

Inculturation of the Vincentian Charism in Latin America

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1. THE WONDER OF A FOREST

The best comparison I could find to focus this work was to imagine myself in a forest where there were all kinds of trees and bushes: some tall, strong and robust, others very leafy. These were the most numerous and the most striking. But I also came across other trees that were less attractive for their size (smaller), for their shape (twisted, rough); but, in the final instance, these trees also were part of the forest. There was also no lack of lesser kinds of bushes. And, to no one's surprise, grass and even weeds had grown in the forest. All of these were part of the forest. In fact, they were the forest.

Dear reader, this image can help you as well to understand what I am going to show in this article about "inculturation of the Vincentian charism in Latin America." It caused me to reflect much as I got more deeply into it, but it has also filled me with evermore Vincentian and missionary conviction and satisfaction.

2. MAKING AN EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

This work has proved very difficult in many aspects: having to reduce to a minimal number of pages the miles and miles of material compiled in its preparation because our territory is miles and miles long. Long as well is the history to be verified. Another problem was having to be critical, and with that, the fear of possibly distorting the intimate truth of the facts, and, above all, the lived experience of the people which cannot be measured by the tiny lines on the ruler of criticism. There is the fear of being unjust precisely by trying to be just; the fear of bearing out the gospel warning: carefully watching the specks of dust that can be beams, or not seeing the beams thinking they are simply dust; and that because of having necessarily

to leave in silence long stretches of history and the testimony of many lives. Despite everything, I have learned much — more than just intellectually and in a Vincentian manner. I love my vocation more. I admire more my Congregational and provincial roots. I recognize and respect more my Vincentian forefathers who worked on this continent. As I say that, I am already affirming part of the response for this work.

Throughout the preparation of this work, I have found myself in circumstances similar to those we experienced when we heard speak of and focused upon the ideas of the “discovery” and the evangelization of America. What for some was an epic, for others was an outrage. So let not criticism or scientific rigor produce short-sightedness with regard to the simple vision of lived experiences; nor let existential or sentimental oversimplification justify or ennoble the trivial or ordinary. Rather let good sense demonstrate the greatness of some facts which have been written, many times with blood, almost always with sweat and suffering, and always with the grace of the Spirit — the missionary work of the sons of Saint Vincent de Paul in Latin America.

I have had to make a choice regarding how to focus this work: to do it on a theoretical plane, i.e., as an ideological reflection, or to stick to the historical recollection of facts. Or there could be a third way: to focus on the historical data bearing in mind the ideological aspect. The first option would provide no more interest than passing some time for the growth of criticism, *but it would also recondition the floor so as to provide firmness without taking away solidity*. With the second option, I would commit myself to an historical venture that could not possibly give satisfaction because of the scope the facts demand, *but this contribution is necessary to base oneself in the data of history and life*. With the third option, I think I can allow for critical reflection and allow as well for the knowledge of what was done and lived, especially by our forefathers.

As I have said, I will present this work in three parts which will make it less extensive, but will give a more complex vision:

1. What should be said about the terms expressed in the title of this article? (ideological part)
2. What are the historical facts which respond to the title? (historical part)
3. What conclusions can we draw? (reflective/conclusive part)

Part I:

WHAT SHOULD BE SAID ABOUT THE TERMS EXPRESSED IN THE TITLE OF THIS ARTICLE?

Inculturation – Charism – Latin America: three words which are not easy to either understand or with which to work. Each one has its complexity and its own world or relationships. The first, inculturation, is difficult to achieve. The second, charism, is difficult to interpret. The third, Latin America, is difficult because of its geographical and cultural breadth.

1. IN-CULTURATION

Who and how many people have known how to “inculturate” themselves in the totality of their lives, work and persons? Certainly God himself, as the Lord of the Chosen People, shows us throughout the Old Testament his wish to inculturate himself with his people. But there are some scenes which cause us to question what inculturation should be. A simple and clear example of this: the passage about Abraham and his son Isaac (complete savagery for our mentality today, but perfectly in tune with the mentality of those times not as humanized as ours). Offer a human sacrifice, and to please the gods no less! If the Lord, because of wanting to inculturate himself had accepted the inhuman sacrifice (nothing less than filicide), when would that sacrificial culture have ended? This is a clear example about knowing that inculturation requires a keen sense of smell in order to discern what must be changed or what should be taken on or left aside.

In any case, to point out the difficulty, and in the same way the model of what true inculturation means in its most radical and perfect sense, we have the example of Jesus of Nazareth who, being God and never ceasing to be God, “became equal to us in everything except sin,” as Saint Paul tells us. Paul himself was a clear model of inculturation, because, being a Jew, and a cultured one, he knew how to teach Peter himself what becoming fully inculturated meant: in his person, in his work and with the Gospel, taking on the different cultures of the pagan peoples in order to truly evangelize them.

In addition to them, and very like them, we have one or another saint, although not all, like Teresa of Calcutta, to cite a contemporary, or Justin De Jacobis or Perboyre to mention some of our own, who knew how to inculturate. Without doubt, there have been and there are saints who have done it.

But, how many saints or people are there with this dimension? Because, to inculturate oneself, one must know how to and want to uproot himself (without ceasing to be who one is as a person); it is

being born again in another world, with other people, other customs and another mentality in order to take on the essences of the other culture and not just its accidents or way of acting in one or another circumstance. To inculturate oneself truly is much more than changing a manner of dressing, learning a new language, performing some rites. It is not a question of no longer thinking, but of thinking in another way, with other categories (almost always very different ones), and working accordingly. It is undergoing a whole “kenosis” so that a “planning out” of the other can occur. Is this an exaggeration? Perhaps, but perhaps more of a demand. How right Nicodemus was when he asked the Lord, who was speaking to him of “inculturating” himself in the divine (just as the Master had inculturated himself in the human) “*Can one who is old be born again?*”

Someone, speaking about this topic, said to me, *when the hour of truth arrives every true inculturation ends in martyrdom*. Examples confirm this. Naturally, all of us like to see the ear of grain already flowering, but we resist being the grain that must be buried in the ground and die.

Culture has been defined as “the totality of human activity, intelligence and emotions, the human search for meaning, human customs and ethics across a culture.”

Gaudium et Spes confirms this in No. 53: inculturating oneself is a laying aside (so as not to impose) and a taking on (to accept). Therefore, one cannot understand what inculturating oneself is by trying to leave aside the culture of certain peoples of such a time and place. For the same reason, in order that any evangelizing effort or action have force and bear fruit, the grain of the gospel must be buried — or in our case the grain of the Vincentian charism — so that, by dying, i.e. losing the form of one culture, it may attain the new life of evangelic fruit — or Vincentian fruit — in these other peoples, times and places; in a word, in these new cultures which are not those of Saint Vincent and his missionaries, nor those of their countries (Europe), nor those of their time (the 17th or 19th century).

The application of inculturation to the missionary reality has been taken more into account since John Paul II spoke about it in the encyclical, *Slavorum Apostoli*, numbers 21 and 26, and it must touch the same vital nerve of the cultures so it can be vibrant and remain as something of the culture and not be thrown away as something foreign.

For a greater precision about the term “In-Culturation”

In order not to undervalue the work carried out by our Vincentian missionaries in Latin America, but rather in order that, even appreciating such an admirable effort, it not be the confusion of

words and their meanings, which could cause the loss of something admirable, it may be opportune, from a critical perspective, to mention other expressions which, while they are similar, have another connotation and flavor.

This should cause us to reflect upon, in the moment of analysis, whether our “Vincentian charism” has been “inculturated” or simply “transported” or “transferred” with some minor retouching, as when a door is painted with a new color, but underneath it is still the same wood, in the same form and condition as before. Even if our missionaries had done only this, it took great and praiseworthy efforts.

“In-culturation” IS a true INSERTION, very respectful and progressive, of what is essential to the values of our charism into the very heart of the culture in such a way that the culture is not destroyed nor does the charism lose its essence and values.

John Paul II conveys these ideas to us in two of his writings: *Redemptoris Missio* and *Fides et Ratio*. We also find them in the Puebla document. A reading of these documents will clarify for us that on which the space allowed for in this article does not permit us to comment.

With regard to the inculturation of the Vincentian charism in America, the same Pope enlightens us in his *Exhortation to the Peoples of Latin America* affirming that “the process of evangelization requires a lucid, serious and orderly effort towards the evangelization of the culture.”

In our case, the inculturation of the Vincentian charism should help to purify the cultures and structures of our continent from so much injustice, poverty and misery. To what degree have we achieved this? What have we done or helped to do in this sense? In what phase of the progressive process — in three centuries — do we find ourselves? But we should also ask: What, thanks to the Vincentian charism, has been advanced, transformed, improved on our continent and Church with regard to justice, humanity and the dignity of the poor and the clergy?

2. CHARISM

At the beginning of this article we pointed out that this word was hard for us to deal with because of its interpretation. How many discussions and opinions have not been given to the exact definition or understanding of this word? What does it mean? How is it to be understood? To whom is it applied? Is it a question of heredity? Is the charism lived by the father of the family the same as the one lived by his sons? Is it not something personal and nontransferable?

We should also bear in mind that this word “charism,” although it has existed for a long time — Saint Paul in 1 Corinthians speaks of it — its use became more current after Vatican II. It was Paul VI who gave it currency, using it to refer to the charism of Religious Life as well as to that of the Founders; he conceived of it always as a gift of the Holy Spirit (*Evangelica Testificatio*, 11).

Neither Saint Vincent nor Saint Louise used the word, although each was granted his/her own charism, not for his/her own sanctification but rather for the good of the Church and of people. This is proper to the nature of the gift (*Lumen Gentium* 44, 46). In *Mutuae Relationes* 11, the charism of the Founders is spoken of as a gift and experience of the Holy Spirit to their persons, so that they could enlighten their institutes and so that the gift could be transmitted to their followers to guard, live, deepen and develop in order that each institute would be “characterized” by the living out of the charism.

Therefore, the charism, as a gift of the Holy Spirit, 1) is personal to the Founder; 2) can be collective and participated in by the Founder’s disciples; and 3) is always for the good of the Church and people. In this sense one speaks of the charism **of the** Founder (personal), the **Founder’s** charism (collective), and the charism **of the** Institute (ecclesial).

The use of other words as synonyms of charism

For an understanding that may permit us to arrive at an application of the word *charism* (although not in the precise biblical-theological-spiritual sense), it is good to know that other synonyms are frequently used such as “spirit,” “sense,” “end,” “experience,” “living out,” “mystique of action,” “vocation,” or “mission”; e.g., With what *spirit* was such an action or work done? What was or is the *sense* with which such an action was or is being done? By understanding it thus and by expressing ourselves in this way we can avoid certain difficulties, which usually occur when one thinks that, since the charism is a personal gift, a Vincentian of the 20th century cannot have the charism of Vincent de Paul (*charism of the Founder*), since Vincent de Paul is unique and unrepeatable in his being and action with all his graces, potencies and actions. But a Vincentian of the 20th century can act with the *spirit, sense, end, etc.* with which Vincent de Paul moved, lived and acted.

On the other hand, Vincent did use the word *spirit*. According to Dodin he used it 2,891 times, and with 27 meanings. In any case, such meanings can never be considered as contrary, but rather as in harmony and coherent with it.

Taking *spirit* as equal to *zeal* as a synonym of charism, it has to do with a free gift of the Holy Spirit, which is given to a person so as to be better able to live the charism, which moved the Founder and which he transmitted to the Institute, thus fulfilling the *mission*, acting with the same *spirit* or *sense*, which the charism of the Founder implies. In this way, we can say that the missionary, who lives in America in the 21st century, who does not have the personal charism which Saint Vincent had, but works with the Vincentian *spirit* or *sense*, acts with the Vincentian *charism*, or that the work he does with such *spirit* can be understood as a Vincentian work or is carried out with the Vincentian *charism*.

On the other hand, one who works with such a *spirit* or has such a *charism* is always the person, and we could never apply such a label to the works, which may or may not be carried out according to the Vincentian *end* or *spirit*, etc. For it can easily happen that the work founded is not in conformity with the Vincentian *charism* (a school for well-off students), but the missionary who works there, because he was sent and is working with the virtue of obedience, does so with true Vincentian *spirit*, *sense*, *vocation* and *mystique*, acting with an evangelic spirit; and, as priest-professor, orients the students with a commitment to justice and love for the poor and evangelizes their lives and consciences so that in their professional future they evangelize and defend and treat the poor with the dignity they deserve. It is the case of Saint Vincent himself when he worked with the grand ladies of the Parisian social set so they would love the poor. The reverse may also happen: the work may well be in line with the Vincentian charism, but the missionary may act or live without the *spirit*, *sense*, *vocation*, *mystique* = Vincentian *charism*.

As we did in the previous section, speaking of inculturation, when we asked that the charism respect the cultures so as not to invade or destroy them, now we ask that inculturation respect the charism so that the culture not adulterate the charism and change its values, which are not in its forms, but rather in the content and essence, in its most neuralgic roots. Therefore we should establish whether the charism continues with its force and efficacy without losing its own criteria, because then it would lose its essence. The charism, because it is a reality that moves in the sphere of faith, should transcend all cultures, although it can incarnate itself in all of them. Otherwise the charism would end up becoming one more culture and then it would not be either transcendent, nor truly immanent. These ideas are contained in John Paul II's encyclical *Princeps Pastorum*, 10. We could say that the inculturation and the charism should form a true matrimony, where both parts respect one another and, without losing their identity, merge into a new reality, different from either but which belongs to both, for it could not come

about without both of them. Is it not true that we have often contributed (with all the good will in the world) to divorcing this marriage of “charism-culture”?

3. LATIN AMERICA

The geographic extension and the mosaic of cultures which comprise the third term of our work is the third obstacle which presents itself in the writing of this article.

Ever since the discovery of our Latin America, the European scientists of the time have understood that the discovered territory “constituted an until then unknown and extraordinarily complex continent.”

Indeed: Complex for its *surface area*: more than 42 million square kilometers.

Complex for its *distances*: between its northern and southern ends lies a distance of more than 14 thousand kilometers.

Complex for its *geographical configurations*: isthmuses, archipelagos, an immensity of islands of different sizes, peninsulas, etc.

Complex by reason of the *make up of its countries*: from Mexico to the most southern point there are 36 countries, whether islands (15) or landed nations (21).

Complex by reason of its *population*: disproportionately distributed, economically and socially unequal, ethnically composed of three great groups: American Indian, white and black.

Complex because of its *cultures*: in which the missionaries, and in this case the Vincentians, had to spread the charism.

Naturally enough, the idea of religion has special relevance for out theme. No one doubts that the Catholic religion is predominant and widely disseminated throughout the Latin American continent — the continent of hope for the Church — without discounting those areas where, because of strong Indian and black populations, ancestral cults, whether indigenous or imported, persist mixed with elements of Christian tradition and the presence of the sects as a substratum for weakening the force of the Gospel implying an urgent need for evangelization.

This profusion of facts may seem unnecessary for an article whose audience came rather late to the Central and South American continent, when it was practically all formed. True, but we all know how important (not to say, necessary) it is to take into account and

to be familiar with something of the foundations upon which a whole structure like the Latin American continent is based.

Furthermore, by having a basis for comparison, one can measure much better the work in question. The arrival of the Vincentians, as workers of the fourth or fifth hour in the harvest field (the earliest arrived at the end of the 18th, and officially at the beginning of the 19th century), came almost four centuries after the first evangelization (although they could not have arrived earlier). Only by knowing how things and, especially, people were, can our appreciation be more objective. Into which world did we go — that of the countryside or the city? In which mission fields or ethnic groups did our communities settle: where there were no priests or where there already were some? What kind of priests did we form — for America or for Europe?

Part II:
WHAT ARE THE HISTORICAL FACTS
WHICH RESPOND TO THE TITLE?

In the two centuries of missionary presence can we say that the Vincentian charism is inculturated in Latin America?

The Conference of Latin American Provinces (CLAPVI) is present in almost all of Latin America. Of the 36 countries, which make up the Latin American continent, we are in 22 of them by means of the 13 provinces, one vice-province, four delegations and one mission which make up CLAPVI and to which 700 missionaries belong.

Two warnings to better understand this work:

- When I speak of CLAPVI, I will indicate as provinces all the components of the Conference, including under this label the vice-province, delegations and mission, unless for some special reason it is better to indicate otherwise.
- I think it is fair to point out that, besides the missionaries, all the branches of the Vincentian Family are spread throughout Latin America, especially the Daughters of Charity, who also sowed the Vincentian charism on the continent. But in this work we will refer only to the work carried out by the missionaries.

There is no doubt. It is clear that the Sons of Saint Vincent are present in Latin America. But with us, is the charism or spirit of our Founder also present? Is it truly inculturated?

This is the forest about which I spoke at the beginning of this work and these are the trees that compose it. Without doubt, among them we can find trees of all kinds and sizes; but all of us together form the forest. The forest is in Latin America. In this forest one can

breathe in the atmosphere, the odor, the air, and one can see the color of the Vincentian charism.

Moving from the image-parable to the reality, and bearing in mind the ideological part of our work, I present the data and the facts so that you, dear reader, can draw your own conclusions.

1. HOW LONG HAVE WE BEEN PRESENT IN LATIN AMERICA?

According to some documents we can safely say that Brazil was in the thoughts of Saint Vincent and his first missionaries. We deduce this from the letters he wrote to Father Louis Lebreton in August 1640 (SV II, 90), and from a sermon on the Catechism between 1613 and 1616 (SV XIII, 28 ff.).

But the first real and personal arrival of the sons of Saint Vincent on this continent came in the 19th century, in 1820, and precisely in Brazil, by invitation of King John VI, to minister in the present state of Mato Grosso. The first missionaries to walk on our continent were the Portuguese Fathers Leandro Rebelo Peixoto y Castro (1781-1841) and Antonio Ferreira Viscoco (1781-1875), who was Archbishop of Mariana and whose process of canonization is being undertaken in Rome.

I purposely point out these two data: **mission** and **process of canonization** (= sanctity). Are not these two terms those that express the essence of our true charismatic Vincentian identity?



Congress of the Vincentian Family in Latin America, Caracas

2. FROM WHERE DID THE FIRST MISSIONARIES COME? Who founded the different provinces that make up CLAPVI today?

We have already pointed out that the first to arrive were missionaries from Portugal. Almost immediately afterwards came the French, who arrived in ten of the 19 present-day provinces. Next came the Dutch Fathers (in six provinces) and the Germans (in six others). The Spanish missionaries were those who arrived in the most provinces (11). Missionaries of other nationalities also came: from the United States, Poland, Italy, Yugoslavia, Slovenia and Luxemburg. Besides the missionaries from Europe, priests from other provinces in Latin America itself also made their presence felt: from Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Uruguay and Peru, etc.

3. WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE MISSIONARIES' COMING TO LATIN AMERICA?

Although there are many and varied reasons that the missionaries were called to our continent, they can be reduced to three more common reasons: they were sent by the Superiors General to give spiritual attention to the Daughters; they were called by the bishops to take care of seminaries; they were invited by some governors to minister, be missionaries (King John VI in Brazil, Queen Isabel II to go to Cuba, the sitting governor in Argentina and Chile).

How can we establish that they came to exercise the purposes for which Saint Vincent founded us?

4. WHAT ARE THE WORKS in which we have labored during our stay on this continent?

Even though the question is answered in the previous section, we have to complete it by presenting the immense work carried out by our Vincentian pioneers and their followers, following the impulse of our Vincentian charism and spirit:

In 14 of our provinces, the priests dedicated themselves to the formation of the diocesan clergy in **seminary** work. In some places they did this for more than 100 years; and in many others they staffed almost all the seminaries of the country, for example, in Ecuador, Venezuela and Colombia... *"imposing in them the sense of the charism in favor of the poor country people, forming priests who are going to work in the countryside,"* and when, for different reasons, they had to hand them over: *"They left in the clergy a deep social conscience, a sense of work, (they formed) simple, pious persons, sufficiently numerous to satisfy the needs of the country";* and everywhere *"making a great contribution to the particular churches of each nation,"* for from such *"seminaries came forth priests and bishops*

of great value." Besides attention to the formation of the clergy in the seminaries, in some provinces, like Puerto Rico, the bishop placed them in charge of retreats for ordinands and for all the clergy of the island.

In almost all the provinces and delegations they gave **popular missions** in different modalities depending on circumstances; for example, by accompanying the bishops as they made their pastoral visits, which would last two or three months; or by making of them special times for the evangelization of the poor, "*taking on many different shapes and combinations: traditional, mixed, short, long (for two years), forming parishes in a permanent state of mission, in the countryside, in the suburbs.... With all these the Congregation made a profound contribution to the religious life of the country.*"

Attention to missions among the Indians or in indigenous zones. There were 12 provinces with a presence in areas populated by indigenous peoples (Amazonia and Paraguasu in Brazil, Otomi in Mexico, Mapuches in Chile, the indigenous settlements of the Argentine pampas, the Indians of Petén in Central America, in Tierradentro de Arauca in Colombia, the indigenous area of El Limón in Costa Rica, the Moskitia in Honduras, Santo Domingo of the Colorados in Ecuador, El Alto in Bolivia, jungle and Banda del Shilcayo in Peru). In every one of these areas one could write testimonies filled with admiration. For our purposes, this small example: *the labor carried out in Costa Rica by Bishop Bernardo A. Thiel who translated into Brivi different parts of the bible and many things regarding liturgy; he was concerned about the defense of the rights of the indigenous and the poor, and he worked in the poorest area of the country, involving himself in every apostolic field: social pastoral, health, education, vocational training, neighborhoods, etc.* Speaking of the Moskitia, the chronicler describes it for us in these terms: *It deserves a separate section. A region of 1600 square kilometers, full of lagoons, given to hurricanes, rainy, where the mosquitoes swarm, rivers overflow with many consequences; where the Misquitos live, descendents of Negroes and Indians, leading a nomadic life cut off from civilization; and among whom the Father and two catechists began their work "with many sacrifices and adventures" as true heroes of Mosquitia, knowing how to deal fraternally with the hunger and sleeplessness, innumerable labors and fatigues, and so many needs of every kind that only God knows....* Everywhere, from the outset and later on, the missionaries attended to the indigenous peoples with that evangelizing and missionary spirit Saint Vincent so wished for during his life.

Parish work was also taken on from the beginning, in all the provinces, even forming in some of them the principal apostolate, or in the majority of them, almost the only work in our day, as the concentration on missions and the formation of the clergy

diminished. This work took on different modalities as years went by. But almost all the parishes were attended and run with a missionary stamp, many of them being real “Mission Houses” or places where Mission Teams were formed. Such parishes were founded in the countryside or in the suburbs of the cities where the great number of inhabitants and the lack of spiritual attention because of the shortage of priests made the presence of the missionaries an urgent necessity. In almost all of them, we can say the work was done, as they tell us was done in Mexico, where the province *lived out its missionary concern guided by the motto ‘the Province carries out its missionary vocation in parish ministry according to the specific characteristics of our charism.’* It must be noted that those who awakened the missionary potential of the priests in Mexico, and those who led them to these kinds of parishes, were the Volunteers of Charity. In Panama, where missionaries from the United States had worked attending to the Canal workers, the acceptance of parish ministry was the key element in a change towards a more missionary work, leading to a more authentic inculturation. It would be unpardonable not to point out in this profile what the work carried out through the parishes inserted in the “Young Communities” (Pueblos Jovenes) of Lima meant to the Province of Peru.

It is also true that, lately, we would have to change the qualification of *missionary* applied to our first parishes to *sacramental* now.

A very telling indication of this missionary spirit of the first founders of the provinces of the continent was the attention and dedication by many of them in various provinces to the service and care of hospitals and prisons, especially in moments of epidemics. We have heroic chapters of what we could call a true Vincentian martyrology. Many gave their lives, which was much more than giving the glass of water or the piece of bread or the medicine they also knew how to give.

Another facet we cannot leave out, in this catalogue of works carried out by our missionaries on the continent, is the area of the educational apostolate in schools and colleges with different focuses and purposes, although all could be centered on the idea of educating and forming persons, starting from Saint Vincent’s thought *that the ignorance of the people and the priests brought so many misfortunes, and in many cases put salvation itself in danger.* So we find: from schools and colleges (*where distinguished people — presidents, ministers, congressmen, artists, writers, bishops and pastors of the Church, citizens committed to the social reality in favor of the unfortunate and in the spirit of Saint Vincent were educated*) in some countries (Brazil, Costa Rica, Peru), to agricultural schools and, of course, schools for poor children. It is true that as time went by some schools for the poor became schools for the better-off. In some provinces, the priests felt obliged by the bishops to open a

school next to the parish they were offered or the house they wished to found.

It was not only by means of these traditional institutions that the confreres exercised the educational apostolate. In some provinces publishing houses were opened; in others mass media like radio and even television were employed.

The work of “catechisms” and even the translation of different parts of the bible and the liturgy, which many of our first missionaries did to form the faithful in the Christian life, are also worthy of mention in this work.

Neither can we forget the work the missionaries did from the beginning in favor of the different branches of the Vincentian Family. Some of the branches were already established in the countries before the first missionaries arrived there, as was the case with Argentina, where it was the Knights of Saint Vincent who asked the governor to call the priests to that country; or in Mexico, the Ladies of Charity. For the most part the priests created the different branches. We already said that, in not a few provinces, the Daughters demanded the presence of the priests, and in others three or four missionaries arrived together with them, as is the case of Chile and Puerto Rico, for example.

As an appendix if you wish, but also as a sign of the creativity and the search for new paths, but always in the line of the charism and with a missionary and evangelizing spirit, it is worth pointing out **new works**: the Highway Pastoral in Curitiba, or the provinces which employ mass media for evangelization (Puerto Rico, Cuba, Curitiba), as we mentioned earlier.

5. THOSE WERE THE WORKS – WHAT OF THE MISSIONARIES?

This is the most important section, but also the most difficult because of the delicacy required.

It is the most important because the charism and the spirit are in the people. In them is the life.

The works exist; they are there. The people were there and they gave their example, it is true. But who is so daring as to think he can arrive at the whole truth? Who is so fair that he cannot say that he failed to mention some whose names deserved to be written in gold or silver letters? Therefore, although in a general way, I will make some brush strokes that hopefully will produce a painting. I want to base myself on the quote of one who describes our pioneering missionaries and the founders of our present day provinces this way: *Admirable confreres, young men who spent their lives in our countries, wise men who shared their knowledge with many priests and lay people, tireless evangelizers whose testimony, more than their words or*

methods, left footprints; courageous men who never complained about leaving their homelands to take on the hardships of our underdevelopment.

Those who are **on the path to canonization** are: the first to come to Latin America, Bishop Antonio Ferriera Viscoco, and the native Peruvian and also bishop, Bishop Emilio Lisson, known as the "apostle of the poor."

But there are also some who could be honored not only for their missionary holiness, but are also worthy of sainthood; like those who gave their lives taking care of plague victims, or were victims of yellow fever (Argentina, Fortaleza, Chile); or were persecuted and exiled by anti-clerical governors (Brazil, Argentina, Ecuador, Chile, Honduras, Peru, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Central America, Mexico).

Or, without giving their lives physically, exposed them to daily sacrifice, immersed in true physical, material, cultural and relational hardships, like those who traveled inhospitable roads, in truly nomadic situations; also those who lived in the seminaries who, as one missionary said to the Superior General: *Seminary work is, to my way of thinking, the best thing for the Congregation in America, but it will always demand the greatest abnegation and will never be exempt from every kind of difficulty.*

Very worthy of bearing in mind is what the Archbishop of Curitiba, Bishop Pedro Fedalto wrote: *We can imagine and understand the sacrifices of those early times: not knowing the language, the roads of those days, with drought, mud on the curves, without electric light or running water or telephone, long journeys on the back of a donkey or horse or in a wagon....* Who would not remember what Saint Paul said in 2 Cor 11:23-29?

6. HOW WAS THE VOCATIONAL APOSTOLATE?

Another way of asking this question would be: In the beginning all the missionaries came from outside. But when did native vocations begin? As a point of departure we can say that today, in almost all the provinces, the majority of the missionaries are from the continent. But our own vocational apostolate in Latin America has a sort of common denominator, because its cause is fairly common as well. Since the first and most common ministry was in the seminaries, for reason of ethics, respect and professional pride, a mentality of not making the bishops suspicious was created. If we were working to get our own vocations, we would be taking advantage, reaping in someone else's field. Therefore the vocational apostolate for ourselves was somewhat neglected.

But this was not the case everywhere. There were provinces in which, from the very beginning, the Founding Fathers were

concerned about working for native vocations with a view to having the possibility of a province with native personnel. Thus apostolic schools, college seminaries, major and minor seminaries and houses of formation were opened with interesting projects and plans for the vocational apostolate. Today some provinces have more personnel than the original mother provinces. With great satisfaction we have today in CLAPVI provinces who are helping other provinces or mission areas with their men both within and beyond the American continent.

Another common factor in many provinces was a kind of neglect, in this sense, based on the abundance of missionaries that came from other provinces that enjoyed abundant vocations.

Also all of our provinces felt the crisis that affected the whole Church on the occasion of the whirlwind raised in the post-Conciliar years. Thanks be to God, when the waters calmed, many had overcome or are overcoming the crisis, revising their works, guiding the formation of their own men, struggling against the shortage of personnel caused by aging, facing up to the diversity of mentalities which arise and looking for new paths according to the dictates of the Vincentian charism and spirit. One Provincial Assembly said it this way: *Integral evangelization, that is, the human and Christian promotion of the poor, especially the country people, is the commitment of our apostolic life.*

Part III: WHAT CONCLUSIONS CAN WE DRAW?

After this panoramic shot, as the cinematographers would say, and completing our outline, we finish up with some brief reflections and conclusions:

1. Admitting the possible and real shadows that exist in every human endeavor, we are content because the lights that were lit in our Latin America are brighter, and the fruits that were gathered are immensely more numerous than those that were lost, thanks to the living out of the Vincentian charism.
2. The current presence of the 19 entities of CLAPVI, with its 700 missionaries, after two centuries of existence in Latin America, is a clear recognition that the work was carried out in the line of the Vincentian charism and spirituality. None of the 13 provinces, one vice-province, four delegations and one international mission, which make up CLAPVI, would exist today if the major superiors had not recognized and favored the work of the

missionaries as true sons of Saint Vincent, bearers of the charism/spirituality of the Founder on our continent. Thus we can say that the aforementioned work is a prime indication of the fidelity, cultivation, insertion and communication of the Vincentian charism by the missionaries in Latin America.

3. The place where Father Maloney had the inspiration to launch that great initiative that the Vincentian Family has today was Mexico. The place of the greatest revitalization of the AIC is Mexico. Brazil has the greatest number of members of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society.
4. As a coda to this work, I want to offer a bouquet of flowers for those who sowed the Vincentian charism with so much conviction in this Latin America of ours: *What is most important and what claims our constant gratitude is the deep spiritual action of so many and such selfless missionaries who gave everything, even their own lives, to make the spiritual and missionary presence of Vincent de Paul lasting and fruitful.* I dare to place other flowers in this bouquet, citing the authoritative words of some bishops and cardinals spoken on the occasion of the centenary celebrations of some provinces: *What a wide range of works! How commendable! The Vincentian Fathers are bearers of the work of Saint Vincent de Paul, initiated by him in the 17th century, and fostered and cared for by the Vincentians in Cuba.* Or those of the hierarchy of Ecuador who described the missionaries as: *Persons of evangelical simplicity, uncommon wisdom, tireless zeal.*

This is, without doubt, a fair evaluation of the selfless, disinterested and generous self-giving of those missionaries, the majority from Europe, who managed to place and to strengthen the bases of the Church in our countries, showing themselves to be men of prayer, study, work, dedication in such a way that they won for themselves the admiration, sympathy and affection of the people, and even the awards and recognition of the Church and the governments, but most of all the love of the poor. Their work is a hymn to the Vincentian charism with regard to the evangelization of the poor and the formation of the clergy.

(Translation: JOSEPH V. CUMMINS, C.M.)