So, one day the ship and its captain were shaken from their sleep and had to leave for other seas. The wind blows where it wills! Africa, Costa Rica, Cauca were waiting for him, the Superior General would tell him, and he sent him there for 14 long years. When he returned he was a real veteran in the work of the missions. The Congregation is missionary and the mission *ad gentes* was calling missionaries of great stature.

Africa was waiting for him. The Superior General called him, so on Saturday, 31 March 1882 at 10 o'clock in the morning in the port of La Libertad in El Salvador he boarded ship. All this was in spite of his great devotion to the missions of El Salvador: *"Ah, my beloved missions! My poor Fatherland, which is now passing through such a dangerous time! How many well-disposed souls will be lost for lack of priests? Ah, if there were a group of missionaries some of whom could take care of the major seminary while others went around to the parishes doing missions and still others who would be occupied in the primary schools in order to preserve the people from heresy and impiety."*

When he arrived at the Motherhouse, Fr. Antoine Fiat, the Superior General, sent him to Algiers, Africa, so that there he might work with great care for the glory of God and the salvation of the Christians and Moslems, while his projects were coming to full maturity. *"Go without care to Africa, to Algiers, and sooner or later you will return to your beloved El Salvador."* Later the Superior General called him: *"Now then, my dear brother, I have thought about you for the missions in Colombia. I have been receiving letters non-stop from those distant lands asking me for reinforcements. Go, IN NOMINE DOMINI, and there you will be just two steps from your native land. I know that when the hour comes to realize your cherished dream, Providence will take care of everything. From Colombia to El Salvador is a very short distance."*

An order of this nature would have been very upsetting to anyone who did not have the spirit of faith and obedience that Fr. Julio had. We have the circular letter of Fr. Fiat: *"Paris, 1 January 1884. Today the following confreres were sent to the foreign missions of Central America: Augusto Birot, Julio Pineda, Constante Veltin, and*

Brother Juan Bautista Concedan.” He was delayed two years in Costa Rica, because of the anticlerical climate in the mission countries, even though Costa Rica was no exception and had a policy of expelling priests. Fr. Birot went back to Colombia after having been brutally expelled and harassed by the despotism of César Conto in 1876. Fr. Pineda reached Colombia on 3 March 1886 and got to Popayán on 8 March, where he stayed until 1892. He had great pastoral success preaching missions along the Pacific coast, in the vast reaches of Quindío, and south of Tolima. He also devoted himself to the formation of the clergy in the seminaries and was an excellent spiritual director.

“His preaching, simple like every son of Vincent de Paul, came from his heart with such unction that it drew many tears from his listeners. His austere and penitent life was itself a sermon which went to the heart. The people looked on him as a saint. He achieved conversions that were considered miraculous. He was always like a torch fired by the heavenly glory of God and the salvation of souls.” This brief recollection of this son of St. Vincent, I believe says all that needs to be said about the ten years he was a missionary in Colombia.

Straight to the End

The short 16 years from the beginning of his missionary work in El Salvador gave Fr. Pineda a truly apostolic bearing. He was the worker in the fields with the plow in this hand working from sunup to sundown in Africa, Costa Rica, El Cauca, Tolima, which became for him his school of specialization. *“February 1896. In the first days of this month I left Tunja in Colombia. My liver bothered me so much that I believed I could not make the journey to Guatemala, but I had scarcely begun the journey when I began to feel better. I had the intention to obey God in my superiors, and so he helped me. God brought me to found the missions of El Salvador and I did not understand his divine designs.”* How could there not be joy among his old companions and formators in that beloved house in Guatemala? How many questions would there be about his mission in a foreign land?

Foundation of the Mission House of San Jacinto

Fr. Julio had been contemplating missions in El Salvador for a long time. It was in the end worth waiting for. *“November 1898. The road to El Salvador. On 29 October Fr. Hetuin and I left Guatemala for El Salvador to begin the foundation. We arrived here on 5 November at 8 o’clock in the evening. (Later he said): We can say that it was on 8 November of the past year that the Mission House of El Salvador was*

begun." The birth of the Congregation in El Salvador is a very important date for the Congregation in the Province of Central America. A block from the Church of San Jacinto, along the street which leads to La Vega, they bought a beautiful two and a half manzana plot (= 4375 acres).

"December 1899 San Salvador. Today, 31 December finishes the year 1899. This year has been very important for me, because of the distress I experienced in establishing the mission. It was on 1 December that we first used the Mission House in San Jacinto." The dreams of Fr. Pineda were already realized and one could speak of a mission house in El Salvador. *"Twenty years ago I cried out before God asking him for this grace. I could not be detached from seeing so many souls in my native country being lost without caring about them"* (Letter to the Superior General). Fr. Hetuin wrote to the Superior General: *"Fr. Pineda triumphed in the end."*

The Fourth and Final Mission

Once installed in the new mission house of San Jacinto with all the details taken care of, the three missionaries prepared themselves for the new missionary era. It is the year 1900 toward the end of February. Fr. Pineda judged the hour had come for answering the desire of the villages that had in cries called for the Holy Mission. Among them was his own town and parish of Arcatao. He was moved by love of his own, as well as by the missionary fire in his heart, to give them preference. So on 26 February they set out for Arcatao. This mission lasted until 24 May. It included missions to Arcatao's four outstations.

The results were very reassuring. El Salvador is a mission land of the sons of St. Vincent de Paul. But it happened that, when joy was at its peak, sadness overcame their joy. We know it is true that extremes touch each other, and the sage says: "The end of joy is sorrow." Scarcely had they returned to the capital then Fr. Pineda felt weak, stretched by his missionary works, hurt by contradictions. Then abruptly, having a cerebral hemorrhage on 29 June 1900, at the age of 58, with 21 years of vocation in the Congregation of the Mission, he came to the end of his journey. His final words were a résumé of all that he had preached and lived in his life as a missionary: *"The most necessary things are most easily overlooked."*

Those who knew Fr. Julio knew a true apostle who incarnated the Gospel in his life. The local press the following day wrote: ***"We acknowledge publicly the mercies of this impeccable gentleman."*** The clergy of El Salvador in their bulletin expressed themselves in this way: *"We certainly do not have to ask for spiritual blessings from Fr. Julio Pineda, our Vincentian countryman, who, with the charity of St. Vincent de Paul, so generously distributed them more than others in*

his lifetime. He remains interested in our spiritual welfare. Fr. Pineda, with his solid words, knew how to enkindle the sacred fire in the hearts of the priests.” The clergy of Colombia said: “He was a consummate teacher, as a director of consciences and a preacher of retreats to the clergy. No one could surpass him, I believe, as a preacher of spiritual retreats to the clergy. All the priests with whom we have spoken have assured us that they always carried very moving and helpful impressions from the retreats. They praised to the sky his retreats to the clergy.”

Fr. Pineda, esteemed and loved, full of health and life, seemed to have been born in Colombia and would also die in Colombia. His apostolic zeal guaranteed for him the affection of all who knew him. The Bishop of Tolima expressed these same sentiments: *“The people had great affection for the Vincentian missionaries from the moment they came to appreciate the missionary works of Fr. Julio Pineda, whom they considered a saint and an apostle. All the parishes wanted Fr. Julio Pineda to preach the mission for them. All the people praised him.”*

**Rest in peace, O self-sacrificing
apostle of Jesus Christ,
who will not abandon the field opened
in the harvest of the Father.
Your brothers and successors
will be responsible for watering
it with their sweat and carrying
the good odor of the name
of José Julio Pineda Portillo
to the borders of your beloved country.**

(HUGH F. O'DONNELL, C.M., translator)

Fr. Ildefonso Moral, C.M. (1835-1907)

Apostle of the Laity and of Social Action

by Juan José Muñoz Martínez, C.M.

Province of Mexico

First Steps of a Traveling Missionary: Spain - the Philippines - Spain

As Fr. Moral said in Mexico: *I am from Old Castilla*, from Burgos. He was born on 21 January 1835 in Salazar de Anaya. There he learned to read and write and at the age of 12 entered the diocesan seminary of Burgos where he undertook the greater part of his studies. The last part of his theological career was completed in Toledo where, together with other seminarians, he was considered part of the family of Fray Cirilo Alameda y Brea, the Archbishop of Burgos, who was elevated to cardinal and transferred to the diocese of Toledo. He completed his studies at the age of 23, but before ordination decided to enter the Congregation of the Mission and was received on 15 July 1858. Perhaps this decision was made in order to follow the path of other companions and priests from



Burgos, who had entered the Congregation before him. He completed the Internal Seminary and returned to Toledo where he was ordained on 16 March 1861 by his former benefactor. He was 26 years old.¹

¹ BRUNO ÁLVAREZ, C.M., *Noticia biográfica del R.P. Ildefonso Moral, escrita por un misionero*, Printing Workshops of P. Rodríguez, Puerta Falsa de Santo

He began to teach philosophy to the students at the Central House in Madrid. Immediately his superiors considered him for the position of director of the Internal Seminary and he was transferred to Paris to learn the traditions and the spirit of the Motherhouse. This rapid ascent is not surprising. His few, but well-informed, biographers coincide in their affirmation of the fact that he inherited a solid piety from his family. This should not surprise us for even now we see Pope John Paul II and Benedict XVI honor saints and blessed who come from rural, simple, frugal and hardworking family roots. It seems that Ildefonso had a certain natural predisposition to piety and because of this was also able to influence others in the development of a like piety. His theological formation was solid and we see this reflected in later years in his conferences to the laity. He read the works of the Fathers of the Church, especially St. Augustine whom he cited frequently. He also read the classical spiritual Spanish writings, especially those of St. Theresa of Avila, whom he cited in his conferences.

On 22 July 1862, an expedition of Spanish Sisters set ashore in Manila. They were accompanied by two great missionaries: Fr. Ildefonso Moral and Fr. Gregorio Velasco. There in the Philippines, in addition to his primary ministry of supporting Fr. Velasco in his work with the Daughters of Charity, he was very involved in seminary formation and ministry with the laity, especially with the members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society. In the seminaries he was either rector or spiritual director, but always a professor. He served in the seminaries of Manila, Jaro, Nueva Segovia and again, in 1877, in Manila. After 23 years of fruitful missionary ministry, it became evident that his health had diminished and so, in 1885, his superiors asked him to return to Madrid. For the next five years he assisted the Provincial, Fr. Máller, was director of students and dedicated himself totally to hearing confessions and guiding countless lay people. In 1890 he was named superior of the house of Andujar. It is probable that neither his superiors nor he himself suspected that this was setting him on a course toward the Port of Cádiz, on a course that would lead him to an ocean voyage, except this time it would involve crossing the Atlantic Ocean and his destiny was America.

Domingo, Mexico, 1908, 23 pp. Cf. *Anales*, 1910, pp. 113-135; *Historia de los PP. Paules y las Hijas de la Caridad en las Islas Filipinas*, 1913, VI-X; VICENTE DE DIOS, C.M., *Historia de la Familia Vicentina en México: 1844-1994*, Vol. II, chapter 35, "Un Visitador," pp. 51-61.

Named Visitor of the Mexican Province

This destiny was very fortuitous but at the same time most providential. From its beginning (1847), the Mexican Province had sought personnel among native vocations and from volunteers from Catalonia. In 1861 this situation changed with the triumph of the Liberals who dispossessed the missionaries from the Church and the Central House of the Holy Spirit — buildings that were located in the heart of the city. Fr. Antonio Learreta wrote about this situation in a report to his superiors: *The Holy Spirit flew off and we remained on the moon of Valencia*. This Calvary of *walking on the moon of Valencia* would last for 30 years, during which time the missionaries experienced plunder (as already mentioned), expulsion of the Daughters of Charity (1875), weariness, discomfort, discouragement, disunity, polemics, and the dispersion of the missionaries. Despite all these difficulties the problem that was strangling the province was the lack of personnel. No channels existed to bring in personnel from other provinces, nor were there ways to compensate for this by improvising with native vocations. Repeated petitions for assistance were directed to the Superior General, Fr. Fiat, who turned toward the flourishing Province of Prussia, which had taken refuge in Belgium. As a result of a petition that was made to Fr. Vogels, the Visitor, Fr. Godofredo Heck was named Visitor of Mexico (30 January 1890 - 11 July 1891). The same year that he was named Visitor, Fr. Heck made a quick trip to Belgium and then returned with six missionaries: one priest, one ordinand, two students, and two brothers. Perhaps because of a mistake, this first effort to aid the Mexican Province was not successful. The German missionaries disembarked at the Port of Progreso and remained in Yucatan, a place with a very warm climate but also, at the time, a very unhealthy place. Fr. Schilhab, recently ordained in Mérida, died on 11 December 1890 as a result of yellow fever. The group became discouraged and returned to Europe. Fr. Heck remained in Mexico, but was unable to change the situation.

Finally, Providence opened a path during the 1890 General Assembly in Paris. The delegates from Mexico, Frs. Juan Huerta and Miguel Rubí were insistent before the Superior General about the serious situation of their province and they asked him to intercede on their behalf with Fr. Máller, so that the Province of Spain would provide personnel to their province. The Superior General had no other path but to show that he was convinced and thus an agreement was reached with Spain, which would send personnel to the Province of Mexico. The wheels were placed in motion. At the beginning or middle of 1891, Fr. Ildefonso, named Visitor of Mexico and Fr. Heladio Arnáiz, the Vice-Visitor of Madrid, traveled to Paris to arrive at an agreement for this new cooperation with Mexico. There

are various drafts of this agreement that established the following points: Mexico preserved its character as an autonomous canonical province; it would be affiliated with Spain only in regard to the sending of personnel; Mexico promised to pay an unspecified amount of money for each group of missionaries that was received.² By necessity the Province of Mexico changed course and set out in a new direction. We can now read about this in a recent publication: *“Even though it ended with weakness, yet an unquestionable glorious phase of the Mexican Province had been completed. From the beginning, and against all odds, the province had set out on a decisive course and had created and maintained this course of action in all the works of the Congregation. There was discouragement because they had to have it and it was paid for with inevitable consequences.”* As a complement the following is cited: *“From the time of the birth of the gospel we are accustomed to those situations that are most difficult to understand, situations of darkness and agony that occur on the path that we have set out for ourselves. But the light always returns. Thanks to God a small but great man named Ildefonso Moral came to bring this new light and this new flame and he was able to rely on human help,”* that is, missionaries who came from Spain.³

Encounter with Mexico

In October Fr. Ildefonso and Fr. Arnáiz set forth from the Port of Cádiz and entered Veracruz in the beginning of November. During the night of 6 November, they took the Veracruz-Mexico train and arrived in Mexico City the following day at seven o'clock in the morning. Some missionaries received them by boarding the train two or three stops before their arrival in Mexico City, while another group welcomed them at the Nonoalco Station. In Mexico City they traveled to the Central House in carriage and then to the church of San Lorenzo where Fr. Ildefonso celebrated the Mass at eight o'clock. The church was filled with almost a thousand people who were members of the Association of the Daughters of Mary, the Confraternity of the Ladies of Charity, the St. Vincent de Paul Society and other lay persons who were associated with the missionaries. The reception of communion was prolonged and there were not enough hosts. Two hundred-fifty persons had to wait for a second Mass that was solemnly celebrated by Fr. Arnáiz at nine-thirty in the morning. Fr Moral did not hide the immense joy that he experienced

² Concerning the critical situation and the negotiations see, VICENTE DE DIOS, C.M., *op. cit.*, I, chapter 11, “Seis Visitadores (1845-1891),” pp. 189-218; I, chapter 12, “Cuatro criticas y cuatro comisarios,” pp. 219-232.

³ VICENTE DE DIOS, C.M., *op. cit.*, I, p. 218.

as a result of meeting such a large group of lay people. Immediately he asked for detailed information about these Associations and these reports led him to direct these groups with joy and tireless zeal.

The Vincentian Lay Groups in Mexico

The Vincentian lay groups in Mexico have a very fortunate history. They were well received by the Mexican laity, by the archbishops and bishops and by the diocesan and religious clergy. Furthermore, very soon they became required in the parishes and, despite continual revolutionary threats during the 19th century, their steady growth surprised even the missionaries. Without a doubt it can be said that the missionaries were the founders of the Vincentian Associations but their propagators, and later their diocesan and local directors, were in large number members of the diocesan and religious clergy. *Las Memorias Anuales* of the Confraternities provide testimony to this fact by expressing over and over again their gratitude to the archbishops, bishops, pastors and chaplains spread throughout the Republic.

A group of Catholics led by Dr. Andrade (1809-1848) established the Confraternities of Blessed Ozanam between 15-22 December 1844 (a time when the missionaries and the Daughters of Charity had recently arrived). Even though this Association never attained more than 2,000 members, they struggled greatly to recruit members for their cause. Their work was frequently recognized and applauded by Fr. Ildefonso. In 1857 their quarterly publication, *Boletín*, appeared.

On 2 February 1862, Fr. Antonio Learreta and the Daughters of Charity established the first Association of the Daughters of Mary in El Colegio San Vicente in the city of Mexico. Soon this Association was spread to all the houses and works of the Daughters throughout the Republic. Due to the expulsion of the Daughters in 1875, the Holy See issued a rescript in 1877 that made the Visitors of the missionaries the canonical directors of the Association with the right to direct the existing groups and establish new groups with the consent of the bishops. The establishment of this Association in the parishes was the beginning of its great expansion and of its wonderful and well-merited history that has been written into the story of the Church of Mexico because of their witness of Christian life and their apostolate of catechesis and charity. In 1852 the first edition of their monthly bulletin appeared.

In February 1848, Fr. Juan Figuerola established the first Confraternity of the Ladies of Charity in Puebla. Later other missionaries did the same in their houses and on the missions. On 2 August 1863, the missionary, Fr. Francisco Muñoz de la Cruz, established the Confraternity in El Sagrario Metropolitano in the city of Mexico. This initiative was so successful among the pastors of the

city that in less than a year the Association was established in at least ten of the 12 city parishes. The Association in Toluca was extended to the neighboring towns. From the center of the country it began to spread out to Guadalajara and in 1864 was established in San Luis Potosí. This surprise enlivened the zeal of the missionaries and in the middle of 1868 a Central Council was established with a corresponding secretary. In July of the same year, the first General Assembly was convoked and the first number of *La Memoria* was printed and sent to the Associations, the houses of the Daughters of Charity and other strategic States of the Republic. The following year the Rule was published and this act created a foundation for the establishment of a National Association that experienced great expansion despite the obstacles of war. The national character of the Association would have another very important consequence for the theme that is dealt with in this article: the importance of the Visitors as Directors General of the Associations.⁴

The Lay Apostolate of Fr. Ildelfonso

His pastoral ministry with the laity was centered on the following points: presiding at their general assemblies, giving doctrinal conferences and providing them with encouragement in their apostolate. He also gave their monthly or annual retreats and maintained continual communication with them through circular letters which were published in their bulletins. These letters gave them practical guidance in the areas of creating diocesan centers and the participation of the Marian youth in the works of the Confraternities of Charity. He also focused on frequent visits to the various Associations in order to draw closer to them and encourage them. He would visit the archbishops and bishops who gave much support to the Vincentian lay groups. We have just briefly outlined some of the salient characteristics of his immense pastoral ministry.

The Daughters of Mary: A Greeting of Peace

Perhaps the most beloved group and that which deserved all of his care was that of the Marian Youth. Fr. Moral was greatly concerned about the young people because, in his perception, they had to endure a secular education and environment that was promoted by the government through the reform laws which outlawed the Church and her institutions.

⁴ Concerning the history of the lay Vincentians in Mexico see VICENTE DE DIOS, *op. cit.*, I, chapters 29, 30 and 31; II, chapters 64, 65 and 66.

His first contact and presentation to this group was made through means of a circular letter dated 23 January 1892.⁵ This was directed to the Association that, according to the catalogue of 1891, had 12,500 members — the majority of whom were young people. Notice the greeting in his letter: *I greet you with the greeting of Jesus Christ: peace be with you!* (Lk 24:36; Jn 20:19-21). Objectively speaking this greeting could be seen as communicating a message to the country where the *Porfirina Peace* concealed a continual hidden violence. This greeting could also be seen as a sign for the missionaries who had spent many years in anguish and worry. This message reflected the personality of the new Visitor and Director General of the Mexican Vincentian Family. Fr. Moral was a missionary with a deep interior life and as a result he was a person of interior and exterior peace. Therefore he goes deeper into the theme: *“According to St. Augustine, this peace of Jesus Christ perfects every action and all the intentions of those who possess this peace. This peace fills our hearts with joy and makes our hearts overflow with jubilation and holy joy because it illuminates the understanding with supernatural light which enables us to see all things in God. Only in God can our hearts find true happiness. This interior vision confirms the soul and the mind so that the individual seeks only God. This light of God’s grace, which gives supernatural life to our souls, unites us with his divine majesty and inclines the soul to love all things that the Lord loves and to abhor all that the Lord detests. The soul that is freed from a disordered love of self and all other creatures and the soul that is enriched with divine love is able to exclaim with the sacred joy of St. Theresa: ‘The one who loves God lacks nothing; God alone is sufficient.’ He then refers once again to St. Augustine: ‘Everyone desires peace but not everyone desires that which is necessary to acquire this peace.’”*⁶

The Marian Youth Group Supports the Confraternities of Charity

Aware of the numerous young people, who were active in the Association, and desiring to free them from the danger of a complacent and narcissistic piety, he wrote another circular letter to the Association and recommended that these young people, when they reached the age of 20 (without abandoning their membership in the Marian Youth Group) should join the Confraternity of Charity, so

⁵ *Boletín de las Hijas de María Immaculada (Bol. HMI)*, 1892, pp. 21-25.

⁶ Other themes that he touched on: “La sencillez,” Assembly of 31 May 1896, *Bol. HMI*, 1896, pp. 145-154; “La verdadera devoción,” Receiving the members of the Daughters of Mary in San Lorenzo, 8 December 1896, *Bol. HMI*, 1896, pp. 6-13; “La perfección cristiana,” General Assembly in San Lorenzo, 31 May 1898, *Bol. HMI*, 1898, pp. 204-212.

that in this way you might show, in a practical way, your love to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Blessed Virgin... serving them, as much as possible in the person of the poor, especially those who are ill. He motivated them by citing Mt 25:36-40. He also made this same recommendation to the Daughters of Mary who were married.⁷ At the beginning of the 20th century this Association had 445 centers and 32,233 members — this number included aspirants.⁸

Encounter with the Confraternities of Charity

We have knowledge about these encounters because of *Las Memorias* of the Confraternities that have preserved nine conferences that were given by Fr. Moral. The first conference was given during the Assembly of 24 January 1893.⁹ The ninth conference was given during the Assembly of 31 December 1906 and then, because he was now seriously ill, this was the last Assembly at which he was able to be present.¹⁰ Of these nine conferences, two were dedicated to the life of St. Vincent, one to the origins of the Vincentian Confraternities, another to the origin and development of the Association in Mexico. In his conference of 1904, he spoke explicitly about the spirit of the Confraternities and his final intervention of 1906 was dedicated to the theme of the supremacy of charity and followed closely the text of the 13th chapter of St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians. The remainder of his conferences were variations on the messages contained in his conferences of 1904 and 1906. There was one constant in the conferences that Fr. Moral gave to the three Vincentian groups: God is the foundation and this God is essentially participative and communicative charity. Without distinction, Fr. Moral promoted the laity and the various pious associations, e.g., the Confraternity of the Holy Agony, the Archdiocesan Confraternity of the Sacred Heart, etc., because he saw that it was important for people to draw near to God and to live in God's grace. When speaking to the Vincentian Associations he was insistent on the fact that love is indivisible: those who love God must also love the neighbor and vice versa. He warned them of the danger of falling into the temptation of a piety that offered them solace through their participation in long ceremonies in which they were able to listen to soothing melodies and contemplate the Baroque adornments of the churches.

⁷ Circular Letter of 1 June 1892, *Bol. HMI*, 1892, pp. 101-108.

⁸ *Bol. HMI*, "Algo sobre las Hijas de María en la República Mexicana," 1902, p. 150.

⁹ *Memoria de las Cofradías de Caridad de SVP en México (Mem. 1892)*, pp. 3-24.

¹⁰ *Mem. 1906*, pp. III-XII.

When he first spoke to the Association there were 16,407 members divided into 38 Central Councils — 17 were diocesan groups (at the time there were 20 dioceses in Mexico)¹¹ and the remainder were autonomous councils with no diocesan character. In 1906, the last year in which he participated in their Assembly, their membership had risen to 39,912¹² with a presence in eight archdioceses and 20 dioceses, that is, they were present in every ecclesiastical jurisdiction except that of the Apostolic Vicariate of Baja California. There were also two autonomous central councils, one in Toluca and the other in Guanajuato.¹³

Encounter with the St. Vincent de Paul Society

We find the first mention of his encounters with the St. Vincent de Paul Society referred to in the Assembly of Sunday, 19 July 1896. *“From the time that I began to dwell in this land of Mexico, this is the sixth time that you have called me to preside at your assembly. Your practice of charity is very obvious and the proof of this is seen in a fact about which I want to remind you. Recently the Ladies of Charity, who cultivate this virtue of charity under the patronage of St. Vincent de Paul published their annual bulletin. We read there that half of the monies collected by these associations come from Mexico. This is a powerful reality especially when we consider the fact that the circumstances and the present situation of the country are not very prosperous.”*¹⁴

In the first assembly of 1898 which was held on the first Sunday of Lent, Fr. Ildefonso expressed once again his joy at being able to participate in these meetings: *“Mr. President, I have the great honor and joy to find myself with you and among the various people with whom I have lived in five parts of the world. I have never seen such faith and charity as I have found in this country. It is impossible then that God would abandon this nation that is so charitable. To see the works that are undertaken by the Conferences, over which you so worthily preside and to see the work that is done by the Ladies of Charity, one can only exclaim: ‘Digitus Dei est hic!’ (The hand of God is seen here!).”*¹⁵

¹¹ *Mem.* 1892, “Estados Generales, 1890-1891; 1891-1892.”

¹² *Mem.* 1906, p. XI.

¹³ *Mem.* 1906, “Estado General de la Asociación 1905-1906”; cf. GUTIÉRREZ CASILLAS, S.J., *Historia de la Iglesia en México*, Ed. Porrúa, Mexico, 1974, pp. 336-341.

¹⁴ *Boletín de la Sociedad de SVP en México (Bol. SSVp)*, February 1897, pp. 51-52.

¹⁵ *Bol. SSVp*, April 1898, p. 101.

Reflecting on the gospel passage that refers to the temptations of Jesus, he explained the spiritual application of this passage, but also insisted on this social issue: *the greatest temptation that we experience today is that of secular schools.*¹⁶ Then he expressed his joy at seeing the presence of young men in the Assembly *who are engaged in learning charity from their elders.* He recommended that *they become concerned with founding educational institutions, learning from the work of nature, which continually reproduces and renews itself by the seed that is planted and cultivated with painstaking care.*¹⁷ Insisting on this theme he later stated: education and civil and religious schools *are in my judgment one of the most important realities because the Christian future of nations depends on the religious instruction of people from their infancy.*¹⁸ He concluded by saying: *This is a great work — a work par excellence.*¹⁹

In the Assembly that was held on 25 July 1897, he dealt with the theme of charity. He said that charity is freedom, soul, life, union, and grace. This was affirmed by St. Augustine, who also referred to charity as universal and undivided love. Charity is the source of holiness and gives meaning and wholeness to the apostolate. Charity is the source of happiness so that *as long as we dwell with God, God also dwells with us.*²⁰ God watches over his followers in such a way that the soul that is united to God is also watched over and cared for by God. God directs the events but the soul is not aware of this intervention and so attributes it to coincidence. But for Christians there is no such thing as coincidence. St. Teresa of Avila said: *Let nothing disturb you, let nothing frighten you; all things are passing; God never changes. Patient endurance attains all things. Whom God possesses nothing is wanting. Alone God suffices.*²¹ Everything leads to love. *Let us not forget that all the virtues lead to charity and if this does not happen then there is only the appearance of virtue. As the waters of the river flow out into the sea, so too, all the virtues lead to charity. St. Paul says that if we have faith but are lacking in charity then we are nothing.*²² Fr. Moral spoke of committed people in the apostolate who nevertheless lived in a vacuum and sadness. He said that they are *souls who are attached to exterior matters; they have no depth and for this reason they do not take advantage of these charitable acts. Let them examine themselves and purify themselves of their faults so that their*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

¹⁸ *Bol. SSVP*, 3 ép., April 1898, p. 107.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

²⁰ *Bol. SSVP*, September 1897, p. 272.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 273.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 277; cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Deus Caritas est*, Nos. 16-18.

*work of mercy might be fruitful. To state this positively: so that charity might be true charity it is necessary that the soul be in a state of friendship and grace with God.*²³ This is the road of faith and happiness and for this reason he said: *live a life of faith and the works you undertake will not be burdensome but very easy to carry out.*²⁴ For Vincentians there is a direct relationship between worship and service. *"I know of no other association like yours that is more appropriate to work out one's salvation. In other associations, the members dedicate themselves to the practice of excellent works, such as participating in great Church functions, truly something very meritorious, but this entails little work for those persons. As a result such works are not as advantageous as the works of those persons who are inspired by charity to go, not to entertain themselves with the sounds of harmonious music, not to see the churches beautifully adorned... rather you go tirelessly and listen to the needs of your suffering sisters and brothers. You go to see unclean insects, inseparable from misery, and, lastly, to place your intellectual faculties to procure, through all the means that charity inspires, the salvation of the persons assisted."*²⁵ He spoke to them about the virulence of the liberal press and the influence of the secular and prep schools and the young people who lose their faith. He asked them for their assistance in establishing an educational center that would provide people with good ideas and true knowledge.²⁶

Retreat Center and Shelter for the Poor Young Girls

During the decade of the 1890s a new class of wealthy persons immigrated to the south of the city where exclusive neighborhoods were built, for example, Juárez, Roma, Las Lomas de Chapultepec, etc. The poor lived in the northeast, in the area that today is known as Colonia Tepito. Artisans, workers, traveling salesmen, and small businessmen lived there. The unemployed and thieves sought shelter there. Vincentian literature and other sources of the time refer to this region as a zone of moral, educational and material misery. These sources describe the fear that was created there and the rejection that was experienced by those who walked the streets barefooted, ragged and filled with parasites.²⁷

²³ Assembly of the First Sunday of Lent, 27 February 1898, *Bol. SSVP*, April 1898, p. 106.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

²⁵ *Bol. SSVP*, September 1898, p. 260.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 161 (261).

²⁷ JONHATAN KANDELL, *La capital. La historia de la ciudad de México*, Javier Vergara Editor, S.A., Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1990, chapter 14, "El amo de México," pp. 366-376.

Between 1897-1898, Fr. Moral obtained 4200 square meters of land in this zone of misery and marginalization. This land was acquired at the cost of 4,000 pesos. According to the project that he had in mind, the land would be divided in the following way: 1200 square meters for the retreat house, 2700 for the shelter for the girls and 630 for the establishment of a public chapel that would be built in the center of the project. On 23 January 1899, two first stones were put in place and the construction of the two buildings was begun at the same time. A five-cent coin was buried beneath each of these stones — a symbol of the money that was on hand at the beginning of this ambitious project. From the beginning, the number of workers increased and decreased according to the resources that were at hand — but the work never stopped. In four years and nine months a two-story building (70 rooms) was completed. For some time the shelter remained with one floor.

On 18 November 1903, Archbishop Próspero María Alarcón blessed both buildings in the presence of Fr. Moral, the Daughters of Mary, and a select group of benefactors and friends. The Director General did not want noise or a large gathering of invited guests. From 16-25 December, Fr. Ildefonso directed the first retreat that was given to the members of the Central Council and the dignitaries of the groups of the Association of the Daughters of Mary, who came from the city and the surrounding area. As time progressed this same service was later provided to the clergy, seminarians and lay people.²⁸

On 8 September 1904, Fr. Moral blessed the image of Mary Immaculate and this image was placed in the retreat house.²⁹ It is possible that this was the last public act of his involvement with this project that was not yet completed. Contributions continued to enable him to complete this project and he dreamed of other projects: that the retreats would be given to the laity at no cost to them (except for some special cases); the acquisition of an adjoining piece of land where all the works of the Congregation could be located; and thus this center would become a permanent mission. This tireless, soft-spoken missionary, this missionary, who when dealing with the cause of the poor never stopped dreaming, began to become ill around the end of 1905 or the beginning of 1906. Finally, he found it impossible to leave his room because his legs could not sustain him any longer. He died on 13 November 1907.

²⁸ *Bol. HMI*, 1904, V.C.I., "Historia de la Casa de Ejercicios," pp. 169-174 and 202-204; *Bol. HMI*, 1905, p. 360; VICENTE DE DIOS, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, chapter 66, pp. 672-674 and 674-675.

²⁹ *Bol. HMI*, 1904, pp. 269-376.

The Work Continues

Despite the illness and the death of Fr. Ildefonso, the work of the shelter continued. The blessings and the inaugurations were multiplied as each floor of the building was completed. On 12 May 1907, Archbishop Alarcón blessed *La Escuela Gratuita* (the first floor) that was established for poor girls... *here the name of Fr. Moral was forever engraved as its illustrious founder.*³⁰

The Apostolic Delegate, Bishop José Ridolfi, was publicly invited by Fr. Daydí, director of the school (an invitation that was published in the Catholic newspaper *El País* on 24 July), to participate in the solemn blessing of the shelter for young girls. This blessing took place on 23 August 1908 and the work of this shelter was begun with 12 young girls living at the shelter (on the second floor of the building). Fr. Daydí's style was very evident in the blessing ceremony. A great celebration was organized³¹ and his lengthy discourse was published in the Catholic Newspaper, *El Tiempo*, on 29 September.

Fr. Daydí Speaks

Less than a year ago one could see walking on the streets of Mexico a priest of humble appearance, affable countenance and noble demeanor. This priest, whose name is on everyone's lips, was Rev. Ildefonso Moral, director of the admirable society of the Confraternity of the Ladies of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul. He walked with quick steps and seemed to take in everything that passed around him and was obviously concerned with an idea. The Ladies of Charity had grown tremendously and did good work throughout the Republic. This humble priest and tireless fighter was a true father of the poor. The Ladies of Charity were indebted to him for their admirable organization and because of their structure they were numbered among the best in the world. The constant concern of this good son of St. Vincent de Paul was the needs of the poor. He worked for them; he devised ingenious combinations for them; he watched over them; he developed incredible activity for them. He knocked on the doors of the wealthy and begged alms for his beloved children: the poor. It must be stated that this good priest possessed the secret that allowed him to move the hearts of the wealthy from whom he was always able to obtain abundant assistance for those in need.

Gentlemen, we owe to him the initiative for the establishment of this house which we inaugurate today. The sad lot of the workers and their daughters who grew up in situations of poverty touched his heart.

³⁰ Bol. HMI., 1907, "Día 12 de mayo de 1907," pp. 168-169.

³¹ Bol. HMI., October 1908, pp. 289-306.

He saw these poor people roaming idly through the streets of the capital. They needed bread, clothing, shoes and, even more sadly, they needed bread to nourish their souls — moral education. But instead they received unwholesome impressions and terrible example that, at an early age, led them to the ways of vice and corruption. How could the lot of these people be made better? This was the question that Fr. Moral anguished over without finding a satisfactory answer.

Gentlemen, charity does not know the meaning of the word impossible. Fr. Moral conceived the bold idea of establishing a house to gather together the greatest possible number of these poor girls — a place where they could be fed, clothed, educated and assured an honorable future.

When Fr. Moral thought of the idea of this magnificent work, what funds did he have at his disposal? I will tell you, but before I do so, I beg you not to laugh! When this good priest set out with Christian boldness to make this work a reality he had in hand a donation of “un real y medio,” a donation that had been given to him.

If Fr. Moral were a financier, he would surely have been sent to an insane asylum because of this project. But Fr. Moral was not a financier, but a priest of Jesus Christ and a son of the apostle of charity, St. Vincent de Paul, and, gentlemen, charity does not calculate with the mind, but only consults with the heart, and the heart of this good priest was great and embraced the needs and miseries of all those who suffered.

Very soon, gentlemen, that “real y medio” became fruitful through the warmth of charity and was watered with the tears of suffering. It soon was changed into cement and walls and classrooms. Noble and humble souls generously opened their hands and through their donations assisted this humble priest. Some people generously donated the land and others assisted him with building materials. Some people endorsed this work with large sums of money and thus the workers were able to be paid... and the miracle of this charity became a reality for we have before our eyes this building which has been constructed to lodge these poor girls.

This was the final charitable work of Fr. Moral. In the final years of his life, he concentrated all his effort and love to the realization of this project. This work was in the forefront of his mind and he spoke about it to anyone who would listen to him.

One day Fr. Moral greeted me with obvious joy: “God is good!” he told me, “God is good! He just sent me a great donation. This has come at a most convenient time, since I had no more funds for the project!” And, as though there were some remorse for the joy that he felt, he added with the liveliness that was unique to him: “I want nothing for myself... nothing... nothing! I need nothing! Everything is for the poor!”

As he lay on his deathbed and suffered the cruel pains of the illness which led him to his grave, Fr. Moral always thought of this house and made a thousand plans that he wanted to accomplish.

One morning when I entered his poor and very small room I asked him: "How do you feel Fr. Moral?" "I feel better, Father; I feel better, thanks to God. Sit down and let us talk for a while. Look, they tell me they are finishing the work on the house. Go and look at it! Go and look at it! One of these days when I have a little more strength, we will go together to look at the house.... Right now, I cannot go because my legs will not allow me to move. When I stand up, I fall.... Look, this house is a great concern of mine. It is near completion, that is, we now have a cage, but... how are we going to feed the birds? How are we going to sustain the poor children?... we have no funds!"... I said: "Do not worry about this, Fr. Moral, do not worry. God will provide just as he has provided up to the present time. What funds did you have when you began this work? And, beginning to laugh, the good elder said, Real y medio!"... "It is true God will provide; God will provide! This is his work; this is his work!... God has raised it up and God will sustain it!"...³²

The Missionaries Crown the Work

The missionaries of the Central House gave themselves to the task of finishing the work of Fr. Moral. Fr. Daydí was put in charge of this work — a different style but the same spirit. Daydí had a modern vision of social relationships and how to complete the work of his Visitor and friend. On 9 August 1909, with a group of priests from the community, some members of the Confraternities of Charity, and with some businessmen and their financing, the *Sociedad Cooperativa Limitada* was established with an initial financing of 50,000 pesos. The objective of this undertaking was to direct the production of the Workshop House Shelter and to bring about the commercialization of the shelter in cooperation with some of the large commercial businesses. Another step was taken on 19 August of the same year when the Confraternity of Charity of St. Philomena was established. While all of this was happening the Poor Girls' Shelter of St. Vincent de Paul received 115 young women who boarded there and 315 others who traveled there and attended the public school. A group of 75 of these girls was selected and trained in the use of the machinery and the means of production in small industries, such as, lace work, embroidering and sewing, washing, ironing and folding.

³² *Bol. HMI*, 1908, pp. 290-293.

Last Solemn Blessing: Third Floor

On 24 February 1910 the new Archbishop of Mexico, José Mora y del Río, a champion of Catholic social action, as expressed in *Rerum Novarum*, blessed the third floor where the workshops were installed.³³ This was another great celebration. Fr. Álvarez, C.M. (Visitor), missionaries, priests associated with the Confraternities of Charity, the Minister from Spain, members of the Cooperative Society, representatives of the Catholic Workers' Union,³⁴ workers and families of the young girls, members of high society, participated in this celebration. After a brief festival that was organized by the children, Bishop Mora y del Río went up to the third floor and pushed a button that started all the machinery. The missionaries had more than fulfilled the expectations of their Visitor and guide, in the province, for 16 years.

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

³³ *Fiesta de la caridad. Los hijos de San Vicente están de plácemes*, report of the newspaper *El Tiempo*, in its edition of 21 February 1910, reprinted in the *Bol. HMI*, April 1910, pp. 122-128.

³⁴ Concerning the Unión Católica de Obreros: CEBALLOS RAMÍREZ MANUEL, *La Encíclica Rerum Novarum y los trabajadores en la ciudad de México (1891-1913)*, Col. Diálogo y autocrítica, n. 2, Imdosoc, México, 1986, 41 pp.

Pierre Vigne, C.M. (1670-1740)

A Missionary of the Eucharist

by Alfredo Becerra Vázquez, C.M.

Director of “Vincentiana”

Introduction

This simple portrait of Blessed Pierre Vigne (1670-1740) will allow us to approach him and come to know his spiritual and apostolic richness. We will discover different dimensions of his person: the priest, the missionary and the founder.¹ But, above all, we will discover in him a missionary in love with the Eucharist. Our intention in sharing this article with you is twofold: first, to become acquainted with a confrere who is unknown to most of us, and second, to renew our Vincentian vocation with regard to the Eucharist in order to serve and evangelize the poor.



1. His Origins²

We can come to know a person by his life and by his writings. Let us now get to know his life and his family. Let us learn a little about his family roots and his first years of life to his entrance in the seminary.

¹ www.rsssacramento.it

² Cf. CONGREGATIO DE CAUSIS SANCTORUM, *Beatificationis et Canonizationis Servi Dei Petri Vigne (1670-1740). Positio Super vita, Virtutibus et Fama Sanctati*, Roma 2000, 401 pages.

1.1. *His Family*

His father's name was Pierre Vigne, and he died in 1699 when he was about 86 years old. His mother, Françoise Gautier, died in 1700 at the age of 75. Both were from Privas in what is now Ardèche, where they were married in 1653 when he was 40 and she was 28.

His father was illiterate and his signature does not appear on the marriage license. He was an honest cloth merchant. The family had a decent standard of living. The mother was well-educated. She was 12 years younger than her husband, a difference in age which was not unusual in those times. This allowed her a greater closeness to their children than to her husband. The couple, Vigne-Gautier, had at least 5 children: Eléonore, Jean-François, Anne-Clémence, Jeanne and Pierre.

Before continuing with the description of the family of Blessed Pierre, it is necessary to consider the problem of the Vigne family's religion. And so it is helpful to recall briefly the religious situation of France, and of Vivarais specifically, in the 16th and 17th centuries.

In the second decade of the 16th century the condemnation of Luther and Calvin by the Church led to the "Wars of Religion" that bloodied France. The Edict of Nantes (13 April 1598) recognized freedom of conscience but conceded to the Reformers limited freedom of worship everywhere, including, of course, the city of Privas. This region was the scene of revolts and reprisals, of rivalries and violent fratricides. The king (Louis XIII and later Louis XIV), more or less well-informed and advised, sent out the army against the rebels of the supposedly reformed religion: Catholics and Protestants fought each other with reciprocal hatred. The periods of calm alternated with periods of murder and devastation. Imprisonment, the confiscation of properties, tortures, and massacres forced the Protestants into exile, into hiding, or into pretending to abjure their faith.

In this painful history the city of Privas, "*the small Calvinist capital*," played a magnificent and tragic role. It was a rich agricultural and commercial city of 2,500 inhabitants with a Protestant majority. At the beginning of the 17th century it was conquered and destroyed by royal troops in May of 1629. Once the Edict of Nantes was revoked (17 October 1685), the Catholic missions began years before multiplied. This did not stop the Protestant population of Privas from growing from 47% to 60%. The census of 1689 reveals that Privas had 180 Protestants or new converts out of 310 inhabitants.

Where was the Vigne family situated in this historical-religious context? All the oral tradition indicates that the family was Protestant. The first biographer writes that "*his father and his mother*

were immersed in the heresy." There are important doubts surrounding this hypothesis.

The facts which are available to the well-informed provide some explanations. The parents of Pierre Vigne were married on 26 April 1653. Their burials, in 1699 (the father) and 1700 (the mother), were recorded in the Catholic archives of the parish of Privas. The baptismal records of the last three children are in the parish archives of Saint Thomas. Blessed Pierre Vigne signed the parish records for baptisms, marriages and funerals at least 79 times, from the age of 11 until his priestly ordination. On the eve of his diaconal ordination, he received a clerical title from his family, assuring him of a pension.

In conclusion, nothing indicates expressly that the relatives and neighbors of Pierre were Protestants. Nothing can prove that they were among the New Converts. It is certain that, from the time of his adolescence until Pierre's ordination, his family was Catholic.

1.2. *Infancy, Adolescence and Youth*

Pierre Vigne was born 20 August 1670 in Privas. He was baptized on 24 August in the parish of Saint Thomas in Privas with his older sister and brother, Eléonore and Jean-François, as godparents.

When Pierre was born, his father was 57 years old and his mother 45. In his father he had a model of work and initiative. His mother was tender. We do not know much about his childhood, but everything leads us to think that there were no important problems and that as a young boy he was well cared for by his family. Likewise, everything leads us to believe that the personality of the blessed was well-formed as a child and that he showed signs of early maturity.

The character of the young Pierre was marked by his human, intellectual and natural gifts and by the social, family, and natural environment of his early youth.

Although there are no certain facts about where he began his studies, we do know that he entered the seminary when he was 20. We also know that he began important theological and doctrinal studies in 1690 and continued them through 1694. This would not have been possible if he had not had a solid foundation.

1.3. *"His Encounter with God"*

A longstanding tradition holds that Pierre Vigne, before he was 20, as a Protestant, had begun a journey to Geneva to study and become a minister of the reformed religions and that he was converted mysteriously in the presence of the Eucharist. It was then

that he decided to enter the seminary and become a priest of the Catholic Church.³

The oral tradition, which we have already mentioned, has insisted on highlighting his conversion to Catholicism and his Eucharistic fervor.

In conclusion, the documents and the results of recent investigations do not allow us to discard the hypothesis of a conversion. This permits us access to the spiritual significance of these events. We can deduce two points: 1) Vigne wanted to become a priest of the Catholic Church in order to fight against the Calvinist heresy; 2) he became a priest of Jesus Christ after having an experience of God's presence in the Eucharist and afterward his whole life was marked by the desire to adore, and to promote adoration of, the Blessed Sacrament.



1.4. *His Entrance in the Seminary*

Whichever the context — external or internal — of his conversion, whatever his previous formation, Vigne began his preparation for the priesthood in 1690. We know that he entered the seminary of Viviers because the document that establishes his clerical title in May 1692 presents him as “*a gentleman cleric now in the Seminary of Viviers.*” In the same document it says that he “*... had received the four minor clerical (orders) from the Bishop of Viviers.*” He had come to the seminary at Viviers, at least to receive minor orders. The rule stipulated at least ten days in the seminary before each of the Minor Orders.

All this leads us to believe that from 1690 to 1694 Vigne had done studies for the priesthood. He received priestly ordination on

³ His first biographer, Msgr. Marzolini, is quite sober in his description. Throughout the years the story has been constructed and built up and precise details have appeared: the encounter with a priest who had the Blessed Sacrament with him, the rejection of the greeting, the intervention of the fellow travelers, the fall from the horse, the return to Privas or else the departure for Viviers, depending on the version of the story.

18 September 1694 at the hands of Charles-Antoine de la Garde de Chambonas, Bishop of Viviers, in the chapel of his episcopal palace of Bourg Saint-Andéol. We know this information thanks to his ordination certificate, written in Latin.⁴

2. His Priestly and Missionary Life (1694-1712)

Let us approach the first years of his priestly ministry. These years are important for us as members of the Congregation of the Mission, since he formed part of our community.

2.1. *The Vicar of Saint-Agrève (1694-1700)*

Toward the end of November 1694 he was named Vicar of Saint-Agrève, a small city with a somewhat rigid atmosphere, where he assisted the pastor, Msgr. Jean Chambe. His first signature appears in the parish registers of this city throughout the whole month of October. The last signature is on 2 November 1699. We know that toward the end of the 17th century, the parochial vicar was housed, fed and maintained by the parish and he received a certain “incidental” amount of money. The two priests developed a close relationship. The elder, initiating the younger in the multiple pastoral responsibilities and activities; the younger, supporting the elder with all his generosity, and his availability. Msgr. Chambe died in July 1699. Vigne remained in the parish until 11 May 1700.

2.2. *Lazarist (1700-1706)*

Several months after the arrival of the new pastor, Pierre Vigne left Saint-Agrève and on 27 May 1700 he returned to Lyon to enter the Internal Seminary of the Congregation of the Mission. In the *Positio* we see that “*he felt the need for a substantial spirituality, for an extended formation in the mission, and that brought forth in him the ardent desire to announce Jesus Christ, particularly to the poorest, to the poor people of the countryside, that is, to those who are the special object of the mission of the sons of St. Vincent de Paul. Let us add that he was seeking a fraternal community life, a stimulating association with the confreres who were animated by the same desire for the interior life and the same missionary fire. And the Congregation of the Mission could offer it to him.*”⁵

Lyon is the city nearest to the birthplace of Vigne. There was a house of the Mission there that was founded in 1668. He was

⁴ Cf. CONGREGATIO DEI CAUSIS SANCTORUM, *Positio*, 10-11.

⁵ *Ibidem*, 36.

received by André Gallien, one of the most well-loved of the superiors of the house of Lyon.

Along with the work of the missions, the internal seminary was established toward the end of 1670 or early in 1671, "*with the end of providing workers for the Company.*" The Superior General at the time, Fr. René Alméras,⁶ sent an eminent teacher, Fr Grégoire, who had been the director of Saint Lazare.

The Director of the Internal Seminary when Vigne arrived was Pierre Badeulh. He was assisted by various collaborators, in particular by Jean-Jacques Porte, who would later become the director of the Seminary.

In order to be accepted in the seminary of Lyon, Pierre Vigne, who had been a priest for six years, presented his ordination certificate along with a description of the services he had carried out. Those who received him into the Community asked for information from his ecclesiastical superiors, and they were assured that there were no obstacles for his admission.

Once admitted in the Vincentian seminary of Lyon, Vigne lived like all the other postulants, a trial period of two years, designed to initiate them into the spirit and the life of the little Company, and to prove the authenticity of their Vincentian vocation.⁷

Vigne made his Internal Seminary in the context of a community life that was very structured and demanding. The rhythm of the day was marked by the tasks and the pious exercises of the time. He received spiritual direction. The formation was completed by lessons on the nature of the vows and the way of living them out, and lessons on the missions.⁸ Vigne received a formation that was quite close to that which he had received in the seminary of Viviers. But here the formation was a good model for what was specifically Vincentian: quite rigorous, community based, and clearly oriented toward the missions among the country folk.

⁶ Cf. JOSÉ MARÍA ROMÁN, "Lecciones de Historia de la Congregación de la Misión," in *Anales de la Congregación de la Misión y de las Hijas de la Caridad*, no. 4-5, July-October 2005, 333-347.

⁷ The objective of the seminary, according to the Rule of the Seminary at that time, was to deepen and to acquire the spirit of the Congregation, to become aware of the rules. And so Pierre Vigne was attracted by the five Vincentian virtues and the spirit of the Seminary: mortification, obedience, poverty, silence, compliance to the Rules.

⁸ In the index of the books used in the Internal Seminary of the time are found, along with the writings that are particular to the C.M., a good number of texts of the Fathers of the Church and of masters of the spiritual life, all of this to strengthen the life and the activity of the Christian, the priest, the religious, the apostle.

At the end of the first year he made his “*Good Purposes*,” in which he committed himself to live for a year according to the Rule of the Congregation of the Mission. At the end of the second year he made Vows on 28 May 1702. Now he was ready to begin work in the missions.

He was sent to Valfleury, near St. Etienne. There he found a Marian sanctuary dedicated to the Virgin of Genêt d’Or. He collaborated in the spiritual support of the pilgrims. This ministry reinforced his admiration of, devotion to, and confidence in the Virgin Mary.

The spiritual life of Fr. Pierre was strengthened by the atmosphere of recollection in Valfleury. Then he decided, along with Fr. Jean Blanc, a “holy man of God,” to live out his apostolate among the humble country people in what is now the Department of the Loire.

During the missions, his principal occupation was preaching, following the “*Little Method*” of St. Vincent. For Vigne this method became a school upon which he would base his own way of preaching. Other activities filled the day of the missionary.⁹

In 1703 his missionary activity extended beyond the area of Valfleury to Savoy, Grand Bonard and Cluze in the diocese of Annecy. In 1704 he left Lyon and moved to Béziers.

2.3. *His Departure from the Lazarists*

He left the Congregation of the Mission in 1706. This departure was not the result of a hurried decision. Rather it was the conclusion of a long interior struggle. He left the Community of his own will, and actually against the will of his superiors.

After two years of reflection and various pastoral experiences, Vigne seems to have found his personal vocation as a missionary in the countryside. He gave missions in the dioceses of Viviers, Mende, and in Puy.

3. **Calvary and the Foundation of the Congregation (1712-1722)**

In the heart of Vigne, “the flame of love was fed by a double devotion: **the Eucharist and the Passion of Jesus**. “*Fr. Vigne had two particular devotions to which he gave himself completely, to which*

⁹ The principal activities of the Vincentian mission were: the explanation of the big and the little catechism, the administration of the sacraments, especially confession and communion, and the visits to the sick, arguments with heretics, and the reconciliation of people.

he sought to lead others with all the fire of which he was capable: Calvary and the altar, the Passion and the Eucharist.”¹⁰ These were the arms of war to convert sinners and to stir up the lukewarm.

These affirmations which come from the two biographies of the blessed express well the vision and the meaning of his activity in this fertile period of his life. The Passion and Calvary help him to convert Christians and to animate them on the road to Calvary. The Eucharist and the altar shall be the source and the center of the life of the Congregation of the Most Blessed Sacrament which he founded.



In 1712 he arrived in the town of Boucieu-le-Roi, in Ardèche, where he erected the Way of the Cross. Helped by the faithful of the surrounding areas, he set up 39 stations which went from the countryside through the town. In this way, he taught Christians to follow Jesus from the Last Supper to Pentecost. Boucieu became his residence. There he gathered some women together and entrusted them with the task of “*accompanying the pilgrims*” on the Way of the Cross in order to help them to meditate and pray. Thus was born the Congregation of the Sisters of the Most Blessed Sacrament. On 30 November 1715, in the church of Boucieu, he gave them the cross and the religious habit, inviting his daughters to combine the adoration of Jesus present in the Eucharist with the communal life lived in fraternal union.

Even while dedicating himself to the formation of the new Congregation, Pierre Vigne continued his apostolic endeavors. To extend the fruits of his mission, he discovered the possibility of writing books: *The Rule of Life*, a work on spirituality, and, above all, the meditations in “*The Most Beautiful Book: Jesus Christ Who Suffers and Dies on the Cross for Us.*”¹¹

¹⁰ CONGREGATIO DEI CAUSIS SANCTORUM, *Positio*, 59.

¹¹ PIERRE VIGNE, *Il più bel libro. Gesù chi soffre e muore in croce per noi*, Leberit, Rome s/a, 99 pages.

Around 70 years old, this vigorous “itinerant of God” now began to feel the weariness of a life totally dedicated to announcing the Word of God. During a mission in Rencurel, in the mountains of Vercors, startled by a sudden illness, he was forced to stop preaching. Despite all his efforts to celebrate the Eucharist and to exhort the faithful to the love of Jesus, he knew that the end was approaching. He once again expressed his missionary zeal and recollected himself in prayer. A priest, and later two sisters, accompanied him in the final moments of his life. On 8 July 1740, Pierre Vigne was united with him whom he always loved, adored and served. He was buried in the church of Boucieu-le-Roi.

4. In the Line of French Spirituality¹²

When Pierre Vigne was 30 years old, a new century began. The Church of the 17th century had inherited the spirituality of the French School. The century of “light,” with the exaltation of reason, seemed to relegate the world of spirituality to the dark ages. But the Spirit was not held back, not by enlightened minds, such as Voltaire, nor by the encyclopedists. The Spirit continued to raise up new saints such as Louis Grignon de Montfort who was able to bring again to the world the wisdom of the cross, and Alphonsus Maria Liguori, who knew how to overcome the entanglements of outdated doctrines such as Quietism¹³ and Jansenism.¹⁴

Vigne knew how to respond to the expectations of his time. His simple yet substantial spirituality can inspire even now our living of the Gospel. It can be summed up in three basic elements: the Word, the Cross and the Eucharist.

¹² Cf. FABIO CIARDI, “Pietro Vigne, un uomo per l’anno eucaristico,” in *Unità e Carisma* (No. 6, November-December 2004), pp. 19-22.

¹³ Mystical religious doctrine especially popular in the 17th century. It viewed the union of the soul with God as a state of total “quiet” and passivity that practically excluded the will and desire. Its principal proponent was the Spanish priest, Miguel de Molinos (1628-1696). Cf. “Quietismo,” in *Dizionario Storico del Cristianismo*, Pauline, Turin.

¹⁴ Doctrinal, political and ecclesiastical movement of the 17th and 18th centuries. It began in Holland and other European countries and takes its name from the theologian of Leuven, Cornelius Jansen (1585-1638). Jansenism understands grace in terms of predestination as do the Calvinists. Other aspects of Jansenism include the rejection of philosophy in the realm of theology, the predominant place of the Bible and of the Holy Fathers, moral severity. Cf. “Giansenismo,” in *Dizionario Storico del Cristianismo*, Pauline, Turin.

4.1. *The Word*

Vigne is above all a missionary. Carrying a heavy box he traveled the highways of France, from village to village, to light the fire of the love of God in the people whom he encountered. From the box he would take out books which he had written to explain how great was the love of Christ. Animated by Sacred Scripture, from which he was continually nourished, and with which he also nourished the country folk that he directed, his spirituality was authentically biblical.

His was a time in which people thrived on devotions. Vigne explains that *"It is necessary to be nourished with the Word of God, and so to nourish and instruct others."* *"Whoever does evil,"* he explains with conviction, *"does so because he does not know God. Who would dare not to obey him, not to love him, if only he truly knew him? Who would dare offend him? When one has the habit of meditating on his love, one also has the certainty of expecting everything from his mercy."*¹⁵

His writings illustrate the constant biblical references that invite to a continual meditation of the Word of God. He calls for a direct meditation on the Sacred Scriptures day and night.

4.2. *The Cross*

The cross remains always as *"the knowledge of the saints,"* and it is the *"only knowledge"* of Vigne, whose heart was firmly attached to Jesus in the Eucharist and was open, by the Holy Spirit, to the wisdom of the Scriptures.

Like all authentic saints, Pierre Vigne knew how to inculcate the Gospel and he synthesized it in the cross. He was a man who knew how to depict the passion of Christ to the people and show them the sign of divine love. While to all he pointed to the Sacred Scriptures as the source of Christian life, he concentrated the whole Word of God in him, whom he called *"The Most Beautiful Book. Jesus Who Suffers and Dies on the Cross for Us."* In order for the people to "read" it, he built a Calvary which responded to the popular piety that desired to see and to touch.

All the representation of the scenes of the Way of the Cross is at the service of the mystery. He gives it an extraordinarily pastoral interpretation. He knows how to respond to the needs of the people and he knows how to transmit the genuine content of the faith. *"Calvary,"* he explains, *"contains the place, the time, and the state, in which Jesus primarily demonstrated his infinite love."*

¹⁵ FABIO CIARDI, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-21.

We can all discover in the cross of Christ the synthesis and the school of each virtue. *“Do you seek humility? Go to the Cross! Do you seek purity? Go to the Cross! Do you seek hope? Are you attracted by pride? Look at the crucifix....”* The response to each question, the remedy for every vice, is always there: *“Are you subject to greed? Look at your God who gives all that he has: his blood, his body, his soul, his life. Are you attracted by sensuality? Look at Jesus whose body was subjected to the greatest suffering! Are you envious? Contemplate Jesus on the cross, burning with desire and love because he wants only the happiness of those who were putting him to death!... Are you overcome with anger? See this sweet Savior who does not speak a word before the cruelty of his executioners!... All can attain inexhaustible graces contemplating Jesus on the Cross.”*¹⁶

In the writings of Vigne resounds the simple but effective preaching, directed to the people of the countryside, to inspire in them the love of Christ, as he is in love with them: *“Oh my Lord, you have suffered so much for us, no gift you have given us is as beautiful as the cross. There you have shed your blood with tremendous suffering! Yes, all that you have made, the heavens and the earth, has cost you nothing, for with one word you have created everything; but all that you have redeemed, what pain, what suffering.... Such love, such tenderness in thinking that he himself has died for me! Behold God, the Lord of the world, in Christ Jesus suffers the passion to give us life. I do not understand how my heart is not overcome with sorrow, with repentance, how could it forget you, oh my Savior, there on the cross! Oh my sweet Jesus, could I now dare offend you, considering all that you have suffered for me?”*¹⁷

4.3. The Eucharist

The third focal point in the spirituality of Pierre Vigne is the Eucharist. For him, the love manifested in the crucifix is given in the Eucharist. When speaking of the Eucharist, he uses language which is so convincing because he speaks from his own personal experience: *“We beg you, Lord of heaven and earth, by the merits of your Son, to give us a spirit which does not esteem passing things, but rather those which raise us up, that which is eternal. May we contemplate as from the summit of the mountain, the littleness of temporal and ephemeral goods, and the greatness of those which await us in heaven.... Directed toward heaven, we will receive more easily the gifts of grace and we shall see the beauty that faith reveals to us in the darkness of this life to be able to defend ourselves from numerous and*

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, 21.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, 22.

powerful enemies. Grant, oh Jesus, that my soul always be formed by your virtues, and my body be purified of all that your infinitely pure eyes view with horror, for I am predestined to be your living tabernacle."¹⁸

It is not possible to think of the Eucharist separate from the cross that leads us to conversion and the imitation of Christ: *"Oh God, turn your gaze on your Son and because this divine Host is elevated, forgive us who are sinners, grant us the grace to recognize ourselves as such, and to lift up our spirit and our heart to you.... We should imitate his virtues; we should fulfill our obligation, orient our intentions to him, in short, maintain our soul adorned with his sentiments, in the purity of love, avoiding sin."*¹⁹

5. A Living Spirituality²⁰

Vigne was an apostle dedicated to the contemplation of Jesus on the Cross; he knew that love calls for love. He wanted to be immolated, not by justice, but by love; only those who consent to becoming little are led by the way of love. The life of Pierre Vigne teaches the profound secret of *"spiritual poverty"*: *"Where there is no love, sow love, and you shall reap love"* was a maxim of St. John of the Cross. From the mystery of the cross flows the mystery of the Eucharist, sacrament of love. Clinging to Christ and burning with the desire to announce him is what Vigne proposes. The attraction of his words and the invitation to conversion to the hardest of hearts, flowed from the fire of his faith, of his charity and of his immense compassion for sinners. He had consecrated himself to the salvation of the people of the countryside; for this he had renounced the outcome. He sought the poor. He hoped to obtain from sinners a sincere repentance of heart. If we only knew this great God well — he used to say — who would not fear or be filled with confusion for having offended him so frequently?

The usual themes of his preaching were the same, to awaken the fear of God in the heart of the sinner and to persuade him to repentance, the sense of the fragility of human things and the infinite greatness of God.

He wrote two books. In one, *The Most Beautiful Book. Jesus Suffers and Dies on the Cross for Us*, we find the following passage which he loved to cite to the people who came to listen to him: *"Let us then read once again and study with diligence and perseverance the book of books which God has authored in the fullness of his love for*

¹⁸ VIGNE, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, 90-91.

²⁰ Cf. www.rsssacramento.it

us, and that he has written, not with ink, but with his blood, not on paper, but on his very body. This is his masterpiece, his book par excellence, which he uses to convert us to himself and draw us to his love.”²¹

“Cross and Eucharist” are the two key words for Vigne, for they kindled his spirit and fed his apostolic zeal. As priest, as missionary, as founder, Vigne gave himself completely with an extraordinary capacity for love, which was nourished in the Eucharist. The bishops, who appreciated his zeal, his doctrine, and his holiness, sought him out to preach in the parishes of their dioceses. He always responded to the best of his ability. He never showed off a spirit of ownership; his name does not appear in his writings, only simply “a missionary of the clergy.” For the same reason he did not sign the Rules for his religious sisters. In the last moments of his life, he relived the sufferings of Jesus Christ.



The spirituality of Vigne continues to be lively and inspiring. When the missionary became aware that alone he could not fulfill the increasing workload of welcoming and accompanying pilgrims along the way that led to the Calvary, he brought together a group of women from which would be born, “Sisters of the Most Holy Calvary,” who would later be known as “Sisters of the Most Holy Sacrament.” He taught them to pray and to live in contemplation before the Eucharist, and so, immersed in the Eucharist, they would be able to guide people in the daily way of the cross that is the way of holiness. For him, the Eucharist was at the center of his evangelization. The mystery of the Eucharist constituted the foundation of the “Rule of Life” that he left to his religious. Jesus has given his life freely on the cross so that we might live a new life. Today we too participate in this gift as we receive the Eucharist and contemplate Christ present in the host. For Pierre Vigne, the Last Supper and the Passion express the same reality: God gives the gift of his life so that humanity might live in a new way.

²¹ VIGNE, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

Conclusion

In this article we have discovered in Pierre Vigne a man in love with Jesus Christ who died on the Cross and is present in the Eucharist, an upright and faithful priest, a zealous missionary willing to work to announce the Good News, a friend of the poor and of the unlearned who sought by all means possible to help them grow both spiritually and as human beings — all this with the simplicity of a daily life oriented toward God and toward others.

Priests, religious men and women, laypeople... all can find in Vigne a model and guide for making of our ordinary life, a faithful, rich, and fruitful Christian life, rooted in the Gospel.

Pierre Vigne was beatified on 3 October 2004 by Pope John Paul II in Rome, in the Year of the Eucharist. He summed up Vigne's spirituality and message in these words: "*Contemplating Christ present in the Eucharist and the saving Passion, [he] was led to be... a faithful missionary.... May the Church in France find in [him] an example to raise up new sowers of the Gospel!*"²²

We conclude with these words: "Blessed Pierre Vigne....

- Invites us to discover: the Eucharist, mystery of love and redemption.
- Invites us to be witnesses of missionary zeal and of the Eucharist.
- Invites us to contribute to the life, the communion, and the mission of the Church.
- Invites us to commit ourselves: to give a privileged place to the Eucharist celebrated and adored; to welcome and to live the Word of God; to be signs of communion and of solidarity, and to participate in the work of evangelization."²³

Let us be true adorers of the Father and of his Son Jesus Christ, present in the Eucharist, and let us continue his work for, with, and among the poor.

(GILBERT R. WALKER, C.M., translator)

²² JOHN PAUL II, "Homily on His Beatification," in *L'Osservatore Romano* (4-5 October 2004), pp. 6-7.

²³ COMUNITÀ PARROCCHIALE LANUVIO, *Bolettino parrocchiale*, Anno VII, no. Speciale, 2004, p. 2.

Fr. Eugène Boré, C.M. (1809-1878)

Scholarship in the Service of the Faith

by Yves Danjou, C.M.

Province of Paris

On the subject of Fr. Eugène Boré, a historian observes that “he is one of the most astonishing figures among the sons of Monsieur Vincent.”¹ He recognized in Boré the one who developed the missionary method best adapted to Moslem countries in the Middle East. Eugène Boré, an excellent scholar and specialist in Oriental civilizations, discovered quite quickly that the promotion of education was the surest means to open Moslems to knowledge of the Christian religion, and at the same time it would raise the level of local Christians locked up by centuries of Islamic domination. He explained this clearly: “School or teaching is the best preparation for the Gospel. It is only in this way that the truth can penetrate and infiltrate the old Moslem society. Although we limit ourselves to adorning and to cultivating spirit and heart without crossing the threshold of conscience, ideas and lights deposited with good example in young minds will bear their fruit later, and grace will be able to finish what knowledge has started.”²



¹ DANIEL-ROPS, *L'Eglise des Révolutions*, Fayard, Paris 1960, p. 778.

² LÉONCE DE LA RALLAYE, *Eugène Boré...*, Paris 1893, p. V. — Other biographies: [E. PÉMARTIN], *Eugène Boré... Notice biographique suivie d'extraits*

It is true that, in the romantic atmosphere of his time, Eugène Boré did not hesitate to exalt French culture as the best way of answering the human and Christian values that he wanted to spread. This patriotic core came to him from his family. He was born in Angers on 15 August 1809 to a mother who was very attached to ancestral values, and to a father who was a former military officer. The latter enlisted in 1792 in the army with the grade of lieutenant and took part in many campaigns, in particular on the Rhine and in Italy, before becoming a tax collector.

At his premature death in 1812, he left behind five children, of whom Eugène was the third. Although his deeply religious wife had only a modest income, she influenced her children profoundly. Eugène gained renown for his intellectual qualities while in high school in Angers and, in 1826, succeeded in winning a scholarship to enter the Collège Stanislas in Paris. While there, he found his full development, even winning the top prize in philosophy in a general competition. A little after, in June 1828, he had the sorrow of losing his mother. Her death affected him deeply but encouraged him to look for a teacher and friend, a person he would find in Félicité de Lamennais. This priest had already become famous through his book *Essai sur l'indifférence* [*Essay on Indifference*], which sought to reconcile science with faith, or rather, as he said himself, to bring science under the guidance of faith, the true sovereign of knowledge. To accomplish this, he would gather around himself a certain number of young persons in his manor at La Chesnaie in Brittany. Together with his other brother Léon, Eugène Boré was among his closest disciples, whose wish was to participate in Lamennais' work of moral and social regeneration. He did not regulate his intellectual labors well and received advice to moderate them.

On 3 January 1832, Lamennais wrote him: "My dear child, I received your fine letter with the pleasure arising from everything that comes from you. Now about your studies, I recommend that you take care of your health and your eyesight. It is not only a question of regulating your time, but of not exhausting your strength through excessive work. Be wary of any excess of this type. Nevertheless, if you can not neglect Syriac and Coptic at the same time, you will be doing well. For the rest, you are right to work particularly on Arabic, Sanskrit and Chinese." This letter shows the impetuosity with which Eugène Boré gave himself to the study of oriental languages without

de son journal et de sa correspondance, Paris 1879; Eugène Boré. *L'homme privé, l'homme public, les voyages, les œuvres, d'après un témoin de sa vie*, Lille (n.d.); GÉRARD VAN WINSEN, "La vie et les travaux d'Eugène Boré (1809-1878)," in *Nouvelle Revue de science missionnaire*, 34:2 (1978). These studies are inspired mainly from what is reported here and there in the *Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission*.

letting himself be distracted by the political and social upheavals that were shaking France in 1830. His efforts were rewarded. In 1833, he was received into the Asiatic Society of Paris. A year later, he was appointed a substitute professor of Armenian in the Collège de France, on the proposal of François-Pierre-Guillaume Guizot. He would often be helped by Guizot, the Minister of Public Education, since at the time he was organizing primary education in the belief that education was the antidote against revolutionary doctrines.

Simultaneously, Boré was publishing in the *Journal asiatique* various articles that were making him increasingly well known. His friend Louis Veuillot would later recall, in his *Derniers Mélanges*, the Boré of his youth: “a gentleman with a good figure and a fine face, at his ease with all sorts of people and who, since he never had anything to hide, was never bothered by speaking his mind. He was young and ardent as a soldier, but grave as a priest, and modest and meek like a Sister of Charity.”³ He never hid his Christian convictions, trying to go to daily Mass and resolving — these are his own words — to maintain modesty and simplicity always.

Since he was aware of social problems, he did not hesitate to visit the poor. When the Society of St. Vincent de Paul began to grow, he was one of its most active members. During the course of his visits of mercy, he was infected with cholera. In 1832, it claimed 18,000 victims in Paris out of a population of 800,000. When Frederick Ozanam questioned François Lallier about his vocation, the latter cited as an example their mutual friend Eugène Boré. “The courage to live alone in chastity? That’s the question. If you have this courage, chose the holy career of a priest, doctor, missionary, preacher, pilgrim of science and faith just like Eugène Boré.”⁴

Boré was henceforth known in university circles. At the end of 1835, he was put in charge of a literary mission in the monastery of the Mekhitarist Fathers, those Armenian monks who found refuge in 1717 on the island of San Lazzaro in Venice. He wrote at that time his first book, *Saint-Lazare ou histoire de la société religieuse arménienne de Méchtar*. On his return to Paris, he stopped in Geneva where he met the pianist and composer Franz Liszt, a friend of Lamennais and completely occupied at the time with romantic adventures (it was only in 1858, after a retreat with the Vincentians at Montecitorio in Rome, that Liszt would become a cleric).

³ Quoted by GEORGES GOYAU, *L'Eglise en marche, études d'histoire missionnaire*, 1^{ère} série (Paris 1928), in an article on “Louis Veuillot et l'esprit missionnaire,” pp. 191-224.

⁴ GÉRARD CHOLVY, *Frédéric Ozanam. L'engagement d'un intellectuel catholique au XIX^e siècle*, Fayard, Paris 2003, p. 331.

The desire to study the Armenians and the Eastern Churches a bit better asserted itself and pushed Boré to leave for the Middle East. In a letter dated 27 November 1837 to his brother Léon he made known his deepest motivations: "The definitive goal of my works is the truth or the cause of the Catholic religion.... I am really traveling for God. I am going to visit the country that was the cradle of Christianity, to study the language they spoke there, and to examine its monuments to return strengthened with new knowledge and to lend my feeble support to those who are already in combat."

Nevertheless, he took the precaution of making this trip with the responsibility of a mission from the Ministry of Public Instruction and the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, which gave him good access. He left in August 1837, and went first to Vienna where an illness surprised him. This was for him the occasion to perfect his Armenian through frequent visits to the Mekhitarist monastery there.⁵ Soon after, he went to Trieste to start for Constantinople, where he arrived 6 December 1837.

In this capital of the Ottoman Empire he lodged with an Armenian family. Not far away was the Vincentian residence of Saint-Benoît,⁶ where he became one of their most frequent guests. He became friends with the superior, Fr. Louis Florent Leleu. Thanks to these contacts, he was able to arrange for Fr. Felix Scafi, an Italian Vincentian, to accompany him in his trip to Persia.⁷ On 2 May 1839, the two travelers departed, escorted by some men from the region, since this journey was not without danger. At first they went along the coast of the Black Sea to arrive at the port of Samsun. Then they crossed the Pontic mountains and went to Tokat where they had the joy of encountering a small Catholic community. Then they continued to Erzurum, at the time one of the centers of Greater Armenia. Boré could not resist making a detour to Russia to visit Echmiadzin, residence of the Armenian Orthodox patriarch. Then he came back by Lake Van and at length reached Lake Urmia, at the northeast of which is Tauris (Tabriz). He settled in there on 6 November 1839.

⁵ In the year 2000, the two branches, of Venice and Vienna, joined together to found the Mekhitarist Order.

⁶ Fr. Arthur Droulez, C.M., composed a history of this house, limited today to a work of education, but he never had it printed. The only publication up to now is that of HASAN DILAN, *La mission du Lycée Saint-Benoît dans les relations turco-françaises*, L'Harmattan, Paris 2003.

⁷ E. BORÉ gathered his recollections into his *Correspondance et mémoires d'un voyageur en Orient*, 2 vols., Paris 1840. See STAFFORD POOLE, "Eugene Bore and the Vincentian Mission in the Near East," in *Vincentian Heritage* 5, 1 (1984) 59-102.

Next, despite strong opposition from Nestorian Christians and Protestants, Boré opened a school there, soon to be followed by four others. It was at this time that the painter Eugène Flandin, who was part of a delegation of the French embassy, met him. This is what he said of him:

At Tabriz we found several French who formed a small colony. Its leader was M. Eugène Boré, who moved to this city about a year before. After a long trip and research in the country of the Chaldeans, which had brought this scholarly explorer to the shore of Lake Urmia, he came to stay in the capital of Azerbaijan. All that M. Boré had seen along his route and all that he had gathered about the populations of these lands engendered in him the desire to bring to them the torch of civilization that he himself was holding in his capable hands. As a result, beginning in January 1839, he had prepared what he was calling a humanitarian university at Tabriz. The French language was to be its base, and he was hoping to use it to communicate European knowledge to the Persians. To attain the noble goal that he had proposed for himself, he excluded no one and called all religions, all the dissidents, to benefit from his teaching. At that point, it was not M. Boré's plan to engage in religious proselytizing. He was relying on education to destroy by itself the ignorance and prejudices of Islam, as well as the error or false teachings of schismatic Christians.⁸

Boré's zeal did not stop there. He asked Fr. Scafi to request missionaries from Paris. A little while later he opened at Djulfa, near Isfahan, another school. It was there that he received from Fr. Étienne, Procurator General of the Congregation of the Mission, a letter dated 14 April 1841, announcing the arrival of two Vincentians, Frs. Darnis and Guzel. This was the beginning of Vincentian work in Persia. At the same time, he confided to his personal diary, on 23 February 1841, his secret desire of advancing to the priesthood, as it was "the state most beautiful, most holy and most worthy of man on this earth."

In the meantime, honors were not lacking in recognition of his work and devotion. In 1841, he was named a chevalier of the Légion d'Honneur. A short time later, while he was in Mosul, he received a letter from Guizot, the president of the Council, offering him the post of consul in Jerusalem. This proposition would not be confirmed, however, because of anticlerical opposition. Nonetheless, it moved

⁸ EUGÈNE FLANDIN, *Voyage en Perse*, vol. I, *Relation du voyage*, Paris 1851, pp. 15-16.

him to return to France. He used his stay in Europe to go to Rome where he was warmly welcomed by his friend, Théodore de Bussières, who was key in the conversion of Alphonse Ratisbonne to Catholicism. Pope Gregory XVI received him several times and made him a Knight of St. Gregory the Great.

Despite all this, the East still attracted him. In July 1843, we find him in Constantinople. From here on, he would lodge with the Vincentians at Saint-Benoît, in the Galata quarter, where he could see, on the other side of the Golden Horn, the palace of the sultans. He actually preferred the Vincentian country house at Bebek, on the shores of the Bosphorus, some ten kilometers from the Ottoman capital. This property had a boarding school with about 50 students, and it was having a hard time adjusting to the lay director sent from Paris by Sr. Rosalie Rendu, a man lacking teaching skills despite his evident good will. Boré loved to substitute for absent professors and to deepen his knowledge of Greek, Turkish and Armenian. He kept frequenting his Armenian friends to such an extent that people took him, as he himself admitted, for an Armenian. He even wrote several books of an apologetical nature in their language and translated his friend Théodore's account of Ratisbonne's conversion.

He also often went to the farm known as Saint-Vincent d'Asie which the Vincentians had just acquired.⁹ He loved to go there to reflect, meditate and write different works. At his own expense he even built a house there where he would receive many catechumens to instruct them very discreetly in the Christian faith. His order of the day was nearly that of the Vincentians, with rising at 4:00, an hour for prayer, study in silence, reading at table: "We read the conferences of Lacordaire.... His genius is being revealed."

When he realized that Lamennais was drifting more and more from the Church, and after he left the Sainte-Pélagie prison, Boré invited him to join him.¹⁰ Lamennais refused and Boré had the sadness to see his friend and former teacher take refuge in a vague kind of deism and moralizing popular socialism. After he was ordained a priest, Boré would come to visit him Paris in 1850, but it was a last visit and a cold one.

⁹ The farm of Saint-Vincent d'Asie is a very large property situated on the Asiatic side, some 14 kilometers from the Bosphorus. Fr. Leleu wanted to establish there a small farming community, where orphans could be received, and Polish refugees later on. In fact, their installation was difficult and troubles swelled because of malaria and problems of communication. The property was sold in 1906. Today the village is called Polonezköy or the village of the Poles. We should note that in 1850 Lamartine dreamt of retiring not far from Ephesus on a farm offered by the sultan Abdül-Medjid.

¹⁰ GEORGES HOURDIN, *Lamennais. Prophète et combattant de la liberté*, Librairie Académique Perrin, Paris 1982, p. 348.

Despite these reverses, Eugène Boré kept questioning himself about his true vocation. During a retreat at Saint-Vincent d'Asie in November 1843, he penned these reflections: "I am here with Fr. Scafi, my director and friend.... May you be blessed, my God, for adding to all the graces that you unceasingly shower on me that of being able to remain several days occupied only with you.... In this absolute solitude, in the midst of a nature which is beginning to clothe itself with its annual winter mourning, dedicating myself to self-examination, nourished with meditations and pious readings, I am making my apprenticeship in the religious life for which you have been inspiring me in secret for several years." He was wondering whether he could truly be able to aspire to the priestly life. Fr. Leleu, superior of the Vincentian mission, thought, along with others, that as a layman Boré could accomplish much more good by being freer in his words and in his undertakings.

It is true that Fr. Leleu, who exercised a determining influence, had an attractive personality. He was priest of the Diocese of Amiens when he entered the Vincentians at age 31 to go quickly to the mission of Constantinople. Endowed with a lively spirit and speaking good Turkish, he quickly made his presence known and multiplied various initiatives. He was the one who purchased the house at Bebek to install the boarding school there in 1836, and later the property of Saint-Vincent d'Asie. In 1839, he brought the Daughters of Charity and, two years later, the Brothers of the Christian Schools. In 1841, he obtained from Guizot, now Minister of Foreign Affairs, a grant to open a press,¹¹ which would publish several of Boré's works. Leleu encouraged him to begin, on 6 March 1846, a conference of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, the first in the Middle East. On 11 November 1846, he died suddenly, at age 46, on his return from a trip to Smyrna where, accompanied by Boré, he had opened a College of Propaganda Fide. An epitaph in the church of Saint-Benoît correctly recalls his memory in the place that he had renovated.

The death of Leleu, who Boré found, according to his own testimony, to be a model, support and guide, was the impulse that led him to decide to go on for the priesthood. Nevertheless, he took the time to go to the Holy Land that he had so long wished to visit. He had been traveling with Fr. Doumercq, the new Visitor, in his visits to the houses of Greece, and he took the occasion of his stopping in Athens to take a ship that brought him to Lebanon. At

¹¹ Boré wrote on 25 November 1843 to his friend Taconet, director of the newspaper *Univers*: "We have a press already installed and we are beginning our publications." This polyglot press already had Latin characters, but also typefaces in Greek, Armenian, Turkish and Bulgarian, and they were awaiting the arrival of others in Arabic and Persian. The list of published works is found in *Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission* 69 (1904) 504-510.

the end of a memorable ride on horseback, he reached Bethlehem on Christmas Eve, 1847.

He remained several months in Palestine to study carefully the question of the holy places. He noted, as well, the increasing influence of the Russians over the numerous Orthodox churches, thereby calling into question the rights of the Latins which had been established for a long time. He drew up on this point his *Mémoire sur les lieux saints* which, through the help of Montalembert, he brought before the French National Assembly.¹² He did not hide, moreover, his esteem for the Turks nor his attachment to the Ottoman Empire. To those who reproached him for it, he would answer that this was the only way to keep the Russians from dominating the Middle East under the guise of Orthodoxy.

Nevertheless, interest was growing elsewhere. On 24 February 1848, Louis Philippe was forced to abdicate, and the people noisily demanded the proclamation of a Republic. On 25 June, Denis Affre, Archbishop of Paris, fell under bullets while seeking to appease the insurgents. Boré was shaken. For him, "the cause of the evil is the lack of Catholic thought." Calm would only return with the election, as President of the Republic, of Prince Charles Louis Bonaparte, nephew of Napoleon, who would do all in his power to have himself proclaimed emperor on 2 December 1852.

When Boré returned to Constantinople, then, he decided to make a definite step in his life. He finished his studies in theology with the help of Fr. Gamba, superior of Saint-Benoît from 1851 to 1860, and he petitioned Fr. Étienne, Superior General since 1843, to receive him into the Congregation of the Mission. On 28 January 1849, he began his Internal Seminary in the house, while waiting for someone to be found to replace him as director of the school at Bebek. His advancement to the priesthood would take place at the same time and quite rapidly, since within a few months he would receive the different orders leading to the priesthood, which he received on 7 April 1850 at the hands of Bishop Hillereau, Latin Bishop of Constantinople.

Following his ordination, Boré went to Paris to complete his Internal Seminary. He was happy to be there, as he commented: "Retired in a kind of cell improvised with curtains, I had to resist an evil trait of nature which loves neither isolation nor meditation." On 29 January 1851, he took his vows and was moved to recall that ten years previously at Isfahan, he had promised to give himself to God.

¹² "His reports concerning Russian trampling on the Holy Places are at the origin of the demands leading to the Crimean War" (*Grand Larousse encyclopédique*, 1960, article, "Boré").

At that time, he accompanied Fr. Étienne on his visit to the Vincentian houses in Algeria. While there, he launched the idea of a catechumenate for Moslems as he had done in Saint-Vincent d'Asie, an idea taken up by Fr. Girard, superior of the major seminary of Kouba. On Boré's return to Europe, he went to Constantinople to be named shortly afterward the director of the school at Bebek.

At age 42 he was full of energy. He reserved for himself the classes of religious instruction, philosophy, history and geography. He composed, for the use of his students, a little guide to French pronunciation. His stay in France had given him other ideas. For example, he introduced to the school drill exercises, giving his students a uniform made of a military tunic, belt and helmet. His confreres gave him effective help, such as Fr. Régnier, superior of Saint-Benoît following Fr. Gamba, and whose meteorological observations kept from 1848 to 1853 at Bebek served for the climatological study of the Bosporus.¹³

Amid all this, Étienne did not forget him. He named him Visitor of the province in a letter dated 6 September 1851 in which he told him: "I am fulfilling a wish that I had formed as soon as I learned of your decision to enter the Company. You know my heart, my dear Monsieur Boré, you know what place you occupy there. You can therefore count on my complete dedication.... A fine future is reserved for you, I have no doubt." Fr. Boré had plenty to do, since he was also receiving the responsibility for the Daughters of Charity and remained in charge of Bebek. He had to make yearly visits of the Vincentian houses in his jurisdiction, such as Smyrna, Santorin (Thira), Naxos, Thessalonica and Monastir (Bitola).

His zeal was soon able to be deployed even more with the Crimean War (1854-1856). He did not disguise his wish for this war. In his opinion, it was the occasion for France to reassume its protectorate over the East for the good of the Catholic Church, and to favor the return of the Orthodox Churches to Rome. In 1853, Russia claimed the right of official protection over the Orthodox of the Ottoman Empire, something that would let it intervene in Turkish affairs at the least provocation. In the face of the sultan's refusal, the Russians invaded the Moldo-Walachian principalities along the Danube. In March 1854, they even crossed the Danube, thus pushing France and England to declare war against Russia.

Allied troops, assembled in Varna, decided to attack Sebastopol, the main stronghold of the Crimean peninsula, and home of the Russian fleet that controlled the Black Sea. Losses were enormous, more because of epidemics, like cholera or typhus, than from

¹³ A. VIKESNEL, *Voyage dans la Turquie d'Europe. Description physique et géologique de la Thrace*, Paris 1868, vol. II, pp. 20-50.

combat. Out of 95,000 French deaths, 75,000 were caused by disease. Hospitals multiplied to care for them. The Vincentians and the Daughters of Charity, under Fr. Boré's leadership, multiplied their charitable actions and were unreservedly devoted to the sick. To help them, Fr. Étienne sent 255 sisters from France. When Piedmont entered the war on the side of the allies in January 1855, Fr. Marcantonio Durando, whose brother Giovanni took part in the war as a general, sent another 25 sisters from Italy. As for the missionaries, 14 saw service as chaplains.¹⁴

The Treaty of Paris, signed on 5 July 1856, put a stop to the war. The losses were serious: more than 30 sisters and five Vincentian priests lost their lives. Nonetheless, their devotion was repaid. The sultan revised the imperial charter to stipulate the equality of Moslem and non-Moslem subjects in the empire. He also offered to the Daughters of Charity a large property north of Constantinople for the building the Hôpital de La Paix, still in use. We should note that the Crimean War was the occasion to establish teams of nurses formed on the English side by Florence Nightingale and on the Russian side by the Grand-Duchess Helena, both fervent admirers of the Daughters of Charity.¹⁵ The organization of these nurses led to the foundation of the Red Cross in 1863.

Boré's activity was overwhelming. It is difficult to follow him in all that he was doing. In 1855, he lodged for a while, in one of the buildings of Saint-Benoît, the Polish poet, Adam Mickiewicz, who had been part of the group of friends at La Chesnaie and who had come to Constantinople to take part in the struggle against the Russians. But his spirit was especially engrossed with the Bulgarian Orthodox who found it increasingly difficult to support the authority of the Greek bishops on whom they depended, but who did not respect their national identity. One of his confreres, Fr. Faveyrial,¹⁶ did not hesitate to claim in his *Histoire de l'Albanie* that many Albanians went over to Islam to escape the greed and hellenizing pressure of these bishops.

¹⁴ Personal note: my family has memories of a Daughter of Charity, Sabine Bridoux, called Sr. Xavier (1821-1882), decorated with the Légion d'Honneur by General Mac Mahon during the siege of Sebastopol. She was the sister of my great-great-grandfather on my mother's side. It should not be forgotten, however, that Fr. Étienne was opposed to any honorary distinctions, as he recalled in a letter to Boré dated 18 December 1852.

¹⁵ *Vie de M. Étienne, XIV^e Supérieur Général*, par un prêtre de la Mission, Paris 1881, pp. 372-386.

¹⁶ JEAN-ARNAULT DÉRENS, "Jean-Claude Faveyrial (1817-1893), lazariste amoureux de la "Turquie d'Europe," in *Peuples du monde*, n. 360 (September 2002) 33-35.

Fr. Boré was kept informed of this feeling thanks to the Vincentians of Thessalonica who told him of the desire of certain Bulgarian Orthodox villages that wished to go over to Catholicism. He took part personally on several occasions to gain the freedom, thanks to his friendly relations with Ali Pasha, Minister of Foreign Affairs, of several unjustly imprisoned Bulgarians. More especially, he welcomed to Bebek, Dragan Tsankof, an ardent patriot completely devoted to the political and religious emancipation of Bulgaria. Despite the opposition of the Greek patriarchate, he put at Tsankof's disposition the press of Saint-Benoît, which allowed him, in 1859, to print a weekly newspaper in Bulgarian, called *Bulgaria*.

It was at this moment that a Bulgarian delegation, in the name of 3,000 fellow Christians and supported by Fr. Boré, officially requested their attachment to the Catholic Church, through the help of Bishop Brunoni, Vicar Apostolic of Constantinople. At the head of this group was an archimandrite, Josif Sokolski who, despite his 72 years, was chosen as the head of this nascent community of United Bulgarians. Boré served as translator and accompanied him to Rome, where Pius IX consecrated him bishop on 14 April 1861.

The beginning of this little community was difficult. Sokolski disappeared mysteriously on a Russian ship, and his successors had a difficult time taking over. Nevertheless, the Bulgarian Catholic Church gradually grew in strength, thanks in particular to the Bulgarian seminary at Zeitenlik, a suburb of Thessalonica. Boré blessed it in 1864 accompanied by his confrere, Fr. Bonetti, future Vicar Apostolic of Macedonia. One of the graduates of this seminary was Fr. Dimitri Bogdanoff (1894-1984), a Vincentian, who was the last archimandrite to serve the little church of Bulgarian Catholics in Istanbul. The conclusion of this effort of evangelization fell to Fr. d'Alzon, Superior General of the Assumptionists, who confided to Propaganda Fide that "the Lazarist method... was truly the best to bring these people to the true faith."¹⁷

Dragan Tsankof continued to live at Bebek where he gave lessons in Bulgarian. For Fr. Boré, this was an important element in making Catholic doctrine known to Tsankof's former fellow Christians. The favorable treatment he received, however, was not to everyone's liking. At the same time, Boré was reproached for his frequent and prolonged absences from Bebek, which was being felt in the declining success of the students. In fact, he was much taken up by

¹⁷ IVAN SOFRANOV, *Histoire du mouvement bulgare vers l'Eglise catholique au XIX^e siècle*, Desclée, Paris 1960, p. 208. See also YVES DANJOU, "L'œuvre des Lazaristes dans les Balkans," in *Vincentiana* 38:4-5 (1994) and STAFFORD POOLE, "Eugene Bore and the Bulgarian Catholic Movement," in *Vincentian Heritage*, 16:2 (1995) 193-207.

Bulgarian matters. He spent several weeks in Macedonia, visiting the Bulgarian villages desirous of becoming Catholic. He also took some time to found the mission of Monastir (today called Bitola). He regularly paid rapid visits to the islands of Naxos and Santorin to see his confreres. In April 1864, he went to France to attend the inauguration of the Berceau of Saint Vincent de Paul.

All this moving about was in the order of things, but his trips kept Fr. Boré from following closely matters at home. In addition, his whole character led him to take decisions that drew criticism. In April 1866, the Superior General sent two representatives to take stock of things. At the conclusion of their visits, in a heavy-handed decision, the school at Bebek was transferred to Saint-Benoît and Fr. Boré was summoned to Paris. In a letter of 27 September 1866, Fr. Étienne had to explain the matter to Rome in succinct but precise terms: "Although Fr. Boré, the Prefect Apostolic, brings together the most eminent qualities and an exalted virtue, he lacked tact and appreciation in the direction of people."

His departure for Paris was for Boré a genuine rupture in relation to the mission where he had ardently been invested intellectually and morally and had exercised a spirit of remarkable faith. Faithful to himself, however, he accepted his change with profound obedience, and offered no criticism of a decision that seemed to him to lack proper motives. In any case, the Superior General, Jean-Baptiste Étienne, kept confidence in him by soon naming him Secretary General of the Congregation. He faithfully assumed his new role, taking it as a duty to answer swiftly all the letters he received. He kept his missionary spirit alive whenever he had the occasion to preach, and he also became the procurator of the missions. He admired the extraordinary influence of the Miraculous Medal, by then internationally known. It seems quite likely that he was the author, in 1873, of the biography of the confessor of St. Catherine Labouré, *Vie, vertus et mort de M. Jean-Marie Aladel*, which contains interesting information about the visions at the rue du Bac.¹⁸

For his part, he remained faithful to visiting the houses of the Daughters of Charity, whose Director he became after his arrival in Paris. He often went to the house of Arcueil-Cachan where his goodness impressed the sick and elderly he found there. He stayed in this house in 1870 when the Prussians were besieging Paris. He did not spare his own pain to comfort the persons in the house as well as the soldiers who had established a first-aid station there. Sometime later, while the revolutionary Commune was imposed on

¹⁸ R. LAURENTIN, *Vie de Catherine Labouré. Preuves*, vol. II, DDB, Paris 1980, pp. 581-582.

Paris following this war, he gave proof of a special courage amid great danger. Twice he was arrested by the federated troops who then threatened him. People then begged him to take refuge in Versailles where the legitimate government was located, and he did so on 8 April 1871, barely escaping the death that befell several priests in Cachan.

When calm was restored, he returned to his usual activities, despite a sometimes chancy health. In fact, at the beginning of 1874, a grave and painful illness immobilized him for two months in the sisters' house at Cachan. Since his body was covered with sores and he had an intense fever, he prepared himself for death. However, at the end of a novena to the Sacred Heart, he recovered, contrary to all expectations. He returned to Paris to be present for the last hours of Fr. Étienne, who died 12 March 1874 after 30 years as Superior General.

The General Assembly that followed was very impressive. It brought together 85 members and, for the first time, all the missions were represented there, including those of China, Abyssinia and Persia. Fr. Boré, elected Secretary of the Assembly, was surprised to see his name come out of the ballot box. On 11 September, he was elected Superior General. In his Latin discourse closing the Assembly, he showed himself to be an ever-faithful observer of the holy Rules of the Congregation. The tone was given to which he would remain faithful, and which would be maintained by Fr. Fiat, the Assistant General who would become his successor.

Meanwhile, he had plenty of problems since Europe was being shaken by many political upheavals, whose price the Church and especially the religious congregations paid. When Fr. Boré wanted to travel to Rome to present his respects to Pope Pius IX, he discovered sadly that a number of Italian houses had been obliged to close, and that the Pope himself had been obliged to restrict himself to the confines of the Vatican. At the same time, the Vincentians were violently expelled from Germany, while in Austria new laws hostile to the Church were voted in.

Amid all this, Fr. Boré maintained his courage and rejoiced in the 260 persons who composed the Maison-Mère in 1875. After visiting Italy, he had the joy of traveling, along with Sr. Lequette, Superioress General of the Daughters of Charity, to Great Britain and Ireland, where he was warmly received. In France, he encouraged his confreres to go on pilgrimage to Montmartre, where the Basilica of the Sacred Heart was being built, recalling that St. Vincent and his first confreres had tried to go there to venerate the first martyrs of Paris. He also loved to refer to St. Vincent. He showed himself to be severe toward family visits, since they were opposed to Vincent's

spirit. He accepted the seminary of Troyes since this was the first seminary established by St. Vincent after that of Annecy.

He had a special joy in celebrating what was believed at the time to be the 300th anniversary of the birth of St. Vincent de Paul. On 24 April 1876, he went with a large concourse of people to the Berceau near Dax where, he wrote in a circular letter: "Vincent de Paul was born in a humble hamlet of the Landes, a blessed location, which the great heart of my venerable predecessor, Fr. Étienne, had nearly transfigured by bringing together so many examples of multiple works of charity around the monumental chapel, inaugurated by him with so much solemnity on 24 April 1864."

In the midst of all this, foreign lands still held their attraction for him. He was glad to visit Algeria, a country he first saw in 1851 in company with Étienne and where he made a great impression through his knowledge of Arabic. He visited with interest the three major seminaries of Algiers, Oran and Constantine, all Vincentian directed. Some while later he went through Belgium to visit Poland and Austria, a trip that brought him as much joy as admiration. This did not keep him from following the development of the Congregation in other parts of the world, as in the United States, in South America, in Ethiopia or in China.

However, after his travels to central Europe, he experienced a deep fatigue. During one night, he was overcome by a great weight that revealed pulmonary congestion. He was unable to improve. When Cardinal Guibert was informed, he came with his coadjutor, Bishop Richard, to visit the dying man. The cardinal said when he left: "This is how the saints die." One hour later, Eugène Boré breathed his last. It was 3 May 1878. A small cross was found on him, a distant souvenir of a dear friend, with this inscription: "In hoc signo vinces" (In this sign you will conquer). These words summarize perfectly his life and they express the missionary ideal that he always lived out.

(JOHN E. RYBOLT, C.M., translator)

The Martyrdom of Rev. Nicolas Van Kleef, C.M.

by Teodoro A. Ríos, C.M.

US Eastern Province



Account of the Martyrdom of Fr. Nicolas

On 6 May 1989, I left Puerto Armuelles where I was assigned in my pastoral work, and went to Concepción, Bugaba. The next day presidential elections were scheduled, and I needed to vote in a precinct in Concepción, located in Daniel Octavio Crespo College. The days before the elections you could feel the tension on the streets because of the Military Dictatorship.

I was staying at the Parish House. Early in the morning I went to vote hoping to return to Puerto Armuelles the same day. I intended to celebrate Mass in one of the banana farms which were under my care.

Before I left to vote I had breakfast with Fr. Nicolas Van Kleef. He was an early riser, even though, it took him a while longer to get ready in the morning because he was a paraplegic. That Sunday morning, 7 May, as usual, he had Mass for the community of Santa Marta. I went to vote around 7:00 a.m. I left Nico home. He would leave a little later for Santa Marta which was only 15 minutes away from the house on Concepción hill.

As I arrived to the voting precinct there was a delay. Members of the army were there with their rifles drawn. The people waiting to vote were calm.

On two occasions, as I waited in line to vote, two people approached me and told me at my ear that they had killed a priest in Santa Marta. Those days one heard all kinds of rumors, so I did not give too much importance to what I heard. I knew I had left Nico in the Parish House and so I did not give much credibility to the news.

But I began to get concerned about the rumor. It was 9:00 a.m. and the voting precinct was still not opened. I left the line and told the people near me that I would return. I hurried up to the Parish House. I did not want to believe that Nico was dead. As I ran I thought I would never get there. The nine blocks seem interminable.

When I arrived I found Fr. Kevin Lawlor speaking to a man in front of the house. I waited for a while. I noticed Kevin's serious and alarming demeanor.

I asked him: "Is it true what I hear about Nico?" He shook his head without saying anything, and then he said: "What are we going to do?" I said: "Let us go to the Defense Ministry Headquarters" (it was just one block away).

We arrived there and saw hundreds of troops getting ready to guard the voting precincts.

I asked for the lieutenant on duty. We waited for a while. When he finally appeared I said to him: "They killed Fr. Nico." He did not say anything, but kept his eyes on the floor. "Where is Father? Where is the boy who accompanied him? Where is Father's automobile?" To all these questions he only said that he needed time to investigate, and he left. In the meantime, another young official appeared, I believe he was the captain, who told me that he did not have authorization to give me any information. "Tomorrow," he said, "the commando will release a declaration on the case." I was furious and angry, and told him I could not wait until tomorrow. Realizing that he would not give me an answer, I asked him for his own identification, but he refused. Fr. Kevin, silent and sad, had stood at my side all this time. Suddenly the lieutenant returned and told us that Fr. Nico was in the Regional Hospital in David. The forces in the Department of Defense had taken him there. The young man who accompanied Nico, as well as Fr. Nico's automobile, were also there. I became aware that in order to save this young man's life we needed to act fast.

Immediately we left for David looking for the Bishop, Msgr. Daniel E. Nuñez, who had been informed of the tragic event. Meanwhile, the news about Fr. Nico was spreading very fast. We took Bishop Nuñez with us, and went directly to the headquarters of the fifth military zone. There we talked to the colonel on duty who told us that Fr. Nico was improving according to what he had heard. I answered him: "How can he improve when half of his face was shot

out by an AK-47.” I added that our presence here had to do with the tragedy that had happened in Santa Marta.

We wanted to know who was the soldier who shot him. He told me, visibly disturbed, but without looking at me, that the soldier who shot him had been suspended from the Arm Forces, and that he had been arrested.

We demanded to see the young man who accompanied Fr. Nico (we were afraid for the young man’s safety, since we knew what G-2, the State Security Forces, were capable of doing). We also demanded the return of the automobile, (this would be evidence, which we were afraid they would erase), where Fr. Nico was shot, and a copy of the declaration that the young man had made, either in writing or on tape.

The colonel agreed and sent somebody for the young man. He also ordered someone, presumably an officer of the G-2, to return the automobile to us. The G-2 official told him that he was not authorized to do this, to which the colonel angrily answered: “Give the car to the priests.” In regard to the young man’s declarations, he told us that there was nothing in writing or on tape.

Before we left I asked about what orders were given to the soldiers who were guarding the voting places. He told me that these soldiers were not allowed to carry arms, nor point them at anyone. At that Bishop Nuñez, known to be a very calm person, exclaimed in a loud voice: “Lies, you are intimidating the people.” The colonel did not respond and left.

They brought the young man who had accompanied Fr. Nico to the moment of his assassination. He was pale, scared, but calm. He told us that his brother had gone with him from Concepción to David. He said that army soldiers took them to their headquarters. They did not hit them, but questioned them. This young man was 16 years old. As he was being questioned, the soldier kept hitting the wall with a stick, and warned the young man that he must say that what had happened to Fr. Nico was an accident and nothing else. Having his older brother on his side, he was brave enough to insist over and over again that it was not an accident. A few minutes later they gave us Fr. Nico’s automobile and we left.

Instead of going to the hospital, we went to the Bishop’s Office in David and met with the Diocesan Human Rights Committee presided by Bishop Nuñez, where the young man reported what had happened. That same day, Bishop Nuñez sent a letter to all the parishes and people throughout the diocese describing what had happened to Fr. Nico. I believed we needed to act fast since we feared for the lives of the young man and his brother. It is well known that many people had disappeared during the military dictatorship, for example, Fr. Héctor Gallego. We also wanted to

keep the automobile as proof of the crime, since there was blood and other things inside the car. I must add that two other priests accompanied us to the military headquarters. We mistrusted the authorities, and wanted to make sure that the young man's integrity and his family would be protected, as well as whatever other evidence we could gather related to the crime. It was our hope that, when the political situation changed, we could have a just investigation.

Some of us returned to the hospital and others went to the Parish House in Concepción. In the hospital we found out that Fr. Nico was in extremely critical condition, hanging on to his life. The doctors were doing everything possible to save him. Bishop Nuñez was allowed to see him and he could not contain his tears at what he saw. For the next few hours we did not get any information about Nico's condition. Later, the doctors gave us some brief information, but nothing official.

We knew that Nico was dying. Even one of the doctors said: "We cannot believe how he is still alive with such a wound; he should have died instantly." Well, that was Fr. Nico Van Kleef, a Vincentian Missionary with an indomitable spirit. Only Christ and the poor could soften his life. The fatal accident, which had put him in a wheelchair, had taught him how to endure pain and suffering.

Meanwhile, in the Parish House in Bugaba, the phone was ringing off the wall. People offered their sympathy and prayers, as well as expressions of anger for such an abominable event. Many people called from parishes throughout the diocese as well as from foreign countries. International Organizations for Justice and Peace, both civil and ecclesiastical, made clear their complaints and condemnation of the crime. They offered their condolences and solidarity with our parish and us. Many people came to our Parish House offering their condolences during this sad time.

The next day, Bishop Nuñez, meeting with his Presbyterial Council, received the news that Fr. Nico had died. The Presbyterial Council, presided by the Bishop, put out a press release denouncing the crime and making the Armed Forces responsible for it. They also offered forgiveness to those responsible for such a crime.

We worked through the bureaucracy to have Fr. Nico's body released to us, and to obtain the death certificate. It was no easy task for it took two days before a doctor could be found to sign the death certificate. Many people wanted to be present at the Funeral Mass. On Tuesday, 9 May, Nico's body was viewed all night in the Church of the Immaculate Conception. That night was truly a Vincentian experience of love and fraternal charity. Some people prayed in church next to Nico's body. Others offered hospitality to those present. Some volunteers prepared the stage outside where the

Funeral Mass would take place. A couple spent the whole night arranging white flowers on a big cross that would be placed on the stage during the Funeral Mass. Red and white colors, martyrdom and resurrection adorned the altar.

The next day, Wednesday, 10 May, Bishop Nuñez presided the Funeral Mass. Many priests and about 4000 people attended the Mass on a beautiful sunny morning.

Yet you could feel an atmosphere of mistrust and suspicion among the people. In their midst, you could see strange men taking pictures and taping the Mass. They were observing everything and everyone. We knew they were from the government. I was asked to give the homily. I believe I was asked because, being a Panamanian citizen, they could not deport me. Others, especially foreign confreres, might have run the risk of deportation, especially if they said something against the government. My homily was a reflection, in the light of the gospel, of the witness of Fr. Nico's life, both in his Vincentian priestly ministry and in his tragic death. I emphasized Fr. Nico's vocation as a servant of Christ to the people of Panama.

On two occasions I had to stop, overcome by emotion. Several times I was interrupted by applause. It was a solemn and sacred celebration full of emotion. I saw people crying during Mass. At the end of the Mass, Fr. Nico's casket was carried to the hearse by a group of priests. From there the funeral precesion proceeded to Santa Rosa, to the church where Fr. Nico was pastor and next to which he would be buried.

The trip took about 20 minutes. On the road there was a police blockade. Everybody had to stop, and we are asked to present documentation, such things as driver's licenses, while they took notice of the automobiles' license plates. They made our trip difficult. When we arrived at the Pan-American road, at the entrance to Santa Rosa, we stopped and decided to walk the rest of the way. Suddenly an Air Force jet flew over us to intimidate us. Some of us were afraid; others became angry. It was a final stroke of force and lack of respect.

Ahead of us, as we were walking, Fr. Nico's wheelchair took a prominent place. No doubt it impressed a lot of people. Behind the wheelchair someone carried the cross and then came the hearse with Fr. Nico's body, followed by many people. Suddenly it became dark and a rainstorm soaked all of us for 15 minutes. Nobody left. We arrived at the burial place, Nico's body was lowered and, amid prayers, people's pronouncements, flower offerings, etc., we concluded the ceremony. The previous four days had been long, emotional and trying. We needed to rest so that we could plan ahead. It was my intention to seek justice, not only for the soldiers who

killed Fr. Nico, but also for those in the Defense Department who were responsible for this great violation of human rights, as well as the violent climax that engulfed Panama in those days, and which culminated with the assassination of Fr. Nico Van Kleef.

Fr. Nicolas Van Kleef, the Missionary

Fr. Nico, inspired by his uncle Elias Van Kleef, who was working with the Mayans, arrived in Guatemala after his ordination. In 1965, he went to Varaguas, Panama, where he stayed for the next ten years. In 1976, together with Fr. Jan Hoogenboom, he continued his work in Alanje with the Missionary Team in Concepción. There he worked for ten more years, until he went to live in Concepción, Bugaba, where he ministered to ten communities having Santa Marta as their center.

It was when he came to Alanje that I got to know him. I would like to point out some special characteristics that I observed in Fr. Nico:

1. His witnessing in the face of pain. Any person who suffers a devastating accident that leaves him paralytic can hardly animate others in their difficulties. As a human being, Nico obviously suffered a lot not being able to walk. I knew that he enjoyed football very much. During Mass, on the occasion of the celebration of his Silver Jubilee in Volcán, he said, "When I was ordained I told the Lord that I wanted to preach the Good News with joy. It has been difficult to do that from a wheelchair, but I have tried." Immediately his eyes filled with tears. This was the only time I saw tears in Nico's eyes. He was trying to overcome his own emotions. Nico had a great sense of humor. With his magic tricks he made children and adults laugh. He always got involved in meetings, social gatherings, and always wanted to see people happy. He was especially mindful of the poor, and the youth. He always tried to lift up people.
2. His dedication to the Mission. Everyday he would visit the Parish Communities, celebrating the Eucharist, baptizing, hearing confessions, and presiding at Funeral Masses. He was very attentive to the social needs of the people: respect and promotion of women, fighting those vices which corrupted the youth, the construction of libraries in the community. He published catechetical pamphlets for the laity. He gave many conferences and talks in schools and colleges. He emphasized sports, and he did not shy away from denouncing injustices, especially against the poor. Fr. Nico loved the people, and in all the places where he served he formed authentic Christian communities. This was a tremendous work especially for a missionary in a wheelchair.

3. Importance of Ongoing Formation. Fr. Nico enjoyed theological discussions. Many times he called to share with me some article on the Church, or something else he had read. He knew how important it was to read and to keep up with new theological and biblical investigations. He would ask me about the Panamanian culture. He was a very intelligent priest with a critical and analytical mind, and he made great efforts to become inculturated. He received magazines and pamphlets from Holland and some Latin American countries, which kept him up-to-date on the current affairs of the Church in Europe and the world.

Conclusion

I would like to finish with two points that trouble me: one is an enigma, and the other is a challenge.

An enigma: Even though a trial took place and the soldier who shot Fr. Nico was sentenced, I will always wonder if he did it alone or if he received orders from above to do it. If the latter is the case, I ask myself: Who gave the order? The reason for this doubt on my part is that history has shown us that military dictatorships have always operated under the code of secret and blind obedience. We will never know who else was responsible. What we know is that during those years there were many rumors. For example: The security services had a list of all those persons, including priests, who were adverse to the regime. It is possible that they made a mistake with Nico, and that their intentions were to kill someone else, perhaps one of us. When we see what happened throughout 20 years of dictatorship, including the disappearance of Fr. Héctor Gallego in 1971, one can imagine what they were capable of doing.¹

A challenge: Our confrere, Fr. Nico Van Kleef, C.M., will always represent for us a Vincentian challenge in the service of the poor. Both his life and death are a witness to this challenge. He gave his life in the service of Christ and the poor. The Catholic Church has requirements and ways to officially recognize a person as a martyr. Fr. Nicolas Van Kleef is a martyr for two reasons:

1. If to be a martyr one has to die in defense of the faith, Nico did that. It happened one Sunday morning when he was inviting people to the Holy Eucharist. Because he insisted on that invitation he suffered martyrdom.

¹ Cf. *Labor de la Comisión de la Verdad - Informe Especial*, 2002, Impresos Tavial, S.A., Panamá, Defensoria del Pueblo.

2. We lived under a regime of institutionalized violence, which became apparent in concrete cases of violations of human rights, such as the right to life and dissension. When all doors are shut for the people, the only avenue for expression is the Church. We, Vincentian priests of the Missionary Team of Concepción, defended the people, and were being scrutinized because of our stand against the injustices committed against them. A clear example of this was the annulment of the presidential elections of 7 May 1989 when the military realized that they had lost them. Today we know of about 100 cases of people who disappeared or were assassinated during the dictatorship. To this day, those responsible have not been brought to trail.²

It is for this reason that we must place Fr. Van Kleef's martyrdom in the context of that situation of injustice.

The document *Justice in the World* from the 1971 Synod of Bishops under Pope Paul VI's Pontificate states in its last paragraph: "*The work for justice and participation in the transformation of the world are clearly constitutional dimensions of the preaching of the gospel....*" If this is true, it is clear that Fr. Nicolas Van Kleef died for the cause of justice in preaching the gospel. Fr. Nicolas Van Kleef is a martyr for the faith, and so are Fr. Héctor Gallego, Msgr. Romero and many others in this suffering Latin-American Continent.

Nico, because of his Vincentian priestly life even to his own death, is a martyr for the faith who challenges us Priests of the Mission to live more authentically our Vincentian vocation.

"Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you because of me" (Mt 5:11).

"If fact, the hour is coming when everyone who kills you will think he is offering worship to God. They will do this because they have not known either the Father or me" (Jn 16:2b-3).

² *Ibid.*

“ANNOUNCING THE MASS”

To Nico Van Kleef

(Fr. Teddy Ríos, C.M.)

May - 1989
I arrive on the 7th.
It is morning
a Sunday.
A somber
hope,
invades the atmosphere.
A car goes around
a long way;
several times...
a message:
“In fifteen
minutes
Mass in the church.”
Suddenly, a uniform!
an arrogant voice.
“What are you doing?”
“I am announcing the Mass.”
An order!
a gun,
a canon,
the bang,
the shot,
the blood,
the life which slips away,
the death.
The fact — Good Friday on Sunday!
“I believe that you killed him!”
“He did not obey me!”
A paralytic,
a human being,
Christian,
apostle-priest.
It is Sunday
the day of the Resurrection
Alleluia!

POEM TO FR. NICOLAS VAN KLEEF, C.M.

(by Brother Cresencio Tenorio Abrego, C.M.)

I

Father Nico,
 your foot prints
are still fresh on our soil
 and the sierra hears your
 voice early in the morning.
 The crackle of your wheelchair
 sleeps away quietly as the soft
 breeze of the volcano resounds
 your words:
I WANT TO BE GOOD NEWS.

II

That abominable
 arm is now silent,
but not your words....
 Because they
 are made of hope,
 and the gospel wick is burning
 in the poor who heard you
 and trusted you.
 Your legacy
CONTINUES TO LIVE IN THEM.

III

Bleeding, bleeding, speaking loudly
 from a wheelchair announcing
 the Good News you are always
 triumphant.
 Though the indignant commander
 of violence is not gone, though
 unnoticed,
 in the present system,
 Nico, you are the valiant emblem
WHO WILL NEVER DISAPPEAR.

IV

Today it will not be with
rifles and guns to quench
and silent the battles of the
poor.
Nobody will silence you,
Nico, because you have risen
with Christ,
and your message
continues to be new and palpitates
in them

TO WHOM YOU DEDICATED YOUR LIFE.

V

The arm of taxation continues to kill
the innocent, the same as the
lieutenant.
With his rifle drawn,
Your voice is the right that every
poor person proclaims, the trumpet which
in heroic morning will not cease
to sound inviting

ALL THE HUMAN RACE

to the Resurrection.

(PRUDENCIO RODRIGUEZ DE YURRE, C.M., translator)

VINCENTIAN SOLIDARITY FUND METHODS FOR MAKING A CONTRIBUTION

Provincial and Individual Contributions

1. Checks made payable to: “Congregazione della Missione” and with “Deposit Only” written on the back. These should be sent to:

Elmer Bauer III, C.M., *until 31 December 2006*

John Gouldrick, C.M., *after 1 January 2007*

Treasurer General

Via dei Capasso, 30

00164 Roma

Italy

2. Other possibilities for bank transfers can be discussed with the Treasurer General.

In every case:

1. All gifts received will be acknowledged.
2. If your contribution is not acknowledged in a reasonable time, please contact us for clarification.
3. Please inform us if you are making any transfer of money, as described above.