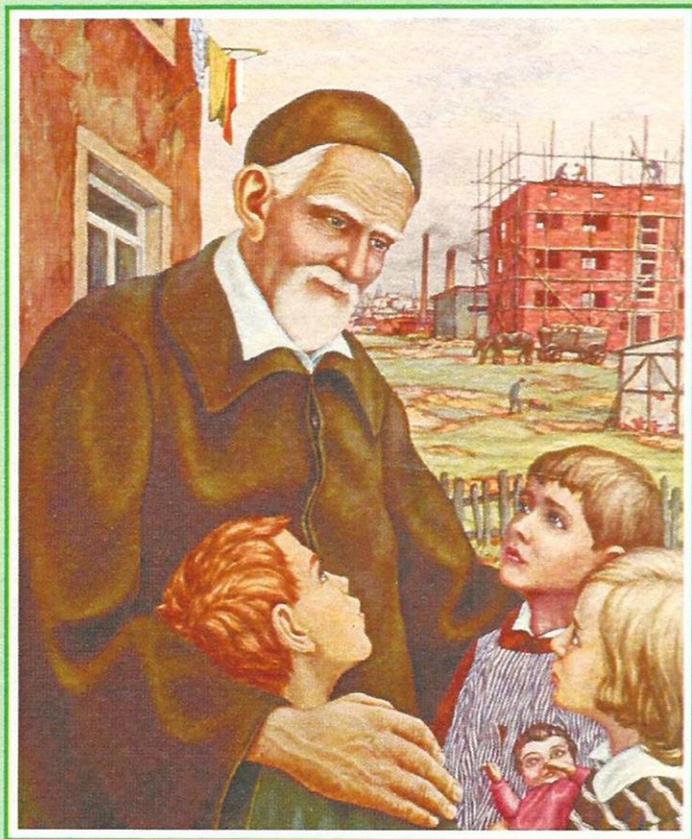


# VINCENTIANA

51<sup>th</sup> YEAR - N. 5      SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2007



## The Vincentian Missions

CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION  
GENERAL CURIA

# GENERAL CURIA

Rome, 21 October 2007

*Mission Sunday*

*To the members of the Congregation of the Mission*

## ***Tempo Forte (1-6 October) Circular***

Dear Brothers,

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

The following are some of the more significant matters that we dealt with in our *tempo forte* meeting from 1-6 October:

1. We did an overall evaluation of the **Visitors' Meeting** in Mexico. We reflected on the synthesis of the evaluation done by all the participants, as well as an evaluation that was done by the Preparatory Commission for the meeting. We discussed the possible lines of action that were drawn up in the synthesis. Some of the decisions that we made based on our studies are the following: We will recommend to the new administration, after the 2010 General Assembly, that the Visitors' Meeting continue to be held because of the value that it has for the leaders of the Congregation to dialogue among themselves and deepen their unity and their relationship with the Superior General and the Curia. In response to one of the recommendations of the synthesis, the Superior General will write a letter, summarizing the experience of the Visitors' Meeting. That will be published around 25 January, the foundation date of the Congregation of the Mission. We have formed a task force to organize and present, in a unified report to the Superior General and his council, all the pertinent materials on ongoing formation that were produced during the meeting or previous to it, as well as other materials. Then further steps will be taken to implement those at the level of the worldwide Congregation.

2. We planned the **New Visitors' Meeting** that will be held from 9-15 January 2008. We are anticipating the participation of up to 13 new Visitors for that meeting. The coordinator of the program will be Corpus Delgado, the Visitor of Zaragoza. The Superior General and the rest of the members of the General Curia will also participate

in the development of the program with the new Visitors. I would like to remind all those who are new Visitors that the follow-up program will take place in Paris, with the opportunity to get to know some of our Vincentian sites under the leadership of the Directors of CIF and Elie Delplace, the Visitor of Paris. More information regarding that will be forthcoming.

3. A commission was formed, once again, to continue the **study of the office space, etc. in the Curia**, dealing with the area of the library and the archives. New office space will be provided for the Director of Communications for the Congregation of the Mission, Julio Suescun.

4. Our **ongoing formation session** in this *tempo forte* was a visit to the archeological excavations under Saint Peter's Basilica in the Vatican. We had a special guide and the tour took about an hour and a half. This interactive, ongoing formation was open to all the members of the Curia House.

5. **Financial matters** were treated. There are a number of points to be mentioned. The Curia has been channeling funds from different provinces of Daughters and the CM, as well as individual confreres, for the earthquake relief in Peru. The International Congregation itself has taken from its Special Needs Fund donations for relief in Peru, as well as flood relief for Colombia and Northern India. We considered the possibility of replacing the late José Luis Fernández with a new member for the Financial Committee of the General Curia. We established a fixed cost for *Vincentiana*.

6. We received the report of the **Vincentian Solidarity Office** from Peter Campbell. From 1 March to 30 September, the VSO took on 28 new projects, as well as 13 micro-projects for grants. We discussed a replacement for Brother Peter, who will finish his six-year term as Administrator of the VSO in June 2008. Because of personal reasons, he has asked not to continue, so we are in the process of searching for a replacement for him. At this time, I want to thank Peter for the wonderful job he has done, together with Mr. Scott Fina, in raising funds for over 86 projects, since its beginning in 2003. In addition, they have given 38 micro-project grants to different poorer provinces in the Congregation. Therefore, the combined number of projects, together with the micro-project grants, is 124. Peter asks us to inform you that he has a new email address for the Vincentian Solidarity Office. It is [cmvso@yahoo.com](mailto:cmvso@yahoo.com). For information regarding the Vincentian Solidarity Office, you can check out its website: [www.famvin.org/vso](http://www.famvin.org/vso) and read its monthly bulletin.

7. We heard the report of Manuel Ginete, the **Delegate of the Superior General for the Vincentian Family**. Manny spoke about

the AIC International Assembly that was held in Rome in March 2007, as well as his visit to the MEGVIS meeting in Untermachtal, Germany, in April 2007. This latter meeting was attended by members of the Vincentian Family from Austria, Germany, and the Netherlands. Manny was one of the keynote speakers at the Vincentian Family Gathering in San Francisco, California, United States in May 2007. He gave a talk entitled: "The Vincentian Family Worldwide: Expanding the Circle of Solidarity." He also gave us a report on his participation in the International Visitors' Meeting in Mexico in June 2007, where he had the opportunity to meet with the core group of the Mexican Vincentian Family and talk about planning the next formation session for advisors and directors in Latin America. This will be held in February 2009. In June of that same year, a similar session will be held in Africa and, in October 2009, one will be held in the Asia-Pacific region. Manny also gave us a report on his visit to the Vincentian Family in Japan, South Korea and Vietnam during the months of July and August. He reported on his visit to the AIC meeting in the United States, where they were celebrating the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their foundation. He participated together with the Superior General, who gave the keynote address on the theme of "Honoring the Past, Celebrating the Present and Embracing the Future." This, together with a visit to the CM's United Nations Representative, Joseph Foley, took place in September. He also mentioned that from 31 January - 2 February 2008 the International Heads of the Vincentian Family will have their annual meeting in Rome.

8. Joseph Foley, the **Vincentian NGO Representative to the UN** gave us his report. In it he mentioned that this fall the United Nations will attempt to focus the attention of world leaders on the challenges of climate change and on financing for development. It is also a time when the United Nations is appealing to nation states to keep the promises they made relative to the Millennium Development Goals. Joe also participated in COVIAM's Formation of the Formators workshop in Nairobi. For more information on the Vincentian NGO's work, you can refer to his website: [www.cm-ngo.net](http://www.cm-ngo.net)

9. We received a report from the **Webmaster**, John Freund. Among other points of interest, he mentions that the current main famvin site has a very effective search engine that allows for quick retrieval of materials. However, he notes that users seem not to utilize it adequately. The famvin campaign to raise consciousness of systemic change in the Family is beginning to take clearer shape. This is a project on the English site ([www.famvin.org](http://www.famvin.org)).

10. Julio Suescun, Executive Secretary of **SIEV**, presented a report on the meeting held in Dublin from 3-5 September. SIEV is promoting a Colloquium for Young Vincentian Researchers, which will take place in February 2008. To this date there are ten

participants. However, if any Visitor has an interest in helping one of the members of his province to develop his capacity to do Vincentian research, please contact Julio Suescun (vincentiana@cmglobal.org) or Alexander Jernej (cmgraz@inode.at), Coordinator of SIEV. SIEV continues with its project of drafting a guide for an "Introduction to Vincentian Studies."

11. The **Director of Communications**, Julio Suescun, made a proposal, which came out of the SIEV meeting. It was approved by the Superior General and his council. The General Curia will establish a virtual office of translators under the direction of the Office of Communications.

12. We received information from the Directors of **CIF**, Hugh O'Donnell and Juan Julián Díaz Catalán, regarding an upcoming new effort, which will be for the Visitors or one of their assistants: a session on leadership next summer. The dates will be somewhere from mid-June to mid-July. Details will be forthcoming in a letter from the Superior General.

13. We spoke about the various **Conferences of Visitors**.

**CLAPVI** will be sponsoring a meeting for brothers from 14-20 October. The Superior General has prepared a video-conference for that session, in which he highlights what he considers to be the significant role of brothers in the Congregation of the Mission today. The conference is available, in Spanish, for anyone to see. Please contact the Secretariat of the General Curia.

We received a report from the President of **COVIAM**, Michael Ngoka, which included the activities of the meeting of the Visitors of COVIAM and other regional representatives that took place in August in Nairobi. At the same time, there was a meeting for the formators, which is held annually. Among the presenters were Robert Maloney and Joseph Foley, the Vincentian Representative to the UN. The theme for the next COVIAM meeting, which will be in Mozambique, is "Financial Sustainability." The Treasurer General of the Congregation, John Gouldrick, has been invited to lead them in these discussions. COVIAM has also endorsed an invitation to open a mission in Chad. A new Executive Secretary was elected. His name will be announced, once we have the approval of his Visitor.

We received two reports from Sylvester Peterka, the Curia's special representative to COVIAM. One report dealt with the Formators' Meeting, which was held in Nairobi. The other report recounted his visit to the Mission of Tanzania.

From **APVC**, we received a proposition for the next Rector of the Holy Name of Mary Seminary in Honiara to replace Frank Vargas, who finishes his responsibility at the end of this year, 2007. We also received the proposal of a new candidate for the mission in the

Solomon Islands, Joeli Nabogi from Fiji, who will replace Joseva Tuimavule. The latter will be moving on to a new assignment at the end of this year. Many thanks to both Frank and Joseva for their wonderful services on the mission.

We analyzed a report from **CEVIM**, the Conferences of Visitors of Europe and the Orient. It was the minutes of the Conference meeting held during the Visitors' Meeting in Mexico. Giuseppe Turati was reelected as the Executive Secretary of CEVIM for the next three years. In January 2008, CEVIM has organized a meeting of missionaries who work in formation. The next Conference meeting will be in April 2008 in Kraków.

We also received and reflected on a report from CEVIM concerning the meeting of young missionaries, which was held in Budapest from 3-9 July.

14. Later we heard from the **Assistant General responsible for Missions**, José Antonio Ubillús. We have two confreres, John Macías Loo and João Donizete Dombroski, who will be participating in the 19<sup>th</sup> Session of Spirituality and Missionary Animation for Priests, held in Rome from 15 October to 1 December.

15. We discussed reports from the **International Missions** that come under the responsibility of the General Curia: **El Alto** and **Papua New Guinea**.

We had a visit from Bishop Gilles Côté of the Diocese of Daru-Kiunga in the area of **Papua New Guinea** where four confreres from the Province of Indonesia work. He and another bishop from Papua New Guinea have made petitions to the Superior General for missionaries. These will be presented in the October Mission Appeal Letter.

16. We spoke about my upcoming visit to the **Province of China** in November and different aspects to help me prepare for that trip.

17. We discussed the responses from last year's **Mission Appeal Letter**. An update on those candidates will be published in this year's appeal, which will be out at the end of this month.

May the Lord continue to bless each of us, as we seek to follow Jesus Christ, Evangelizer of the Poor.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,



G. Gregory Gay, C.M.  
Superior General

Rome, 28 October 2007  
*Feast of Saints Simon and Jude, Apostles*

*To all the members of the Congregation of the Mission*

### **Mission Appeal**

*“Blessed are those who cooperate in extending the Church elsewhere.”*

Letter of Saint Vincent de Paul to missionary  
Jean Dehorgny (SV III, 36; English III, 41)

Dear Brothers in Saint Vincent,

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

Once again, I write this traditional October Mission Appeal Letter. Its purpose is precisely what is stated in the above-cited letter of Saint Vincent de Paul. Throughout the history of the Congregation, we have tried to respond to the needs of our Church, the petitions of our bishops. It is evident that what the Church needs are apostolic men, in other words, missionaries. Therefore, I appeal again to all the members of the Congregation of the Mission to continue to deepen yourselves in your missionary spirit, whether in your home provinces or abroad, serving faithfully by following Jesus Christ, evangelizing the Poor. The appeal of this letter goes out to all those confreres, who, after having read the needs that exist, feel the call from the depths of their hearts to respond to these petitions.

For this year’s Mission Appeal Letter, I would like to begin by naming the confreres who petitioned and were accepted to work in different missions since the Mission Appeal Letter of 2006. At the same time, I will also mention where needs continue to exist and new petitions that we have received. The division will be as follows: the international missions that are under the responsibility of the Superior General and his council, petitions that we have received from other provinces throughout the Congregation of the Mission, other missionary news.

### **INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS**

- 1. Solomon Islands.** I will begin with the International Mission of the Solomon Islands, which is under the General Curia, but strongly supported by the Asia-Pacific Visitors’ Conference. Since

our last Mission Appeal, we have three new members in the Solomon Islands' community. They are Flaviano Caintic, from the Province of the Philippines; Emanuel Prasetyono, from the Province of Indonesia, and, to arrive shortly, Joeli Nabogi, from the Province of Australia, a native of the Fiji Islands. Two members of the mission will be finishing their time there by the end of 2007. They are Frank Vargas, who served as rector and superior, and Joseva Tuimavule. I want to take this opportunity to thank both of them for their most generous service. Their presence has certainly strengthened the apostolate and the growth of the Vincentian charism in the Solomon Islands.

We recently signed an agreement that spells out the responsibilities of the Asia-Pacific Visitor's Conference (APVC) for the mission in the Solomon Islands. The APVC has been very generous in assuring the personnel for this mission, which staffs a national seminary, runs a local parish and serves a formation center for laity. In the agreement, the APVC asks that the mission always be open to other members of the Congregation beyond the provinces that compose it. So, to be faithful to our agreement, I include a petition for this mission in this appeal letter.

In addition to the three specific apostolates of the Solomon Islands mission, for the last couple of years, I have included a petition to consider pastoral work in a neighboring diocese that is part of the seminary program. The bishop is a religious, Dominican, who requests the presence of the Congregation in his diocese as a way of supporting him and his diocesan clergy. This particular diocese has the vast majority of vocations in the seminary our confreres staff. The language for the entire mission is English and then that of the local people. I encourage all missionaries to learn the native language in order to enter more deeply into the culture and life of those you are called to serve.

- 2. Papua New Guinea.** The newest member of the mission in Papua New Guinea is Justin Eke from the Vice-Province of Nigeria, who joins our three other confreres. This mission, which began as a service to the national seminary as formators, has now been extended, as of last year, to include pastoral work in a nearby parish, which will also serve as a discernment house for candidates who are attracted to the Vincentian way of life. Because the contracts of some of our men there are coming to an end and they wish to move on to other services, either in their provinces or for the Congregation, I make this appeal to anyone who has some background in formation and would like to contribute to this seminary which is growing steadily through the service that the Congregation has provided over these past years.

In addition, we have received a petition from the former Bishop of Bereina, Bishop John Ribat, who is now the new Archbishop of Port Moresby. In a letter of 6 June, he invited the Congregation to have a fuller presence in the Diocese of Bereina. For some time now, our confreres in the seminary have spent special times, such as Easter and Christmas, doing parish work. The need is in an isolated, mountainous region of the diocese. At present, four parishes in the mountains are vacant. Obviously, they are in desperate need of priests. He is asking the Vincentians to take up a parish, preferably one called Woitape. If anyone feels inclined to this type of parish work, the languages are English and that of the local people. If you desire more information, the bishop has sent us some general information about the diocese. I ask you to contact the Curia and that information will be sent to you. Rolly Santos, a confrere who has spent some time in the parish of Woitape, wrote: "Those who come should be young and healthy to do the bush walks, which can take a whole day." I hope we can accept the bishop's offer to take on the parish. These people are truly among the more abandoned poor.

- 3. El Alto, Bolivia.** The newest member of our mission in El Alto is Cyrille de Nanteuil, from the Province of Paris. He joins our other three confreres in the very vast and varied mission territory. As you may know, the needs of El Alto are for formators, as well as missionary parish priests. The languages are Spanish and Aymara, that of the people. Presently we are in the process of reorganizing this mission. We have 100% support from the local bishop, who has been delighted with the presence of the Vincentians, since our beginnings in his diocese. He encourages us to increase that presence. It is truly mission territory: difficult and challenging. I know there are some of you who can take up that challenge.

## PROVINCIAL MISSIONS

- 4. Province of Austria.** This is an invitation to confreres to deepen their understanding of Islam, while being present pastorally in our apostolic work in Istanbul. As many may know, the last missionary to volunteer for Istanbul was Claudio Santangelo, whom we have asked to take on the important task of Secretary General for the Congregation of the Mission for a period of time. So, I put out this urgent petition for other confreres to come to know the world of Islam and thus meet this very challenging reality in our world and Church today. In Istanbul, the need is for confreres who are willing to learn Turkish and to undertake additional interreligious studies. The languages of the

community at Saint Georg's, where the confreres would reside, are German and English.

5. **Vice-Province of Saints Cyril and Methodius.** As stated previously, CEVIM, the Conference of Visitors of Europe, has given significant financial support to this vice-province and some personnel from the Provinces of Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. But, again, this call goes out to the entire Congregation to serve in this area where the faith, after having been repressed for so many years, is being awakened in a lively manner. There is much enthusiasm among the confreres in the vice-province to expand their presence. But, to do so, they need the support and presence of good, healthy missionaries. Paul Roche, the Vice-Visitor writes: "We are struggling for personnel at a time when we need to send people for training and get at least one more house up and running. Maybe a bit of the glamour has worn off the idea of working in the former USSR — or perhaps people are afraid of the language," which is Russian.
6. **Province of Hungary.** Having just made the canonical visit of the province, I saw the good work that is being done. But I also noticed a great deficit of confreres. There are ten active confreres, two of whom are 95 years old. The work is with young people either in a high-school setting in one of the poorest areas of the country or in the university, which offers different opportunities: teaching a language and/or campus ministry. I spoke with the Cardinal and two bishops where our confreres work. They each pleaded for help. The language is Hungarian.
7. **Provinces of Italy-Albania.** Since my last Mission Appeal Letter, there are two new missionaries in Albania: Giovanni Colombi, from the Province of Turin, is preparing to work in the mission there. He served for many years as a missionary in Madagascar. Vittorio Pacitti from the Province of Rome, is now serving as Subdirector of the Daughters of Charity for the Region of Albania-Kosovo. The languages spoken are Albanian and Italian. The work is both parish ministry and accompaniment of our own candidates in formation. I would like to offer a special word of thanks here to Giuseppe Ferrara for his 14 years of generous service on this mission. He has now returned to the Province of Naples, after making a wonderful contribution in Albania.
8. **Province of China.** In the month of November, I will be visiting the province, where we hope to strengthen our evangelizing presence. China is the up-and-coming country of the world. Many Congregations have had long-term programs of formation and evangelization. The languages there are English, Taiwanese and Mandarin Chinese. It is certainly a difficult mission, but the Congregation has a long tradition of presence in China.

- 9. Province of Indonesia.** I received a petition indirectly from the Visitor, through a visit I received from Bishop Gilles Côté of the Diocese of Daru-Kiunga in Papua New Guinea, where four confreres from the province are presently working. Three are Indonesian and one is French, but a member of the Indonesian Province. During his visit, the bishop explained to me the various needs that exist in the diocese, that speak eloquently to our charism. I share them with you here.

There is a very special need for a senior priest to be a companion to the younger priests. The intention is to have a priest capable of accompanying the priests in the diocese. He would need to be a spiritual person, capable of listening, encouraging and asking the right questions; a person who can enkindle trust and keep confidentiality; one who is interested in the growth of these young men, both as persons and as priests. The confrere would be based in Kiunga, the diocesan seat. From there he would need to go out, from time to time, to where the priests live in remote parishes. A priest who has had missionary experience already would be ideal.

Another need is for a priest to accompany the candidates for the priesthood while they do their secondary studies. The intention is to construct a formation house in 2008 for about 12-15 serious candidates to the priesthood. The house will be a discernment house. Hopefully, by 2009, there will be a priest available to help accompany these young men at this level of formation. During the day, the priest could be involved in other works, assisting either in the parishes of Kiunga or some other diocesan services. A priest is needed who loves young people and is ready to spend time with them.

Thirdly, the bishop is also seeking priests to take over some of the parishes in the diocese.

For further information concerning the Diocese of Daru-Kiunga, you can write to the Curia. The bishop has left us some information. The languages are English and the native language of the people.

- 10. Province of Cuba.** Among other provinces, Cuba is one that always makes the October Mission Appeal Letter because of the very small number of confreres who work there, in spite of the great needs. As you know, the language there is Spanish.

We have been doubly blessed in Cuba recently. A newly ordained confrere, Nelson Rafael Paulino López, from the Province of Puerto Rico, who did his later years of formation in Cuba, has offered to continue serving there as a missionary. In addition, the Province of Puerto Rico has generously offered the services

of Marion Poncette, for at least one year, as Director of the Internal Seminary.

I take this opportunity to ask everyone to pray for Cuba's Visitor, Justo Moro. He is presently in Spain undergoing treatment for some serious health problems. We pray that he might have a good recovery so that he might return quickly to his beloved Cuba.

11. **Province of Barcelona.** Since last year, we have responded to its petition for missionaries for the work in San Pedro Sula in the Moskitia area of Honduras. Presently serving there is Włodzimierz Małota, from the Province of Poland. He is in the parish of Puerto Lempira. Another missionary, who is preparing to go to Honduras, is Miguel Ángel Rennes, from the Province of Madrid. We have received an offer from another young confrere from the Province of Poland to work there too. He should be free to arrive in 2008. The languages spoken are Spanish and Moskitia.
12. **Province of Salamanca.** It has made numerous petitions throughout the years to include its mission in Nacala, Mozambique in the October Mission Appeal Letter. I am happy to say that we have had two positive responses. One is Maurice Pilloud, from the Province of Toulouse. He is presently working on the mission. Sometime in the near future, Amine Weldegebriel, from the Province of Saint Justin De Jacobis, will arrive. The language of Mozambique is Portuguese. Because of the ever-expanding pastoral possibilities, there is continual need for confreres to reinforce the mission there. They also accompany a community of lay Vincentian missionaries.
13. **Vice-Province of Mozambique.** Since the last time I wrote, there are two new volunteers in Mozambique. They are: Eli Chaves dos Santos, from the Province of Rio de Janeiro, the former Visitor, and a member of the Executive Board of CLAPVI; and Sisay Sisto, from the Province of Ethiopia. The vice-province is small and continually in need of new missionaries. So I encourage others to join these enthusiastic missionaries in the fulfillment of their responsibilities. The language is Portuguese.

## OTHER MISSIONARY NEWS

Members of the **Province of South India** work in the African country of Tanzania. The mission is growing ever stronger. Just this past year, the province has sent three new men: George Kannamkulath, Raju Karickal and George (Cino) Thonakara. Among the major works of the confreres are the formation of our own candidates and parish ministry.

I am happy to announce that the **Province of Slovakia**, at this present time, is engaged in establishing a new mission in the Diocese of Trujillo, Honduras. This diocese also includes the mission of the Moskitia and it is under the leadership of our confrere, Bishop Luis Solé. I want to congratulate the Province of Slovakia for this missionary effort. Already committed to the Vice-Province of Saints Cyril and Methodius, it now wants to expand to Latin America.

The other good news is that **COVIAM**, the Conference of Visitors of Africa and Madagascar, has decided to accept a missionary invitation from the Bishop of Moundou in Chad. The undertaking is just at the initial stages. A member of COVIAM has visited there and made a report. The Conference is presently dialoguing with the General Curia regarding the mission itself. The Congregation of the Mission is not present in Chad at this time, although the Vincentian Family is and there is a community of Daughters of Charity from the Province of San Sebastián there. French is a necessity, as well as the language of the local people. When the mission gets off the ground, COVIAM asks that it be included in the Superior General's annual Mission Appeal Letter. Although COVIAM members have promised to supply personnel, they think it necessary to leave the volunteer process open to all members of the Congregation.

I pray that God will inspire many confreres to give of themselves in this special way.

*Let us ask God to give the Company this spirit, this heart, this heart that makes us go everywhere, this heart of the Son of God, heart of Our Lord, heart of Our Lord, heart of Our Lord.... For this he sent the apostles; he sends us, like them, to bring fire everywhere, everywhere (SV XI, 291).*

Your brother in Saint Vincent,



G. Gregory Gay, C.M.  
Superior General

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## 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 2007.
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.**

## VINCENTIAN SOLIDARITY FUND

### METHODS FOR MAKING A CONTRIBUTION

#### Provincial and Individual Contributions

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

John Gouldrick, C.M.  
Treasurer General  
Via dei Capasso, 30  
00164 Roma  
Italy

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

#### **In every case:**

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

# FEATURE:

## *The Vincentian Missions*

### Presentation

by Julio Suescun Olcoz, C.M.

*Editor of "Vincentiana"*

Read thus, in the plural, the title of this issue of *Vincentiana* could be deceiving. It is not a question of describing, nor of summarizing or presenting in some more significant areas, the evangelizing activity of the Congregation in various parts of the world. Rather the issue's authors agreed to reflect on the very meaning of the mission today, as an expression of fidelity to following Christ, Evangelizer of the poor, in conformity with the thought and action of Vincent de Paul.

From the west, and more concretely, Europe, older persons feel inclined to recall with nostalgia the spirit of generosity, not exempt from a certain dose of adventure and exoticism, with which the missions stimulated and supported our own vocation in the Congregation. To go to the missions was a gesture of generosity for the one who asked, some said, a kind of second vocation. The missionaries certainly told us of the adventures, the sacrifices, the poverty of the peoples on the mission and the urgency of their salvation, and succeeded in awakening, in childlike and youthful spirits, a longing to leave everything to go to the missions.

Today, the mass media have brought the most distant villages close; far-off events are experienced with immediate proximity; different cultures coexist in common spaces. The facility of communication means that almost everything is familiar to us and often experienced; there is hardly any place for adventure; what we call adventure today is like a reality show, which is prepared more for entertainment than for an authentic life experience.

The Church's own reflection was, already in the second half of the last century, that the missions ceased being the adventurous dream of a few generous Christians, who left their home and people to go evangelize distant peoples, in order to turn into the natural expression of living and acting as Christians in the Church. Pius XII, in *Fidei Donum*, already said that *although formerly "the life of the Church in its visible aspects showed its vigor chiefly in the older parts of Europe from which it began to spread out to the shores that may be called the periphery of the world, now however there is a kind of mutual exchange of life and strength among all the members of the Mystical Body of Christ"* (36). This was confirmed by Paul VI, who presented evangelization as *the grace and vocation proper to the Church (Evangelii Nuntiandi 14)*. The mission is like breathing for the Church, without it she cannot live. This, which has always been thus, is expressed today with particular charity. The *woe to me if I do not preach it [the Gospel]!* of Saint Paul (1 Cor 9:16) is today the Church's common cry. And the Church, considered in some places on earth, until recently, as mission territory, where a portion of the pagan world needed to be evangelized, today experiences, with determination renewed by the Spirit, its missionary awareness and sends its sons and daughters to participate in the noble common task of evangelizing the entire world.

How has the evangelizing urgency been lived in the history of the Church? How did Saint Vincent live it? What will be today the normal expressions of living this evangelizing urgency in the Church and in the Congregation?

In the Superior General's letter, the letter that has become traditional in the month of October each year and which we call "Mission Appeal," are listed the principal urgencies that the Church and the Congregation perceive in the various places of the world. Reading this issue of *Vincentiana* might help us, perhaps, to specify and concretize our response.

(Translation: ANN MARY DOUGHERTY, D.C.)

# From the Missions to the Mission

by José Antonio Ubillús Lamadrid, C.M.

*Assistant for the Missions*

Over the course of centuries, the church has acquired diverse figures or patterns, therefore one has to know how to distinguish between the permanent element and the diversity of its historic manifestations. The implementation of the mission is intimately dynamic. It is that which maintains the vitality and permanent youthfulness of the church; it is that which most directly roots it in the history of humanity and at once in a larger way shows its capacity to be faithful to the plan of God in history. The mission therefore, is always a prophetic and challenging dimension in the center of the diverse ecclesial communities as a permanent exigency of faithfulness to the task for which it has been called into existence.

## I. THE ERA OF THE FOREIGN MISSIONS

As a starting point to understand the sense of our reflection on the image of the foreign missions, it is important to center on the significance and the novelty of the two words because that is what underlines the understanding of a great majority of Christians.

The term mission or missions in the sense that we use it is a relatively recent phenomenon (start of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century). Up until that time, to explain the expansion of the church and the proclamation of evangelization, one spoke about the propagation of the faith, the conversion of the gentiles, and the promulgation of the gospel. The Jesuits introduced the “vow of the missions” to express the disposition to accept whatever destiny (mission) that the Pope would assign to them. He could designate also work among the heretics or schismatics. They were also given activity that at that time was achieving great importance: the evangelizing activity among non Christians that were encountered in foreign and distant lands.

Actually during those years, extensive geographic expansion was taking place due to the Spanish and Portuguese journeys. It was the crossroads of human history. The church, by means of the Christians, was present in those circumstances. Therefore the “evangelization mission” would stay marked by the long distances, the risk and the adventure.

In the underlying theology one can outline the following aspects: *a)* Christianity as the only true religion is the only way to salvation; there is a very negative view with regards to the possibility of salvation of the members of other religions and for that reason, Baptism was so urgent; *b)* the Church and Reign of God were identified together in such a way that the missions acquired a strongly church-centered tone; *c)* the ultimate responsibility of the mission fell upon the Pope and the hierarchy, and their protagonists were above all the religious and priests.

This model has been the object of critics for its connection with colonialism and for its tendency to transpose the western world in those far off lands. It has to be recognized nevertheless that thanks to those efforts, the gospel was announced and received in numerous countries, races and cultures. It offered untainted testimony of thousands of missionaries, permitted the development of new evangelization methods whose mighty presence enriched the catholicity of the Church and opened new possibilities of universal evangelization that our historic era needs.

Slowly over time, new horizons opened: a permanent missionary zeal that includes all the people of God, the incorporation of lay people and diocesan priests, spiritual sensibility, financial generosity, a more intense defense of human dignity, incarnation in native cultures, the emergence of the local churches, a deeper and more theological depth.

## II. TOWARD A NEW PARADIGM

In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, we are crossing the threshold of a new consideration — more profound and real — of the missionary activity in the church; this is due in virtue of a more direct reflection of the data of revelation, a greater attention to the breadth of the missions taking into account the cognizance of the historical circumstances. For this reason, missiology is developing, diverse papal encyclicals about missiology are being published, new elements that energize missiology reflection are being considered.

The expression of the new consciousness and of the new role of the missions is also a frequent topic in the publication of papal encyclicals. They seek to focus the missionary activity in response to new needs, seek the collaboration of all the baptized and the consolidation of the missions as churches.

Benedict XV in *Maximum Illud* (1919) puts emphasis on the native clergy, on the collaboration among the missionary institutions, on the formation and spirituality of the missionaries, on the help on the part of the local churches, and on the priority of the Pontifical Missionary Works.

Pius XI in *Rerum Ecclesiae* (1926) hopes to stimulate the responsibility of the bishops and reaffirms the importance of the native clergy. Pius XII in *Evangelii Praecones* (1951) continues to try to rouse the missionary consciousness of all the dioceses (above all by means of the *Pontifical Missionary Work, OMP*) and calls to mind the need of native clergy and of the specialization of the activity of the missionaries. He emphasizes even more than before, the adaptation to the diverse cultures, participation of the laity, and the importance of the social and economic questions. In *Fidei Donum* (1957) the same Pope focused his address from the point of view of the needs of Africa as a consequence of the rapid process of decolonization (which would require a supplementary evangelizing force). He insisted in the sending forth of diocesan priests for service (that would be for temporal needs). John XXIII in *Princeps Pastorum* (1959) attempts to set an equilibrium between tendencies to be taken into account: conversion and planting the seeds of the church, evangelization and human progress, the consolidation of the church that ought to integrate itself into the new structures of the youth, the importance of the laity and the importance of the native clergy.

During the years preceding and preparing for Vatican II some patterns are presented that sound out the base level for a new model to understand in theological terms and to actualize the mission in a practical way.

Prior to this, the missions were reduced to some actions that were developed in far away geographical environments, that were considered in a unidirectional way (the older Christian churches were the ones that missioned and helped the missions that were in need of all support). They were under a juridical disciplinary concept; they were the regions dependent on the Propagation of the Faith. In this way, the missions remained far away, almost in the periphery, while the mission of the Church could be realized even without them, in the countries of older Christianity.

This vision left some open questions: what do these actions have to do with the fundamental and radical mission of the church? In what sense are the missions an expression of the radical mission of the church? Can it exist without them? Can they at least hypothetically be separated without affecting the very reality of the church?

These questions were floating around on the eve of Vatican II and in fact strong requirements existed that the missions not be left in the periphery of ecclesial life. In fact, the Council assumed this concern. The missions remained situated in the heart of the Church as an expression of its deepest dynamism.

Some of these theological threads open a new perspective: you have to pass from the ecclesial centrism to mission centrism. The

mission is in the center, not the church. The priority is the mission of God and the church is at its service. The mission taken alone is not in the periphery, but rather it is the deepest spirit within the Church.

### III. RECENT MAGISTERIAL TEACHING

We have indicated the primary papal interventions concerning the missionary action in the recent period, and we have pointed out the questions and perspectives that were being opened up during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. In this context, there have arisen diverse documents referring to the missionary theme that tried to offer criteria in light of the present debates. We are now going to point out the most relevant interventions, without getting lost in detail, in order to capture the significance of each one of them.

#### ***Vatican Council II (1963-1965)***

The Council attempts to reflect on the church in the actual historical moment (the modern world) to identify the testimony that ought to spark and foster a discernment process concerning the values of the present moment.

Given the reality of a Council, with numerous documents, we ought to pay attention to the general vision of the conciliar texts and not only to one of them, even though that one refers to the missionary activity (*Ad Gentes*). However, we have to emphasize the importance of this document because it was the last one approved by the Council fathers and it brings together all the suppositions and profound thoughts that were realized in the various themes and presentations.

The constitution on the church, *Lumen Gentium* as it is significantly called, emphasizes that the church is the “light of the people” in the center of God’s salvific plan. Its catholicity makes it essentially missionary and therefore, all the members of the church are responsible for the mission. The decrees on the laity, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (AA), priests, *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (PO), and religious, *Perfectae Caritatis* (PC) show forth the missionary obligation of each one of these states of life in the church.

The declarations on religious liberty, *Dignitatis Humanae* (DH), and the one on the relations of the church with non Christian religions, *Nostra Aetate* (NAe) take on the burning issues of salvation of non Christians and what this means in relation to other religions. The pastoral constitution on the church in the modern world, *Gaudium et Spes* (GS) refers to the modern world and its constitutive dimensions. Even though not being of direct missionary character, it

will notably mark the post-conciliar developments as we have indicated. *Ad Gentes* (AG 7.12.1965) is the high point of the conciliar agenda; it received the greatest number of votes of all the conciliar documents. Even though its presentation will receive posterior development, it established fundamental coordinates and offers criteria of equilibrium and mediation among diverse positions; it opens a horizon. The constitution on the trinitarian and the historic salvific nature of the missionary action articulates the relation between mission and missions; it delineates the conversion and implanting of the Church and gives great emphasis to the young churches and to their process of ecclesio-genesis; it leaves space for missionary adaptation and explains the responsibility of each one of the members of the people of God.

### ***Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975)**

It is considered the most important document of Paul VI and one of the most relevant of the postconciliar period. It is the fruit of the Synod of Bishops of 1974 dedicated to the evangelization of the world. It is important to point out a change in terminology. It avoids the missionary terminology and opts for the term evangelization. This concept encompasses the global activity of the church: it exists to evangelize; to evangelize is the most profound and radical saying. This does not diminish the universal dimension or water down the value of a specific missionary vocation.

It is interesting to observe that this universality manifests itself in an important aspect: the major role of the Episcopal conferences of all the world; the non western conferences make up about two thirds. For this reason, the initial presentation (fundamental concern for the unbelievers and atheists) is widened and enriched; there are other aspects equally important for evangelization of the whole world: the plurality of ministries in the communities, the development of the local churches, liberation and the defense of justice.

Therefore, evangelization is explained as a global, complex and dynamic reality. *Global*, because everything in the church should be understood from the evangelization perspective. *Complex*, because it must include a diversity of elements that do not negate the explicit announcement of Jesus nor cast aside the concerns and concrete needs of humanity and of the countries. *Dynamic*, because it has to implicate all members of the church to bring the good news to all areas of humanity, with the goal of renewing all humanity. (Its criteria of judgment and its principal values and the disassociation between faith and culture constitute the principal drama of our time.)

### ***Redemptoris Missio* (1990)**

Published 25 years after *AG*, this attempts to reaffirm the permanent validity of the missionary mandate in the face of some tendencies that question the sense and urgency of the missionary obligation. It is significant that it takes on once again with force, the missionary terminology (speaking normally of the mission *ad gentes*).

Given its radicalness, its force and its wideness of perspectives, this can be considered the most relevant document of the magisterium of Pope John Paul II (that which continues in the fundamental theme of the documents referred to in the jubilee of 2000).

The Pope calls the whole church to maturity and responsibility in a decisive historical moment in such a way that it is especially noteworthy that the mission of the church is still found to be in its beginning stages. This new situation presents a double perspective: from the point of view of quantity, the number of Christians continues to be a minority, a situation that cries out more if you consider the situation of Africa and Asia; from the point of view of quality, it is especially noteworthy that a new civilization is arising whose seeds and whose infrastructure do not have present the values of the gospel.

Confronting this double challenge is made more difficult with missionary zeal diminished and with doubts about the sense of and need for missionary activity. Therefore, it is necessary to recover the missionary spirit that blossoms forth from the most profound center of Christian identity (the centrality of Jesus must be reaffirmed, as well as the newness and peculiarity of the faith, the importance of baptism and the value of belonging to the church).

Taking all this into account, the disruption of situations and the importance of the new missionary situations must be recognized. The new social realities and the new areas of culture have to be valued as missionary environments. For this reason, the distinct ecclesial protagonists ought to abandon their provincialism or their passivity in order to live their missionary responsibility at the height of our historical era. These changes nevertheless ought not to obscure the specific character of the mission *ad gentes*.

#### **IV. THE SPECIFIC CHARACTER OF THE MISSION “AD GENTES”**

We have intended to show that the missions (or missionary activity) ought to reintegrate itself to the unique mission of the Church. But this presents an important question: if all is mission, what space is there for the missionary activity if it can be affirmed that the mission is also “here”? Does the mission *ad gentes* have any

sense in regard to far away lands? Can any special value be given to the going out and going forth?

This problem has been treated in a direct way by the magisterium of the church precisely when the paradigms of the mission were changing, with the intention that the missionary activity not be less valued. Let us examine the indications of the documents already mentioned.

AG 6 affirms that the task of the church is unique and identical in all parts and under whatever condition. In the mission of the church there are differences, not coming from the intimate nature of its mission, but rather of the conditions in which it is being realized.

As the mission develops in history, and for a Church that exists in time, it has to adapt to the diverse situations. This is what generates the diversification that is produced from a double point of view: *a)* on the part of the church. When it cannot be present and act with all the means at its disposal, its presence ought to adapt itself to a more humble and simple rhythm and process; *b)* on the part of the recipients. There are diverse degrees in regards to the going away from Christ or the lack of knowledge of the gospel (together with the geographic criteria the anthropological and soteriological criteria must be taken into account). For these reasons, particular initiatives have to arise that can be designated “missions” or “missionary activity.”

*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, which gives importance to the terminology with regard to evangelization does not hide that which we understand as missionary activity. The horizon of evangelization has a universality without frontiers that has to arrive at the most remote regions. It warns therefore against the temptation of the very evangelizers to limit, under distinct pretext, its area of missionary action. The church has as its deepest inspiration the words of the Master: to all the world! to all creatures! even to the ends of the world!

This “going forth” ought not to be understood only in the geographic sense, but also in the cultural sense; to evangelize is to take the Good News to all humanity, in order to transform humanity from within to make all things new.

This very dialectic is presented profoundly in *Redemptoris Missio*. It reinforces, as we have said, the identity of the mission *ad gentes*. The moment has arrived to dedicate all ecclesial energy to the new evangelization and to the mission *ad gentes*. It reaffirms the unity of the mission but shows also the circumstances that oblige it to speak of the mission *ad gentes* as a specific action. It affirms that all the church is missionary and does not exclude the fact that there be a specific mission *ad gentes*. The number of those who do not know Christ has grown constantly and therefore it has to be directed

to the South and East, and at the same time it has to go to the centers where a new humanity is being born.

Within this plan a precise and necessary classification needs to be established so as not to confuse the circumstances. The *pastoral* action is directed toward the activity in the center of the ecclesial communities. The *new evangelization* refers to the action among the baptized “post Christians” or those whom in our context are found far from the evangelical message. The *mission ad gentes* affects more directly the non Christians. This last consideration has to be the dynamism and horizon of all the rest, but all considered in the same movement and within the same motivation.

We can therefore conclude that it is necessary to recognize this vocation and this action that is proper to the life of the church. There is one fundamental chord that is the only mission, but this chord is played out in diverse variations according to the circumstances and situations. The universality has to accompany all of the Christian vision, but this universality has to be concrete and therefore must cross frontiers and barriers of very diverse types. Because there is “distance” there has to be going out, leaving the area and also sending forth. The theological and practical discernment ought to strive to identify at all times these frontiers and boundaries that have to be crossed to be faithful to the profound logic of the universal plan of God.

## V. THE FRAMEWORK OF THE MISSION OF THE FUTURE

At the end of this treatise, we have been able to identify the central content of the mission of the church in its dimension *ad gentes*. It has to be a holistic mission that includes all the dimensions of reality and addresses all the members of the church. In order that it be truly holistic, it ought to be attentive to identify the crossroads of history, the highways in which the gospel of the Reign of God and the Pascal mystery should be announced. Actually, the framework of the mission ought to take into account five aspects.

1. The mission ought to move forward in the center of the communion of the churches, with its sight set on all the continents, developing inculturation and the involvement of everyone. The mission ought not to reduce itself to the communion among the churches (it is not only a mutual interchange of goods but rather a service to the evangelization in the world) and ought to go beyond the unidirectional concept of the missionary action.

2. The mission has to be contextualized, that is to say it ought to take into account the social, economic and political dynamics that make real and historic the life of all humanity and society. Context is always in flux and demands new answers. Therefore attention to the

context fosters responsibility of all but at the same time ought to avoid breaking the communion or absolutizing the differences.

3. There cannot be Christian mission that does not come forth from *suffering and poverty*, because they constitute some of the most inhuman barriers that have been placed in human history. This option has to avoid violence and hatred, but cannot be deaf to the cry of the marginalized and the poor.

4. The mission has to be realized in the context of plurality of religions; therefore it cannot renounce an *attitude of dialogue and respect* and should listen and accept the religious richness of men and women of other religions and look for cooperation with all religions in favor of threatened humanity. But this should not be done at the cost of the peculiarity of the Christian confession. With respect to dialogue, it ought to manifest the testimony of the true faith itself and therefore the expressed announcement of the salvific action of Jesus, in his radical identity as eternal Son of the Father.

5. The mission ought to plant itself and live with a *global view* even if all the activity has to be *local*. Globalization generates injustice if it is understood from the standpoint of brutal capitalism, but at the same time, it offers new space for communication and new cultural elements that ought to be valued as privileged spaces for evangelization.

Missiology and the missionary praxis, given its characteristics, always supposes the life of freedom and creativity of the Spirit. Therefore, it will always be a prophetic thrust but also a font of joy and optimism, and fundamentally it can give hope and strength to rejuvenate the church and all the church communities.

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(Translation: ARTHUR J. KOLINSKY, C.M.)

# Saint Vincent de Paul and the Mission: Challenges for Today

by Mikel Aingeru Sagastagoitia Calvo, C.M.

*Province of Zaragoza*

*How happy the condition of the missionary  
who has no more limitations...  
than the world we live in!  
(SVP XI, 828)*

Vincent de Paul took as the motto of his life and work the missionary program of Christ himself: "He has sent me to bring good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18). As members of the Congregation of the Mission and the Vincentian Family throughout the world we all feel ourselves challenged by the **urgency of the mission**, just as does the Church in all the different continents. "The missionary mandate accompanies us into the Third Millennium, and urges us to share the same enthusiasm as the very first Christians: we can count on the power of the same Spirit who was poured out at Pentecost and who impels us still today to start out anew, sustained by the hope 'which does not disappoint' (Rom 5:5)" (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 58).

Drawing from Vincent de Paul's experience and from his reflections, found in his letters and conferences, we can recover and bring up to date some proposals for the mission today.

## **1. Missionary activity was Vincent de Paul's creative response to the calls which the Lord sent to him through actual events**

After caring for a dying old man in **Gannes**, Vincent discovers the religious ignorance into which the poor villagers have been abandoned. Then he repeats that first response, preaching in **Folléville** and inviting the parishioners to conversion.

A short time later, while serving as pastor in **Châtillon**, he perceives the misery and hunger in the poor villagers and the need for organized charity with the active participation of the laity and, above all, of the women.

The conversion of a heretic in **Marchais** who, after seeing the work of the missionaries understood that the Holy Spirit guides the Church, confirms in Vincent de Paul his conviction that the Lord is calling him to the evangelization of the poor.

These **events**, above all those related to the lives of the poor, are mediations by means of which the Lord is manifesting His Will to Vincent de Paul.

And Vincent de Paul knew to walk in the steps of Providence and to create new responses when faced with new situations. His first response, chronologically, will be **popular missions**. Later he will discover that the Lord is calling him to extend the mission to **distant lands** and, with no hesitation, to send his best missionaries for this work. His main foundations, **the Congregation of the Mission, the Confraternities of Charity, and the Daughters of Charity**, he will also place in service of the mission.

The Lord asks him (as he is gradually discovering) to dedicate his life to the evangelization of the poor, to continue **the very same mission of Jesus Christ**. Vincent does not hesitate to throw himself into the work with enthusiasm. He feels compelled to offer a response — bold responses that continue to surprise for their creative originality.

Just so today, for us who follow Jesus Christ in the steps of Vincent de Paul, actual **events**, specifically those events related to poor persons, invite us to **get moving**, on cue with the mission: paying attention to the diverse realities of cultures and peoples, adapting ourselves to God's steps with individuals and with groups, listening to the cries of those needs that are most urgent, cultivating the participation of everyone and the respect for everyone.

John Paul II coined the expression 'new cultural landscapes and historical frontiers' in order to refer to the new realities of contemporary civilization where the seed of the Gospel must be made present: "Family, culture, the world of labor, all economic goods, politics, science, technology, social communications, the great challenges of life, of solidarity, of peace, of professional ethics, of the rights of the human person, of education, of religious liberty."<sup>1</sup>

Calls of the Lord and, therefore, the mission, cannot continue to be reduced to one place nor to only one activity nor to one form only of evangelization or service. Faithfulness to the mission demands personal availability, a renewed faithfulness, and creativity. "The proclamation of the Gospel requires proclaimers, the harvest needs workers, the mission happens, above all, with men and women

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<sup>1</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Closing Talk of the Lay Synod*, Rome, October 3, 1987.

consecrated by life to the work of the Gospel, willing to go throughout the whole world to bring salvation.”<sup>2</sup>

Missionary restlessness appears in our communities frequently in intermittent ways. Faced with an especially grave situation, whether nearby or far away, generous responses are offered that are truly exemplary. However, these things may not always have the true mission which is the criterion of our programs and ongoing pastoral tasks, the **key** or the sustaining drive that keeps the whole community on cue with **creativity** and which draws out **responses from life** itself. Personal dedication, working piece by piece, creative dreaming, pastoral zeal — these continue to be the right dispositions (just as they were in Vincent de Paul himself) that are needed to face up to the new requirements of the mission in our own time.

## 2. **The discovery of Jesus Christ, the Father’s missionary, the Evangelizer of the Poor, is the hidden power that explains the fruitfulness of Vincent de Paul’s heritage to us as missionary**

One celebrated researcher of the life and spiritual experience of Vincent de Paul wrote: “That teacher who is Saint Vincent has his own teacher who is Jesus Christ; one can recover in both his correspondence and in his talks a long series of delightful lines, sometimes very unexpected, and with these put together a small book that could be called *the Imitation of Jesus Christ according to Saint Vincent de Paul*. On the horizon of Saint Vincent there always rises the Son of God.... Pay close attention to his life, episode by episode, one could even say minute by minute, in order to find there lessons on how to act.”<sup>3</sup>

Certainly, one could never understand the missionary activity of Vincent de Paul, nor any one of his works, without explicit reference to Jesus Christ. Vincent de Paul desired, from the moment of his conversion, **to follow Jesus Christ**, to be centered in Him, to see himself one time after another in Him, until he reached the point where at every moment he was able to do or not to do that which Christ would do or not do.

Vincent de Paul wanted to make Jesus Christ the **only rule of his life**. And to those who grew to associate with his missionary works, he showed this same road. To Father Antonio Portail, his first collaborator in the missions, he writes as early as May 1, 1635: “Remember, Father, that we live in Jesus Christ because of death in

<sup>2</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 79.

<sup>3</sup> M. GOYAU, *La vie des livres et des âmes*, Paris, 1923, 84. Cited by P. COSTE, *El gran santo del gran siglo*, vol. III, p. 263.

Jesus Christ, and our life has to be hidden in Jesus Christ and full of Jesus Christ, so that, in order to die like Jesus Christ, we must live as Jesus Christ.”<sup>4</sup> In this same way, notice the surprising expression that we find in his letter to Father Nicolás Etienne on January 30, 1656: “Our Lord Jesus Christ is our father, our mother, and our all.”<sup>5</sup>

In the Vincentian experience there appears a strong relation between **Jesus Christ and the Father**. Jesus Christ has been sent by the Father. Jesus Christ lives totally dedicated to doing the will of the Father. Jesus Christ lives in continual prayer with the Father.<sup>6</sup>

Vincent de Paul never tires of repeating that the Son of God, the missionary of the Father, came to the world to evangelize the poor. Only to add immediately that missionaries do nothing other than to continue the mission of Jesus Christ on earth.

In his conference to the missionaries on October 29, 1638, Vincent states: “In this vocation we live in such a way as to be conformed to our Lord Jesus Christ who, it seems, when he came to this world, chose as his principal task that of assisting and caring for the poor. *Misit me evangelizare pauperibus*. And if one would ask our Lord: What have you come to do on earth? — To help the poor. — And something else? — To help the poor, etc. In his company there were no others but the poor and He stayed only a little in the cities, almost always conversing with the villagers, and teaching them. Would we not be happy ourselves to be in the mission with the same purpose which committed God to become man? And if one would ask a missionary, would it not be a great honor to say as did our Lord: *Misit me evangelizare pauperibus*? I am here to catechize, to instruct, to confess, to help the poor.”<sup>7</sup>

The mission is always the prolongation of the action of the missionary Christ Jesus. Because of this, only in the measure in which he reflects Christ and enters into His own dispositions and adopts his attitudes, will the missionary **make his life true mission**.

### 3. In the Church, the continuer of the mission of Jesus Christ to the service of the poor

As a consequence of his vision of Christ, Vincent de Paul sees and experiences the Church as continuer of the mission of Jesus Christ, distancing himself from the dominant ecclesiologies of his time.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> SV I, 295.

<sup>5</sup> SV V, 534.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. SV XII, 108; XI, 313; IX, 409; X, 243.

<sup>7</sup> SV XI, 108. Cf. aussi SV XI, 130-131, 134-135; XII, 87.

<sup>8</sup> A. Dodin, one of the most prominent experts on Vincent, clearly affirms this: “What is it that characterizes the whole presentation of Church for

Vincent de Paul stays within the doctrinal ecclesiology taught in the manuals.<sup>9</sup> He wants to live in the faith of the Church without separating himself, even the least bit, from what the Church teaches.<sup>10</sup> But the **originality of Vincent de Paul** in his vision of the Church, is rooted in seeing her as one **historical reality, itinerant, missionary, and at the service of the poor**, as the continuer of the mission of Christ that she is.<sup>11</sup>

Vincent de Paul will not place the emphasis on the hierarchy, nor on any exterior or shiny adornment. For Vincent, “the Church is above all the poor people who seek help, those ‘good people’ who Vincent had encountered already and with whom he had felt identified while a pastor in Clichy, near Paris. To the service of this people he and his own would dedicate themselves. When speaking of the humble and the most poor, he would say: ‘Our lords and our masters’ thus opening up a new perspective in the theology of the mystical body.”<sup>12</sup>

So then it will not surprise us to find in Vincent de Paul’s correspondence such clear expressions about where to find the Church of Jesus Christ: “The Church is neither in the silk nor gold of the prince-bishops or abbots, but rather in the flesh and blood, in the sufferings and tears of the people. The People of God are here, and whether aware or not, participant in the mystery of the life, the sufferings, the death of the Son of God, in the hope of his glory. Called to join the Council of Conscience, Vincent de Paul will remember this Church when it is time for naming bishops for the service of the people of God and, first of all, for the poor.”<sup>13</sup>

For Vincent de Paul, the mission of the Church is none other than to **continue the work of Christ**, to do just what He did on earth, cooperate with Him in the salvation of all people. This close relationship between Christ and the Church is obvious in Vincentian expressions used when referring to the Church: “Spouse of the

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Vincent? That it is completely different than any ecclesiology ‘with roman inspiration.’ I think here of that Church taken from the studies of Cardinal Bellarmine, and of St. Peter Canisius: a hierarchical Church, stable and vertical. At its peak, on the top of the pyramid, is the Pope, then the bishops, the priests, and at the bottom, the laity. Vincent did not have this image and he’s not the only one.” A. DODIN, *Lecciones sobre vicencianismo*, Ceme, Salamanca, 1978, pp. 66-67.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. SV VI, 263-7 (lettre du 2 avril 1657).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. ABELLY II, XII, p. 411.

<sup>11</sup> A. DODIN, *op. cit.*, 67.

<sup>12</sup> A. SYLVESTRE, *Saint Vincent et L’Église*, en AA.VV., *Monsieur Vincent, témoin de l’évangile*, Toulouse, Animation Vincentienne (1990), p. 126.

<sup>13</sup> CABIERS, *San Vicente de Paúl y la Iglesia*, ANALES (1974), p. 75.

Savior,” “Bride of Jesus Christ,”<sup>14</sup> “Vineyard of the Lord,”<sup>15</sup> “field of grain” that requires workers,<sup>16</sup> “mystical body.”<sup>17</sup>

It is exactly on this last image, the most often used, that Vincent de Paul constructs his sense of Church charity: “All our members are so united and bound together that what is wrong in one is wrong in all. All the more so Christians who are members of one body and among themselves must indeed suffer together. What is this! To be Christian and see the suffering of one’s brother without weeping with him nor experiencing sickness with him! This is not to show charity; it is to be Christian on the surface; it is to lack humanity, to be lower than animals.”<sup>18</sup>

Inside this body that is the Church, Vincent de Paul paid special attention to the poor who are “the afflicted members of our Lord.”<sup>19</sup> Evangelization of the poor is the criterion and the validating sign that **the Holy Spirit is guiding the Church.**<sup>20</sup>

Saint Vincent has discovered that the true person is the poor and, for that matter, the true people, the people of God, the Church, is the world of the poor. The hierarchy has nothing but the function of service. Saint Vincent lives out of this intuition, but it will be Bossuet, his disciple, who gives form to this intuition:

“Jesus Christ has come to the world to reestablish the order that pride had broken. In the world, the rich hold the first ranks; in the Reign of Jesus Christ, the first places belong to the poor, who are the first and true children of the Church. In the world, the poor are subject to the rich and serve them; in the holy Church, the rich are admitted only on condition of serving the poor. In the world, all privilege belongs to the powerful and to those who support them; in the Church of Jesus Christ, graces and blessings belong to the poor, and the rich have no privilege except to be in the midst of the poor.”<sup>21</sup>

Vincentian scholars do not hesitate to agree that this sermon of Bossuet is the best synthesis found of that experience of Church which inspired the life and mission of Vincent de Paul.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Cf. SV I, 571; III, 182; XII, 158-159.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. SV V, 107, 178, 462; VII, 541; VIII, 126.

<sup>16</sup> SV VIII, 125; IX, 734.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. SV IX, 1; X, 364; XII, 96-97, 273.

<sup>18</sup> SV XI, 272.

<sup>19</sup> SV V, 85.

<sup>20</sup> Cfr. ABELLY I, XIII, pp. 55-56.

<sup>21</sup> Bossuet, 1659 sermon. In AA.VV., *L'Église*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *id.*, p. 4.

Those of us who today follow Jesus Christ in the steps of Vincent de Paul, know, through the ecclesiology of Vatican Council II, that **the Church** is the community which makes Jesus Christ present in history and that lives out the **responsibility to continue His Mission**. “The presentation of the gospel message does not constitute for the Church some kind of option; it is by means of the obligation placed on her, by the Lord’s command, with the goal that people believe and are saved.”<sup>23</sup> The mission constitutes the very reason to belong to the Church, which exists to evangelize.<sup>24</sup> Evangelization is the grace and the purpose of the Church; it is her vocation and identity.

The mission is Church activity. Evangelization is no private matter, but rather “an act profoundly ecclesial.”<sup>25</sup> It is the Church who sends the missionary. And the end of all missionary activity is the proclamation of Christ and the formation of the church community.<sup>26</sup> “God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him” asserts the first letter of John (1 Jn 4:16). The discovery of the **love of God** is what raises up Christians in every epoch of history, to share the Good News throughout the world.

In the Church and as Church, each one according to his proper ministry and charism, must know himself to be truly a missionary, driven by the pastoral zeal of the same Christ, that will be “attention, tenderness, compassion, welcome, availability, interest in the problems of the people... fervor of the Spirit, interior excitement which nothing nor anyone could extinguish,”<sup>27</sup> especially committed to the cause of the poor.

#### 4. The poor, protagonists of the mission

The mission, as Vincent de Paul understood and lived it out, integrates the world of the poor as an essential, constitutive element.

Christ is the Father’s missionary, who has been sent to this world to evangelize the poor. The Church, the continuer in history of Christ’s mission, has a duty to the poor.

The centrality of the poor in the mission of Christ and of the Church has been one **discovery** that has been maturing in Vincent de Paul’s experience. As J. Corera states, “Vincent de Paul lived the first

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<sup>23</sup> *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 5.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *Ad Gentes*, 6.

<sup>25</sup> *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 60.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *Ad Gentes*, 6.

<sup>27</sup> *Redemptoris Missio*, 89; *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 80. “Pastoral charity determines the manner with which the missionary thinks, acts, and relates with everyone else” (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 23).

thirty years of his life searching for a comfortable and respectable place in the respectable society of this time.”<sup>28</sup> The Lord, by means of events and people, gradually brought about in him the discovery of his true vocation. “In order to dedicate his life he had first to discover the existence of the poor, since it was no difficult thing in his time to take on a lifestyle and ideals that would shield one from the annoying presence of the poor.”<sup>29</sup>

The discovery of the poor and their suffering would not be enough to explain the surrender of his whole life to their evangelization and service. If Vincent de Paul can dedicate his person and all the institutions he founded to the poor, it is because he sees everything in God; **the poor are Jesus Christ for us**, they are His suffering members. Only from God, only from faith is it possible to discover Christ in the poor. There are many occasions when Vincent speaks to the Daughters of Charity and to the priests of the Mission stressing that service to the poor is service to Jesus Christ.<sup>30</sup> Thus, for example, in a talk to the missionaries in January, 1657, he argues: “God loves the poor, and consequently loves those who love the poor; since, when a person is much loved, this affect is felt by his friends and servants. Just so, this little company of the Mission seeks to dedicate itself completely to serve the poor who are God’s preferred ones; for this reason we can hope that, by our love of them, God will love us as well.”<sup>31</sup>

And, while encouraging the Daughters of Charity to dedicate themselves to the service of the poor, in his conference of November 11, 1657, he assures them: “My daughters, if only you would know that the greatest grace is to serve the poor, since you have been called by God to do this!... The poor are the great lords of heaven; it is their role to open its gates.”<sup>32</sup>

Nevertheless, for Vincent de Paul, **the poor are not only the object of the mission**. Vincent de Paul is convinced that “only the poor are able to save the poor.”<sup>33</sup>

The poor cannot be passive recipients of evangelical activity; they must participate with their own possibilities and energy. Vincent de

<sup>28</sup> J. CORERA, “*Qui ad margines societatis sunt reiecti*,” in *VINCENTIANA* (1988), p. 346.

<sup>29</sup> J. CORERA, *The Poor According to St. Vincent*, in *VINCENTIANA* (1984), p. 583.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. SVP IX, 252.

<sup>31</sup> SV XI, 392 s.

<sup>32</sup> SV X, 332, 337.

<sup>33</sup> Thusly has J. Anouilh interpreted Vincent’s intuitions, in the script developed for the movie *Monsieur Vincent*, directed by M. Cloche in 1947. The script can be found in: *Monsieur Vincent*, Ediciones Fe y Vida, Teruel, 1993.

Paul states this clearly: “They no longer need to assist only those who are unable to work or find their basic sustenance, and those who are in danger of dying of hunger if not helped. In effect if someone barely has the energy to work, you should buy him some tools, appropriate to his profession, without giving him anything else. Alms are not for those who can work... but for the infirm poor, orphans and the elderly.”<sup>34</sup>

That which is without doubt one the most original intuitions of Vincent de Paul, the Company of the Daughters of Charity, is constituted by poor village girls. These **poor young women** turn out to be for Vincent de Paul the best **agents of evangelization of the poor**: “Know this, my daughters, that I have learned that these poor people are very grateful for the grace that God has given them and to see that the Daughters will be present to them and that these Sisters have no other interest in them than the love of God; they say that they now realize that God is the protector of the poor. See how beautiful it is to help these poor people to recognize the goodness of God! Why, they understand perfectly that it is God who moves the Sisters to do this service.”<sup>35</sup>

“The poor are for Saint Vincent the place of faith; only in them does one find Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ does one find the living God.”<sup>36</sup> “Among the poor is found true religion, a living faith.”<sup>37</sup>

In the conference of December 13, 1658, he does not hesitate to confess to his missionaries: “The poor will one day dispute our place in paradise and will snatch it away from us, because there exists a great difference between their way of loving God and our way. Their love is shown in their suffering, in their humiliations, in labor and in conformity with the will of God. And ours, if we have any, how will it be known?”<sup>38</sup>

He feels, and he says so at the end of his life, that he has been evangelized by them, or perhaps, that through them he has finally learned what the true gospel means and what true faith means. Now he has no security in his life other than dedication to the poor; including, he hopes, for his own definitive salvation through them.<sup>39</sup> Since “there is no better way to assure our eternal happiness than to live and die in the service of the poor.”<sup>40</sup>

<sup>34</sup> SV IV, 183.

<sup>35</sup> SV X, 512.

<sup>36</sup> J. CORERA, *Diez estudios vicencianos* [Ten Vincentian Studies], p. 39.

<sup>37</sup> SV XII, 171.

<sup>38</sup> SV XII, 100-101.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. SVP IX, 241.

<sup>40</sup> SV III, 392.

So, then, to continue Christ's mission in our world today, in the steps of Vincent de Paul, we will have to seek out the most abandoned poor, in such a way that, in the words of John Paul II, "no one should relax while, in your country, there is one man, one woman, one child, one old person, one sick person, one child of God!... whose human and Christian dignity is not respected and loved."<sup>41</sup>

Actually the mission has become truly **universal** when the most poor are the protagonists, the participants in full communion of the goods of the Reign of God.<sup>42</sup>

## 5. Lay persons in the Church in service of the Mission

Ever since the experience lived out by Vincent de Paul in Châtillon, lay persons, and particularly women, appear as agents in the Church in service of the mission.<sup>43</sup>

Vincent de Paul recognizes that women had no apostolic activity in the Church of his time, noting that this was not so in the Church of the first centuries: "There have been some eight hundred years in which women have had no public occupation in the Church. Before, there existed deaconesses concerned with organizing women within the Church and instructing them about the ceremonies which then were used. But... in the times of Charlemagne, this use ceased and your gender remained deprived from all occupation."<sup>44</sup>

Vincent de Paul, who recognizes the existing situation, nevertheless does not accept it. He remembers that there were women at the side of Jesus Christ and that they fulfilled apostolic ministry: "Among those who remained firm in following our Lord there were women as well as men, who followed Him up to the cross. The women were not apostles, but formed an order whose office consisted in contributing to the ministry of the apostles, to attend to their needs and to the needs of the faithful."<sup>45</sup>

For this reason, Vincent de Paul is convinced that the time has come for women to return to carrying out the ministry that belongs to them in the mission of the Church.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Homily During the Celebration of the Word in Viedma* (Argentina), *op. cit.*, 637.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 26.

<sup>43</sup> A. Dodin has noted how, through the intervention of Vincent de Paul, attention was given to the role of the laity — particularly of women — in the Church's direct apostolate. Cf. A. DODIN, "St. Vincent de Paul and Women in the Life of the Church," in *Lecciones sobre vicencianismo [Lessons About Vincentianism]*, pp. 161 ff.

<sup>44</sup> ABELLY II, X, p. 364.

<sup>45</sup> ABELLY, I.C., p. 368.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. ABELLY, I.C., p. 364.

Vincent de Paul is conscious that the participation of women in the mission of the Church encounters all kinds of resistance, some founded even in expressions of Saint Paul; consequently, Vincent hastens to declare that women who serve in the mission of the Church are dispensed from any possible prohibition.<sup>47</sup> And he clearly involves women in the missionary work of the Church, in the very building up of the Church.<sup>48</sup>

Saint Vincent de Paul had the audacity to incorporate lay persons in missionary activity. The Vincentian Family today constitutes a potential missionary thanks to thousands of lay people who wish to assume their responsibility in faithfulness to the inspirations of Saint Vincent. **The mission will be done with the laity or not at all.**<sup>49</sup>

By the fact of forming part of the Church, all of us are responsible for the mission. John Paul II has said: “The universal calling to holiness is tightly bound up with the universal calling to the mission. Each baptized person is called to holiness and to the mission.”<sup>50</sup> “The Church is missionary and the work of evangelization is a fundamental duty of the People of God.”<sup>51</sup>

Lay participation in the transmission of faith and in evangelization form part of the history of Christianity ever since the first centuries.<sup>52</sup> “Lay people cooperate in the work of evangelization of the Church and participate in her mission of salvation both as witnesses and as living instruments.... Properly speaking, as long as there does not exist a laity and one which works with the pastors, the Church is not truly founded, nor does it fully live, nor is it the perfect sign of Christ among the nations.”<sup>53</sup>

Lay persons are called especially to participate in all missionary initiatives, not because now there are fewer priests, but because of the duty, the right which flows from baptism, because of which “they have the general obligation, and enjoy the right, both personal and by association, to work that the divine message of salvation is known and received by all people in all the world; an obligation that values them even more in those circumstances in which only through them can people hear the Gospel and know Jesus Christ.”<sup>54</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Cf. SVP X, 902.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. SVP X, 958.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 71-72.

<sup>50</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 90.

<sup>51</sup> *Ad Gentes*, 35.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 71.

<sup>53</sup> *Ad Gentes*, 41; 21.

<sup>54</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 71.

Because “the Gospel cannot penetrate deeply into the consciences, into the lives, into the labor of people, without the active presence of the laity.”<sup>55</sup>

## 6. Charity, which animates the mission; the mission, which makes charity

Saint Vincent, reflecting on the attitude of Christ, discovers in His love the explanation of His surrender and service. Christ is contemplated by Vincent de Paul as an abyss of tenderness which brings Him to behave as **Servant**. In the conference of December 13, 1658, speaking to the missionaries about the members of the Congregation of the Mission and their occupations, Vincent exclaims: “O love, the love of my Savior! O, love, love! You were incomparably more wonderful than all the angels were able to comprehend or could ever comprehend! Your humiliations were nothing other than love; your labor was love, your sufferings love, your prayers love, and every one of your exterior and interior operations were nothing other than repeated acts of your love. Your love gave you a great contempt of the world, contempt of the spirit of the world, contempt of earthly goods, contempt of all pleasures and contempt of all honors. Here there is a description of the spirit of our Lord, with which we should re-clothe ourselves, which consists in one word, to always have a great respect and love of God.”<sup>56</sup>

And in his conference to the missionaries on May 30, 1659, with no less enthusiasm, he invites them to contemplate the love of Jesus Christ and **to re-clothe themselves with this same love** which is capable of surrendering self up to the final consequences.<sup>57</sup>

Jesus Christ did not content himself with preaching to the poor; he served them. This is one conviction firmly in the spiritual experience of Saint Vincent, by means of, in particular, the events of Châtillon in 1617, which gave birth to the Confraternities of Charity.

Saint Vincent has reflected amply over the gospel scene in Saint Mathew 25:31-46: “Whatever you do to one of these my little ones, you do to me.”<sup>58</sup> He clearly speaks of the poor in terms such as teachers, masters, lords, to point out the attitude of **service** proper to those on earth whose own mission is to continue the mission of Jesus Christ.

In the conference given by Vincent de Paul in the last days of his life, concerning the end of the Congregation of the Mission, which

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<sup>55</sup> VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Ad Gentes*, 21.

<sup>56</sup> SV XII, 109.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. SV XII, 260 ss.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. SV XII, 73 ss.

has been called “the testament of Monsieur Vincent”<sup>59</sup> the elderly missionary lists out in detail the proper object of the labor of evangelization: the folk in the countryside, the old people in the Asylum of the Name of Jesus, the inhabitants in those areas devastated by war, the insane at Saint Lazare, the youth at the reformatory of Saint Lazare, abandoned children, the poor of Madagascar, the slaves of Barbary....<sup>60</sup>

And even to this list one could add other various kinds of poor who do not appear there but who were the focus of Vincent de Paul’s and his missionaries’ dedication: those condemned to galleys, ruined aristocrats and émigrés, refugees of war, soldiers.<sup>61</sup>

Saint Vincent repeats to his missionaries that they have as their own lot, as an inheritance, the poor: “We are the priests of the poor. God has chosen us for them. This is primary for us, the rest is incidental.”<sup>62</sup> “The most important part of our vocation is to work for the poor, and all the rest is incidental.... How poor we are if we are remiss in fulfilling the obligation that we have to come to the aid of the poor! Because we have given ourselves to God for this and God counts on us.”<sup>63</sup>

Vincent de Paul’s contemporaries reproached him more than once<sup>64</sup> for extending the mission to the ever growing needs of the poor. For Vincent de Paul it is not possible to restrain himself when faced with **all** the needs of **all** the poor.

The mission, as Vincent de Paul saw it and lived it out, cannot be reduced to one announcement of the word or of doctrine, nor to a one-time relief of the most urgent needs of the poor. For Vincent de Paul, the mission becomes channeled into the **totality of the person** who, as he loved to say, has to be attended to corporally and spiritually.

He says so perfectly clearly to his missionary priests, who sometimes were inclined to be satisfied with preaching: “To go to evangelize the poor is not understood only to teach the mysteries necessary for salvation but to do all those things which the prophets preached and prefigured, to make the gospel effective.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Cf. J. CORERA, *Diez estudios vicencianos* [*Ten Vincentian Studies*], pp. 62-86.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. SV XII, 260 ss.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. J. CORERA, *El pobre según San Vicente* [*The Poor According to St. Vincent*], pp. 581-582.

<sup>62</sup> COLLET, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

<sup>63</sup> SV XII, 108 ss.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. as an example, SVP XI, 390-398.

<sup>65</sup> SV XII, 84.

He says so with the same clarity to the Daughters of Charity who could think that their mission was only to relieve the bodies of the poor: "You are not here only to attend to the bodies of the poor sick, but also to give them instruction in what you are able."<sup>66</sup> "You must bring to the poor sick two kinds of food: corporal and spiritual..."<sup>67</sup>

And, with the same clarity, in the rules written for the Confraternities of Charity, he shows that the association exists to serve the poor corporally and spiritually. The two aspects of evangelization always go together. Because of this, Vincent would himself be concerned with affairs such as cleanliness and the quantity of meat for each poor person.<sup>68</sup> In other moments he would speak of raising the spirits of the poor.<sup>69</sup> But, at the same time, he could mention catechesis and the spiritual preparation of the poor.<sup>70</sup> In the mind of Vincent de Paul, spiritual service and corporal service do not constitute separate ends, but two aspects of the same end, of the same evangelizing mission.

Just so, today, in following Christ in the footsteps of Vincent de Paul, we will have to guess how to correctly join the promotion of the poor with the explicit proclamation of Jesus Christ; effective commitment to the struggle against poverty, the analysis of its causes in solidarity with those on the edge of society, the denunciation of personal sin with society and structures that create exclusion and dependence.<sup>71</sup> "In effect, if the Christian message about love and justice does not show its effectiveness in activity for justice in the world, it will only with great difficulty gain any credibility with the people of our time."<sup>72</sup>

Jesus' words and saving gestures stirred up hope among the poor and afflicted who came to Him. After having brought about various signs in favor of the marginalized, Jesus responded to those sent by the Baptist: "Go and tell John what you are seeing and hearing" (Mt 11:4-6). As followers of Christ Jesus we are called to be **instruments of hope today** with our activities just as with our words. We followers of Jesus are not able to stop talking; we are

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<sup>66</sup> SV IX, 48.

<sup>67</sup> SV IX, 593 ss.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. SVP X, 616-617.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. SVP X, 966.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. SVP X, 967.

<sup>71</sup> "The greatest obstacles to conquering poverty are not technical but moral" John Paul II has stated in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 85. "Poverty is the product of man's will who passes unjust laws that benefit the most powerful while burying into poverty those who are most weak and handicapped." *Ibid.*, 9, cf. 16, 37.

<sup>72</sup> THE UNIVERSAL SYNOD OF BISHOPS, *Justice in the World* (1971), 37.

unable to shut up the Good News, we cannot stop making the gospel credible with concrete works,<sup>73</sup> with eloquent signs of love that promote a new solidarity.

The encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* of John Paul II considers human welfare and development as one of the directions of the mission today, one which is oriented to the proclamation of the Gospel from which it receives its dynamism.<sup>74</sup>

And so it is that for the Mission to be completed there has to be integrated:

- Proclamation of Jesus Christ dead and risen.
- Human liberation from all that threatens each one's integrity.
- Elimination of every obstacle to reconciliation.
- Dialog with members of other religions.
- Defense of creation subject to selfish human exploitation.
- Incorporation of community into the celebration of faith.

All those are elements which constitute **the framework of the missionary action** of the Church sent to proclaim Jesus Christ to all the peoples of the world.

## Conclusion

The encounter with the missionary response of Vincent de Paul challenges us. The mission cannot be the commitment of a few in the Church nor in the Vincentian Family, but rather **the responsibility of everyone**. "The new missionary action cannot be delegated to some few 'specialists,' but will end up involving the responsibility of all the members of the People of God. Whoever has truly met Christ cannot keep him to himself, but must proclaim him" (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 40).

Vincent de Paul gets it right in his own time when he articulates harmoniously **mission and charity**. Attentive to historical events, following Jesus Christ, he gave his life to the evangelization of the poor. We who are part of the Vincentian Family are called to re-create today **his same spiritual and missionary experience**, and to do so from the missionary program of Christ "He has sent me to bring good news to the poor," our motto and the key to our own existence.

(Translation: DANIEL P. BORLIK, C.M.)

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Mt 5:6; Jn 10:37-38.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 58.

# The Future of the Missions of the Congregation of the Mission in the Church

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## **The mission in the early years of the Church**

After Pentecost the first Christians announced Jesus Christ with admirable perseverance. Their missionary project is seen in various passages of the New Testament. Shortly before ascending to the heavens, Jesus sent his apostles forth with these words: *“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you”* (Mt 28:19-20). Saint Luke in Acts of the Apostles tells us of the missionary route taken at the beginning of the life of the Church: *“You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth”* (Acts 1:8b).

Other New Testament passages reflect the missionary awareness of the first Christian communities. In the depths of their being, they felt the unavoidable necessity to announce Jesus Christ: *“It is impossible for us not to speak about what we have seen and heard”* (Acts 4:20). Saint Luke manifests his way of thinking when he writes: *“You are well aware that from early days God made his choice among you that through my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the Gospel and believe”* (Acts 15:7). And Saint Paul, referring to himself, writes to the Corinthians: *“If I preach the gospel, this is no reason for me to boast, for an obligation has been imposed on me, and woe to me if I do not preach it!”* (1 Cor 9:16).

From the passages cited, three conclusions can be deduced: the missionary awareness of the first Christians, manifested in their assuming responsibility for evangelizing beyond borders and frontiers; the conviction that a little yeast can cause the whole dough to rise; and the courageous openness to different peoples and cultures. There is another characteristic of the mission of these first Christians that we cannot fail to admire: the participation of families and of individuals. In the origins of the Church, the full weight of the

mission rested on the shoulders of many persons: apostles, disciples, presbyters, deacons, individual families, and a large number of everyday Christians. Saint Paul, in chapter 16 of his letter to the Romans, lists the names of some thirty active collaborators.

Let us say then, to conclude this first section, that the mission carried out by Jesus Christ, in person, and from Pentecost on, by the first Christians, has served as the example for the mission undertaken by the Church for twenty centuries.

Saint Vincent greatly valued the mission begun by Jesus Christ, the apostles, and the first communities. The Saint would often say: "We must follow in all things our Lord Jesus Christ, the apostles and the first Christians. We continue the mission of Jesus Christ."

### **The paths of the Congregation of the Mission**

*"The purpose of the Congregation of the Mission is to follow Jesus Christ evangelizing the poor"* (C 1). Saint Vincent wanted the Congregation of the Mission to evangelize the poor, above all, but not exclusively, by certain ministries.

First: the popular missions. The proper function of the missionaries *"is to travel around through towns and villages, as Christ himself and his disciples did, breaking the bread of the divine word for the neglected, by preaching and catechizing"* (CR I, 2). *"They act contrary to the Rule, those who do not want to go on mission, or those who, having suffered somewhat on mission, do not want to return"* (SV XII, 82; ES XI, 389). *"Well then, what is most important in our vocation is to work today for the salvation of the poor country people, and all the rest is incidental; we would never have taken up the work with ordinands, nor with the clerics in the seminaries, if we had not judged it necessary to maintain the people and to preserve the fruits of the missions when there are good clerics"* (SV XI, 133; ES XI, 55). *"It is a worthy thing for a missionary to have and to preserve this desire to go on the missions, to promote this obligation to assist the poor people in the way that our Lord would assist them"* (SV XII, 82-83; ES XI, 389).

Second: the formation of the clergy. The Congregation of the Mission commits itself to *"help seminarians and priests to grow in knowledge and virtue, so that they can be effective in their ministry"* (CR I, 1). God *"called us to contribute to the formation of good priests, to give good pastors to the parishes and to teach them what they have to know and do"* (SV XII, 84; ES XI, 390). This work demands: *"A serious, humble, devout and constant dedication, as is required by the excellence of the work"* (SV XII, 84; ES XI, 390).

Third: the mission *"ad gentes."* Some *"will say that it is too ambitious to send missionaries to foreign lands, to the Indies, to Barbary."*

*But my Lord and God, did you not send Saint Thomas to India and the other apostles throughout the earth?" (SV XII, 90; ES XI, 395). "Our vocation is to go, not to a parish, nor only to a diocese, but rather throughout the earth" (SV XII, 262; ES XI, 553). "We have been called to take the love of God to our surroundings and throughout the world" (SV XII, 263; ES XI, 554).*

### **Throughout three centuries**

The missionaries of the Congregation of the Mission for three centuries evangelized the poor, above all by means of three ministries: popular missions, the formation of the clergy, and missions "*ad gentes*." What has happened since Vatican II? In order to respond, it is enough to read the annual statistics, or to consult the General Catalog of the Congregation of the Mission, or better yet, to visit the Provinces of the Congregation to notice that some of these ministries, for whatever reason, are not valued or supported by the missionaries. Let us consider, for example, the popular missions. For centuries we have been recognized in the Church as close collaborators with the pastors by means of the missions offered to the people of God. Frequently we have heard these or similar commentaries, offered by priests and laity with satisfaction and gratitude: the Vincentians gave a mission in our parish on such and such a date.

### **A change in perspective**

At present, having barely entered the third millennium, the Congregation, in the same way as certain Religious Institutes, finds itself affected by an ecclesial phenomenon characteristic of the postconciliar period: assimilation. The large multinational corporations zealously guard the logo that identifies them and the brand of the products that they sell. This way they keep their own identity in view of the public upon whom they depend. It is a question of life or death. Consumers buy the brands they want in the supermarket. If they do not find them there, they will take their business elsewhere. Generally they buy quality products which are easily identified.

How has the Congregation of the Mission been affected by assimilation? It is quite simple. The bishops, the clergy, and even the laity do not recognize our name. They consider us exactly like the members of many other Institutes, and therefore, neither identify us, nor find us. On the other hand, seen from within the Vincentian community, it is difficult for us to get people to understand what we are and what product we are selling. We look so much like all the

rest, that in reality, we offer identical or similar messages and methods.

What is the cause of this situation? Perhaps, looking back, the changes after the Council that shook the foundations of Europe and the rest of the world. Perhaps, the enormous social and ecclesial changes after Vatican II that greatly affected the Congregation. Rough waves have brought us to these shores where we now find ourselves. In these circumstances the Congregation of the Mission correctly set out for itself in the new Constitutions all that is related to its own purpose and end. But as it took steps in achieving its stated purpose, it rather timidly took up the ministry of popular missions, and at times even forgot about them. Without a doubt, this has been a great loss. For centuries popular missions were a hallmark of the Congregation, a sign of our own identity. Because of assimilation to other ecclesial entities, especially the diocesan clergy, the Congregation's own identity lost consistency, and the result was somewhat diluted, lacking color of its own. Nevertheless, in a society which is indifferent, and at times unchristian, the extraordinary evangelization offered by popular missions is all the more necessary.

### **The tendency to become sedentary**

In past times, a high percentage of missionaries of the Congregation were involved in itinerant ministries. The house was a point of departure for numerous Fathers and Brothers who animated the popular missions. The radius of their missionary activity was not limited to a specific area. The missionary was at the service of the parishes and places in need of evangelization. Today, on the contrary, the Congregation of the Mission dedicates a large number of its members to fixed ministries, above all due to the phenomenon of "parochialization." The Congregation has become sedentary; it has pitched its tents in fixed places, in parishes that are often small and stable. This option for parishes, shared by many provinces, has had positive consequences as far as personal equilibrium and evangelization. Many missionaries have found a worthy occupation and, on the other hand, have evangelized the poor by means of ministry in the parish. This is the truth. But the negative side also is obvious. The Congregation, above all because of the tendency toward parish ministries, has suffered two consequences: a growing sense of being sedentary, and of course, a strong sense of assimilation. We carry out our ministries along the same parameters as the diocesan clergy, and as a consequence, our particular foundational charisms have been diluted. It has been said, and written, that the evangelization of the poor, that is, the proper mission of the community, is one and only; that it can be carried out in diverse

ways and methods or ministries. We are in agreement with those who think this way. But it continues to be true that the ministries undertaken, especially the foundational ministries, shape the Provinces and the members who are engaged in them. The pastor is involved with his flock and spends his time and energy at the service of a small portion. He is concerned about the part of the faithful for whom he is responsible. His interest is in maintaining their faith and helping them to deepen it. The Vincentian missionary, on the other hand, remains available and open to respond to pastoral needs without being limited to a specific place: "We go where we are called," Saint Vincent would repeat. The missionary's presence in different places is pastorally aggressive; he tries to give a strong, new momentum to a specific Christian community.

### **The effects have a cause**

Why does the Congregation experience the effects of assimilation? Why have we become sedentary? Why is there a significant drop in the number of popular missions, one of our foundational ministries? Vatican II gave momentum to diocesan and parish renewal. The diocesan priests led the way and took charge of their own process of renewal. Here we see one of the difficulties that has affected the missions. It was not easy for the popular missions to fit into the plans for parish and diocesan renewal. Often diocesan priests no longer felt the need to call on the missionaries to help give new momentum to parish life by means of the missions, which are an extraordinary and temporary ministry. On the other hand, this situation led many Provinces to decide that the ministry of popular missions had no place in diocesan or parish pastoral ministry. As a consequence, it was preferable to abandon one of our foundational ministries. Also, the Congregation of the Mission did not open itself to the necessary "aggiornamento" or adaptation of the dynamic and content of the missions.

And so, with the drastic decline in requests by the diocesan clergy for popular missions, quite a few confreres began to assume parish responsibilities. Many European provinces, as well as those in other latitudes where the Congregation of the Mission is present, find themselves more or less in this situation. The number of priests assigned to parish ministries is far superior to the number assigned to the missions. In other Provinces this foundational ministry does not even appear in their pastoral plans. And worse yet, the desire to return to the ministry of popular missions has begun to disappear from the awareness of many missionaries. And so an incredibly valuable, distinctive ministry, which has formed part of our congregational identity, has become marginalized.

## A new horizon

The universal and local Church, since Vatican II, has reflected deeply on evangelization. There are numerous publications by the popes and the bishops' conferences on the subject. The same can be said internally of the Congregation of the Mission. The last four General Assemblies have dealt with this issue. All the documents available are enriching.

On the other hand, both in Europe and in the rest of the world, we are witnessing a crisis in both its negative and positive sense. In a negative sense, because of the indifference and the lack of faith, the decline in religious practice, the distancing of the youth from the Church, the privatization of religion considered to be a personal issue subject only to an individual's decision, and a postmodern current of thinking that has withered the faith of more than a few, we find ourselves face to face with a society that has become paganized, similar in some ways to that which the apostles and first Christians faced, with the difference that their world was religious, while ours is not.

We also find positive factors both in Europe and in many other places: economic and cultural development, the idea of a Christendom of the state that has largely been overcome, and a better focus on the role of the Church in society.

## Our response

We have been prolific in our documents and plans, but we have fallen short, in a certain sense, in carrying them out. What is needed today is to go out into this field which is wide open and to work with humility and perseverance.

The new situation in which many parishes find themselves, both in the cities and in large rural areas, is well known. The harvest is such that, given the cold religious climate, and in some cases, the high level of paganism, more and more pastors are seeking the collaboration of the missionaries. The Congregation of the Mission, because of the abrupt changes experienced in the Church except in certain places, was not able to, or did not know how to offer in the postconciliar years an appropriate means of evangelization, in accord with the foundational ministry, such as the popular missions. In the beginning years of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century we have been given a new opportunity. The Congregation of the Mission must not opt out. The popular missions have a future. A new reflection is called for, and of course, new decisions must be made. Let us remember the words of Saint Vincent: *"They act contrary to the Rule, those who do not want to go on mission, or those who, having suffered somewhat on mission, do not want to return"* (SV XII, 82; ES XI, 389).

## **Conclusion**

There are three fundamental motives that call for the Congregation of the Mission to renew again the ministry of popular missions. In the first place, as Saint Vincent would say, the welfare of souls. Today we could affirm along with our Saint: the poor people are being lost, they are being condemned. The communities of Christian faithful need to strengthen their faith response. With greater reason, the parishes that are experiencing a critical de-christianization call for a response on our part. In the second place, there is the urgent need, experienced by many pastors, for extraordinary help in revitalizing the faith. Their task has been made more difficult because of growing religious indifference, and in some cases, the drop in the numbers of clergy, and the increasing number of parishes with only one priest. In the third place, because popular missions have been from the beginning, and are today as well, a sign of the identity of the Congregation of the Mission in the Church.

The Holy Spirit neither goes back on his word, nor does he revoke the charism given to communities in the Church. And he gives his grace for the living out of the charism. It is through the charism that this same Spirit, working in the Congregation of the Mission, saves and sanctifies the poor. The popular missions did not begin as the whim of an individual, but rather as the inspiration of the Spirit received by the Founder of the Mission.

For these holy intentions to be put into practice, it will be necessary to revive the zeal for the salvation of the human person, just as Saint Vincent understood it. In speaking to the missionaries about the five virtues, the Saint expressed himself in this way: *“Zeal... consists in the desire to make oneself pleasing to God and useful to the neighbor; zeal for the spread of the kingdom of God, zeal for procuring the salvation of one’s neighbor. Is there anything in the world more perfect than this?”* (SV XII, 307; ES XI, 590). With similar words he spoke to the missionaries on August 22, 1655: *“Let us ask God to give the Company this spirit, this heart... that will make us go wherever”* (SV XI, 291; ES XI, 190). To conclude, let us affirm that the popular missions in the Congregation of the Mission do have a future.

N.B. - The Scripture passages are from the New American Bible (1986). The quotes from Saint Vincent are translated from the Spanish edition of his writings and conferences.

(Translation: GILBERT ROLAND WALKER)

# STUDY

## The Vincentian Mission of Tomorrow

by Alfredo Becerra Vázquez, C.M.

*General Archivist*

### Introduction

As a servant it is a privilege to share with you, dear readers, some reflections on the Vincentian mission of tomorrow. I write these words as a Vincentian missionary who has lived the wonderful experience of preaching popular missions in the land of my birth.

This article has three parts. The first part refers to the relevancy of the teaching about the mission that for a long time has been at the center of the Church's magisterium, especially during the last half century. As we examine this teaching we become aware of the fact that the Church's missionary theology and action has flourished during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

The second part of the article refers to the present missionary challenges as viewed from two dimensions: first, the state of missiology as a science or discipline and the implications that this has as it becomes part of the theological curriculum; second, more recent developments of the concept of the missions which missiology ought to focus on. These two dimensions should be considered together if we want to present an adequate vision of the missions not only to the Church but also to seminary educators.

The third and final part will present a reflection on the missions based on the activities of Saint Vincent and viewed as an action of love. I will end with a brief conclusion.

Before entering into the theme of this article I want to warn the reader about the scope of this work. Because of the breadth and complexity of the subject matter this article is restricted to the study of the newness of the Vincentian mission from the perspective of the teachings and practices of Saint Vincent about the missions. These teachings and practices are the result of his love and are directed

toward the loving proclamation of salvation to the poor. Before coming to this point I propose that we examine the history of missionary activity and missiology in as much as it reflects a history of people filled with missionary love.

## 1. Mission and missiology

### 1.1. The Catholic missionary and the Reform Churches

The Church is born with an awareness of being sent forth and a sense of dedication to the mission (Mark 15:15-16; Luke 24:47; Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:38). Therefore in the Acts of the Apostles, the letters of Saint Paul and the patristic writings we find many references to the missionary activity of the most diverse actors. In the first half of the Middle Ages we meet some great evangelizers: Saint Martin of Tours in Galicia, Saint Patrick in Ireland, Saint Augustine in England, Saint Boniface in Germany. These individuals established Christianity in the known areas of this time and it was thought that the Church's missionary activity was concluded. The Spanish and Portuguese discovery of new land rekindled in the Church a new missionary spirit and the movement of the great religious orders to America as well as some parts of the coast of Asia and Africa. At the beginning of this movement there appeared the emblematic person of Saint Francis Xavier (1506-1552) who was greatly admired by Saint Vincent.<sup>1</sup> In Latin America another great missionary figure came on the scene, Saint Torbio de Mogrovejo.<sup>2</sup> The 19<sup>th</sup> century was the era of the African missions and new missionary Institutes were established such as the White Fathers and the Combonians. As previously stated in this brief historical review, the Catholic Church, with no doubt or hesitation, understood all of this activity as proper to herself and therefore saw no need to elaborate a systematic missiology but, as we will see later, the Church never lacked missiology elements.

The missiology of the Reformed Churches was initiated with force during the 17<sup>th</sup> Century with the decline of the dominance of the Spanish and Portuguese and the emergence of new powers, such as Holland and England. At the same time that these emerging powers established themselves in new colonies, Protestant missionaries made their presence felt. It has to be stated that besides

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. ANTONIO TEXEIRA, *Tras los pasos de Francisco Javier*, in *Misioneros Tercer Milenio*, October, 2006, 28-3; IGNACIO FERNANDEZ MENDOZA, *San Francisco de Javier comentado por San Vicente de Paul y los primeros misioneros de la CM*, in *Anales* 6 (2004), 555-562.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. "IV Centenario de la muerte de santo Toribio de Mogrovejo," *L'Osservatore Roma* (Spanish edition) April 18 - May 4, 2006.

the influx of this new element there was also arising, little by little, an outcry because of the lack of missionary activity among the Protestant Churches. This demand originated in the first place as a rejection of Lutheran and Calvin dogmatism and was further encouraged by the visible missionary activity of the Catholic Church that included the establishment of *Propaganda Fide* in 1622. Some voices of the reform demanded a similar organization that would promote Protestant missionary activity.

Parallel to the emergence of the missionary conscience, there appeared in the heart of the Reformed Churches the first outlines of a missiology that justified and encouraged missionary activity. Nevertheless, modern Protestant missiology was born two and a half centuries after the Reform. Two questions arise: Why did missiology arise in the Reformed Churches and not in the Catholic Church that had a long missionary tradition? Why did this missiology arise two and half centuries after the event of the Reform?

With regard to the first question, we have already pointed out that the Catholic Church felt no need to justify her missionary activity and since there were no serious obstacles to her activity there was also no need to systematize missiology. Regarding the second question, the first response that arose within the Reform pointed out various impediments: Protestantism arose in order to purify Christianity and to restore it to its primitive roots. It is said that this internal confrontation made it inconceivable to reach out to non-believers. Also it was more important for Protestants to defend themselves from the on-going attacks of the Papacy. The fact that the areas where non-believers lived, in the East and the West, were under the rule of the Spanish and Portuguese, clearly impeded the entrance of Protestant missionaries. Thus when the power of Spain and Portugal declined during the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, the way was opened for new future powers that were largely Protestant and it became possible for the missionary action of the Reform to spread.<sup>3</sup>

With regard to these supposed obstacles, Angel Santos writes: "The loyalty and honesty of many other Protestant authors did not allow them to accept such sophisms. The missiology of Gustav Warneck — whom we will speak about later on — stated that such hypothetical obstacles could very easily have been overcome if there had been a true missionary awareness among the Reformers of the sixteenth century. In reality what happened was completely different: the harsh dogmatism of Lutheranism that was even more rigid in Calvinism, led many people in the Protestant churches to become

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. ANGEL SANTOS, *La misionología como ciencia. Sus orígenes*, 37-38, in OBRAS MISIONERAS PONTIFICIAS DE ESPAÑA, *La Misionología hoy*, Verbo Divino, 1987.

disgusted and as a result they attempted to minimize some previous theologians and were inclined to embrace the principles of Catholicism. Thus a doctrinal reform was introduced into the concepts of predestination, grace and the destiny of universal redemption. This awakened among Protestants a missionary ideology that was accepted by their teachers and founders.<sup>4</sup>

Angel Santos continues to affirm: “The new missionary movement was not begun by rectors and those responsible for the different Protestant churches. It was a movement that began to impose itself from the bottom up. The need to justify this very Christian activity and attitude is what prompted the development of a systematic missiology that had not been done previously by the Catholic Church because it was not struggling with the same difficulties. In fact, many Protestant ecclesiastics were opposed to the idea of missionary activity and this concept was also rejected by many outstanding theologians. In any case in the formation of modern missiology we can see a mutual interdependence: Catholics were under pressure to systematize their missiology and were pushed to do this by Protestants. At the same time Protestants outlined a missiology that was supported by doctrinal principles of catholic authors.”<sup>5</sup>

## 1.2. Protestant missiology

The first sketches of a missiology and the response to the demand for missionary activity appear at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century among Lutherans as well as Calvinists and Anglicans. For the scope of this work it is enough to pause and consider the work of Gustav Warneck whom we referred to earlier and who is viewed as the father of modern missiology. He was born in Germany in 1834 and dedicated twenty-two years of his life to pastoral ministry and the rest of his life to teaching. Before beginning his pastoral ministry he explained missiology concerns in Barmen. Then from 1896-1902 (two years before his death) he dedicated his time to teaching missiology in Halle. His vision of missiology is expressed primarily in his great work entitled *Evangelische Missionslehre*. This work represents an evolution and, even more, an ordered and scientific structuring of modern missiology which in some ways would inspire later Protestant theologians and the first Catholic missiologists, such as Rev. Dr. Josef Schmidlin.

Angel Santos speaks about the proposal of our missiology and writes: “He came to define the missions as a group of Christian

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 38-39.

activities that are directed toward the establishment of the Church among non-believers and thus involves an expansion of Western Christianity. He was not satisfied to see missiology as a branch of theology but wanted it to be studied in the university as an autonomous field of investigation.”<sup>6</sup>

In 1892 Warneck published the first Protestant manual for the mission “in which he offered what according to him was the content of the mission. There were two great divisions: historical and doctrinal or theoretical. The last part developed missionary doctrine contained in Scriptural exegesis, dogma, historical theology and apologetics. This section of his work also developed ethics or moral theology and its relationship with other missionary organizations as well as pastoral theology in relation to its objectives and methods.”<sup>7</sup> Warneck placed emphasis on the conversion of non-believers and thus the missions were not involved in any form of proselytism with other denominations.

It would be interesting to follow the work of the followers of Warneck but this is not necessary in order to achieve the objectives of this presentation. It is sufficient to recognize that this author was able to systematize a missionary doctrine and thus, within the university program, reclaimed for missiology the status of an autonomous science. Another task that was pursued by these authors was to offer a manual of missionary theory and practice — a manual that could be used to teach future pastors and missionaries.

### 1.3. Catholic missiology

The great theologian Warneck made the mistake of criticizing the Catholic Church because of her *poverty* in missiology. In reality he was unaware of the missionary milestones and the innumerable missionary elements of this theology that had been developed over the course of 19 centuries. As we have already pointed out, the truth of the matter is that the Catholic missionaries had not felt the urgency to structure a theological justification for their missionary work. Their missionary activity was evident and the missionary characteristics of their activity were based on the gospel, the Acts of the Apostles, the writings of the Fathers of the Church and on many other authors who dealt with diverse theological, canonical and pastoral themes of the Catholic missions. Nevertheless, Catholic missionaries and theologians understood the need to systematize their missionary principles and dedicated themselves to this task.

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 44-45.

Here, the outlines of this theology actually go back to previous centuries but we will focus our attention on modern Catholic missiology as seen at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and that was initiated by Catholic German theologians. This theology was developed by various schools of thought and here we list these schools and point out their primary point of view.

- a) **The School of Munster.** A priest, Dr. Josef Schmidlin (1876-1944) and Fr. Robert Streit (1875-1930), an oblate of Mary Immaculate, are considered the initiators and founders of modern Catholic missiology. According to this school of thought the task of the Catholic missionary endeavor was to call the unfaithful to faith and conversion in order to achieve salvation. In 1910 the chair of missiology was established in the University of Munster, a position that became permanent in 1914. In 1930 the Gregoriana and Urbaniana in Rome also established chairs of missiology.
- b) **The Belgian School.** This school was represented by Father Charles who proposed the establishment of the Church as the fundamental principle of the missions.
- c) **The French School.** This school was represented by Father Glorieux and took the position that the objective of the missions was to lead converts to a full supernatural life.
- d) **The Spanish School.** This school was represented by Father J. Zameza and proposed that the objective of the missions was the expansion and growth of the Mystical Body of Christ.<sup>8</sup>

These different schools would come closer together over the course of time until, as Juan Esqueda Biffet points out in his book, a coherent missiology was achieved. Nevertheless, as a theological science, it will always be inexhaustible and open to different points of view. In this regard John Paul II affirmed that one of the objectives of the mission “is entrusted to priests and their associates, to educators and teachers, and to theologians, particularly those who teach in seminaries and centers for the laity. Theological training cannot and should not ignore the Church’s universal mission, ecumenism, the study of the great religions and missiology.” He then added: “I recommend that such studies be undertaken especially in seminaries and in houses of formation for men and women religious, ensuring that some priests or other students specialize in the different fields of missiology” (*Redemptoris Missio*, 83).

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. JUAN ESQUEDA BIFFET, *Teología de la evangelización. Curso de misionología*, 36-37.

#### 1.4. The mission and missiology of Vatican II

During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century the missions had been extended to all the corners of the world and enjoyed an enthusiastic acceptance. It is sufficient to recall the missions in China and the Asian nations, the missions in Africa, the mission in India that were very much linked to the Vincentian missionaries from the Province of Madrid. Pius XI was called *the Pope of the Missions* and as we shall later see, Pius XII opened the missionary endeavor to diocesan priests.

With regard to the theology of the missions, the Second Vatican Council gathered together and was nourished by a previous thorough investigation that involved diverse areas of study: Patristics, biblical investigation, the liturgical movement. In the area of theology, the *new theology* that was promoted by Le Saulchoir, the new theological center of the Dominican Community (near the Belgian city of Tournai but close to the border of France). This center played a significant role and some of the noted theologians associated with this center were: Gardeil, Marie-Dominique Chenu, Yves Congar. It should be stated here that after the First World War the Jesuits opened the theological school of Lyon-Fourvière which produced some outstanding theologians: H. de Lubac, Jean Danielou, Hugo Rahner. We cannot forget other Catholic theologians such as Karl Rahner, Hans urs von Baltasar and numerous Protestant theologians and scripture scholars.<sup>9</sup> Another element that cannot be ignored is the numerous biblical scholars who influenced the encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* published by Pope Pius XII.<sup>10</sup> Many base groups, such as L'Abbe Pierre, the Trappists of Emaus, the priests-workers, the Mission of Paris, etc., had struggled to open the gospel in those situations that today are referred to as situations on the frontier or the margins. All of these groups opened new paths for the Church's mission and expressed their discontent with the *status quo* of the Church, especially in light of the profound changes that had taken place in the world and continued to change the world after the two great wars.

The metaphor of Blessed John XXIII when he convoked the Council is very significant. According to John XXIII it was necessary "to open the windows of the Church so that fresh air could enter." The new air was stirring in the streets of the Christian world and even moving in the midst of humanity as a whole. The programmatic encyclical of Pope Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam*,<sup>11</sup> is a wonderful

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<sup>9</sup> Cf., ROSINO GIBELINI, *Teologia del siglo XX*, Sal Terrae, 1988, 177-270.

<sup>10</sup> PIUS XII, *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, September 30, 1943.

<sup>11</sup> PAUL VI, *Ecclesiam Suam*, August 6, 1969.

meditation on the Church and its relation to the world. The Pope wanted the Church and human society *to meet together, and get to know and love one another* (*Ecclesiam Suam*, 3) so that all of humanity might be saved. In the prologue of the encyclical the Pope speaks about the paths of the Church and reflects on these paths and says: “All such policies must be derived first of all from an earnest consideration of divine doctrine, for even Christ Himself, we must remember, said: ‘My doctrine is not mine, but his who sent me’ (John 7:16). Then they must be shown to measure up to the present state of the Church, a state in which the Church’s interior life is still vigorous, having stood the test of long experience, and its exterior energies are powerfully directed toward the work of the apostolate. And finally we must bear in mind the actual situation in which human society today finds itself” (*Ecclesiam Suam*, 5). From this perspective the Pope divides his reflection into three parts: the conscience of the Church, the renewal of the Church, dialogue. It is clear that the Council traveled a wider and more enriching path than that which is expressed in this programmatic encyclical, but we have here a seed and an insight into the spirit of the Council.

Before examining the missiology of the Council I will briefly review the missionary encyclicals that preceded it. Biffet states that these encyclicals “on the mission or the missions confine themselves to the first moment of evangelization, leaving us to understand a homogenous and harmonious evolution with regard to other themes that are gradually deepened as a greater balance is sought: the missionary command of Christ, the call to conversion and faith, the establishment of the Church, responsibility among sister Churches, etc. Many themes of the Vatican Council are outlined in these pre-Conciliar documents.”<sup>12</sup> I now list those documents.

*Maximum Illud*<sup>13</sup> was the first document of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, was written by Benedict XV and has been classified as the *Magna Carta* of the missions. Among other things we highlight the fact that this document outlines certain elements that missiology must consider: history, theology, pastoral, law, cooperation, missionary works, and spirituality. It emphasizes the importance of preparation and on-going formation for missionaries, cooperation among different institutions, formation of a native clergy, importance of the local culture and the need for women to participate in missionary activity.

*Rerum Ecclesiae*<sup>14</sup> was written by Pius XI who has been called the *Pope of the Missions*. The highlights of the teaching of this

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. ESQUEDA BIFFET, *o.c.*, 62.

<sup>13</sup> BENEDICT XV, *Maximum Illud*, November 1, 1919.

<sup>14</sup> PIUS XI, *Rerum Ecclesiae*, February 28, 1926.

encyclical are the following: the importance of promoting native apostles (priests, religious, laity), responsibility of the local church in the task of universal evangelization, bishops are co-responsible for the missions together with the Pope, the urgency of proclaiming the gospel to all people is derived from Christian charity and gratitude for the gift of faith, the need to form catechists, and the importance of the presence of contemplative orders in the missions. "Missiology that was at its beginning stages, was inspired by this encyclical that attempted to balance the two most outstanding aspects with regard to missions ad gentes: promotion of the faith (the call to conversion) and the establishment of the church."<sup>15</sup>

With regard to Pius XII it is interesting to cite his two missionary encyclicals that are most important and well known. *Evangelii Praecones*<sup>16</sup> was written to commemorate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Pius XI's *Rerum Ecclesiae*. In this document the Pope attempts to balance the most significant tendencies of missiology in his era: the call to faith and the establishment of the church in which a native hierarchy plays a primary role. This therefore supposes the formation of a native clergy and the urgent need to adapt to local culture and customs. *Fidei Domum*<sup>17</sup> is an encyclical that calls attention to the missions in Africa and also calls the diocesan clergy to participate in the mission (today these members of the clergy are called priests fidei donum). Fifty years after the promulgation of this document its impact on the whole Christian community (especially the fact that this document opened the doors of the mission to diocesan priests without removing their status in their own diocese) has been highlighted. In this way, local churches occupied an important position in the mission of the universal Church.<sup>18</sup>

John XXIII commemorated the 40th anniversary of *Maximum Illud* of Pius XI with his encyclical letter *Princeps Pastorum*.<sup>19</sup> Distinctive of the Pope who wrote *Mater et Magistra*<sup>20</sup> and *Pacem in Terris*,<sup>21</sup> we highlight his doctrinal contribution to the relation between evangelization and human promotion. He insisted on two points that were dealt with by his predecessors: the careful and integral formation of missionaries which in turn will help to

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<sup>15</sup> ESQUEDA BIFFET, *o.c.*, 63.

<sup>16</sup> PIUS XII, *Evangelii Praecones*, June 2, 1951.

<sup>17</sup> PIUS XII, *Fidei Domum*, April 21, 1957.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. MANUEL DE UNCITI, *Balance de una Encíclica innovadora*, in *Misioneros Tercer Milenio*, June, 2007, 14-17.

<sup>19</sup> JOHN XXIII, *Princeps Pastorum*, November 28, 1959.

<sup>20</sup> JOHN XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, May 15, 1961.

<sup>21</sup> JOHN XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, April 11, 1963.

integrate the mission into the cultural and social environment of the younger nations.<sup>22</sup>

Let us now examine the event of the Second Vatican Council. It is interesting to note that the missionary document par excellence, the decree *Ad Gentes*<sup>23</sup> would pass through eight redactions before its final approval. This was perhaps due to the complexity of the missionary theme. Nevertheless, thanks to this delay the decree on the Church's missionary activity was able to be nurtured by the missionary principles and the contributions of the four dogmatic constitutions: *Lumen Gentium*,<sup>24</sup> *Dei Verbum*,<sup>25</sup> *Sacrosanctum Concilium*<sup>26</sup> and *Gaudium et Spes*.<sup>27</sup> "The primary idea," Biffet says, "that is common to these four documents is that of the Church as sacrament and in its missionary dimension *ad gentes* is presented as the Church of universal salvation."

From the Council there arises a theology that places the missions in the center of the Church and envisions the mission as the very presence of God in the world. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* and the decree on the Church's missionary activity, *Ad Gentes*, unify and enrich this theology that had been in process during previous years. The Church as the universal sacrament of salvation offers salvation to all people. In order to do this the Church must be missionary. She is missionary because above all else she recognizes her participation in the mission of the Son which consists of bringing light and truth to all people. In the second place the Church is missionary because she recognizes the fact that she has been called by the Holy Spirit to form the People of God. This teaching in *Lumen Gentium*, together with a renewed ecclesiology that describes the missions as the free exchange between local churches, establishes the foundation for the elaboration of the missionary activity of the Church in *Ad Gentes*.

#### 1.4.1. *The decree Ad Gentes*

If it is true that all the documents of the Vatican Council or at least the great documents of the Council have a missionary theme, then the decree *Ad gentes* synthesized the theological contributions before Vatican II and captured the spirit of the Council. Forty-two

<sup>22</sup> Cf. ESQUEDA BIFFET, *o.c.*, 63-66.

<sup>23</sup> VATICAN II, *Ad Gentes*, December 7, 1965.

<sup>24</sup> VATICAN II, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, November 21, 1964.

<sup>25</sup> VATICAN II, Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*, November 18, 1965.

<sup>26</sup> VATICAN II, Dogmatic Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, December 4, 1963.

<sup>27</sup> VATICAN II, Dogmatic Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, December 7, 1965.

years after its promulgation, its doctrine continues to prevail and it is a point of reference for missionary encouragement and reflection.<sup>28</sup>

In the document *Ad Gentes*, 2 we read: "The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature... and God has called us to share his life and glory not simply as individuals but as a people." The mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit is revealed in God's act of creating the world, especially in the creation of human beings who are called to participate in God's life and glory. This calling is not given to us simply as individuals but we are called to form a people. The Church shares in the Trinitarian mission as a sacrament or a sign of salvation that God offers to the whole world through its activity but also through means of the Holy Spirit. In simple words: the Church does not have a mission but is mission. Her missionary activity does not consist of some secondary activity developed by a group of specialists. The Church in her very essence and in her participation in the action of the Son and the Holy Spirit in the world is considered missionary. This is expressed in *Ad Gentes*: "Missionary activity is nothing else and nothing less than an epiphany, or a manifesting of God's decree, and its fulfillment in the world and in world history, in the course of which God, by means of mission, manifestly works out the history of salvation" (9). The mission goes beyond the extension and the expansion of the Church and is the source of the Church's perfection. Again in the words of *Ad Gentes*: "Thus it is plain that missionary activity wells up from the Church's inner nature and spreads abroad her saving Faith. It perfects her Catholic unity by this expansion. It is sustained by her apostolicity. It exercises the collegial spirit of her hierarchy. It bears witness to her sanctity while spreading and promoting it" (6).

#### 1.4.2. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*

*Evangelii Nuntiandi*<sup>29</sup> was published by Pope Paul VI as the fruit of the Synod on evangelization and also published in the context of the Holy Year 1974-1975 and ten years after the promulgation of the decree *Ad Gentes*. As we will see later, it is not directly a missionary document. It has, however, found great acceptance in the Church and has greatly influenced the evangelization movement. This document faithfully brings together the thinking of the participants in the Synod and it seems to me that in this document we see the wisdom of Pope Paul VI as a theologian, his facility as a writer, his

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. *Informe. A 40 años del decreto Ad Gentes y 15 de Redemptoris missio. La vigencia de la mission, in Misioneros Tercer Milenio*, February, 2006, 28-33.

<sup>29</sup> PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, December 8, 1975.

character as a Pastor and his enormous sensitivity to the complex problems of the modern world and the problems of the Church. Moving beyond the mission, Paul VI was concerned about promoting the evangelization of the world, a world that had become more contradictory, a world that seemed to have lost its way and as a result was more separated from God and yet paradoxically a world that was in need of and hungry for God. Let us look at some of the characteristics of this document.

In *Evangelii Nuntiandi* Paul VI has helped us to understand in a significant way the meaning of evangelization. *Lumen Gentium* as well as *Ad Gentes* had elaborated a theology concerning the evangelizing vocation of the whole People of God in the world, a vocation that is fulfilled through the Son and the Holy Spirit. Paul VI has given a greater consistency to the implications of the Church's evangelizing work. He states: "The Church evangelizes when she seeks to convert, solely through the divine power of the message she proclaims, both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieu which are theirs" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 19). The Pope also summarizes the joyful evangelizing vocation of the Church: "Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize, that is to say, in order to preach and teach" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 14).

We find here the dimensions of an integral evangelization that involves not only the individual conscience but also the collective conscience of the community. This involves not only people's hearts but also their lives and culture. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* speaks about the important developments of the mission during the last part of the century, developments that Vatican II could not wholly foresee. The rapid increase in the number of local churches, a concern to elaborate more clearly the relationship between faith and culture, a new and more profound solidarity in relation to the poor — all of these elements have stimulated the missionary project of the Church.

### 1.4.3. *Redemptoris Missio*

John Paul II has left an image engraved in the imagination of Christian people and even on the imagination of humanity, namely, the image of a missionary Pope. This image is the result of his missionary journeys and of having left us the first encyclical that is truly missionary and that was written after the Second Vatican Council. Some people classify *Redemptoris Missio*<sup>30</sup> as the *manual* of modern evangelization. Shortly after the death of John Paul II on

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<sup>30</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Missio*, December 7, 1990.

April 2, 2005, an editorial in the magazine *Misioneros Tercer Milenio* expressed the idea in the following way: "John Paul clearly understood that he had to launch out with renewed resolve in the direction of the missionary adventure because the evangelization of the world is now at its beginning and constitutes the primary reason for the being and the existence of the Church. The Pope did not want his missionary teaching to be reduced to some mere theological reflection but rather wanted to preach with example and so he became the 'first missionary!' Thus he did not hesitate to carry his knapsack on his shoulder nor conserve his energy during infinite journeys, especially his journeys to the nations of the Third World."<sup>31</sup>

Basing himself on *Lumen Gentium* and *Ad Gentes*, Pope John Paul II reaffirmed the missionary command of the Church as basic for the Church and not merely as one of its numerous obligations. He wanted to clarify some points that had remained obscure in the search for new meanings of the mission in order to respond to daily challenges. His encyclical moves along the lines of the motto of his Pontificate: "Open the door to Christ!" Understanding the importance of dialogue and other forms of witness, he did not want the direct proclamation of the good news to be minimized. The Church has confidence in her message, in the fact that Jesus is Lord and thus this message ought to be proclaimed clearly to a world that frequently wavers in uncertainty. Second, the Pope reaffirms the mission *ad gentes* toward "peoples, groups, and socio-cultural contexts in which Christ and his Gospel are not known, or which lack Christian communities sufficiently mature to be able to incarnate the faith in their own environment and proclaim it to other groups. This is mission *ad gentes* in the proper sense of the term" (*Redemptoris Missio*, 33). The accusations that the Church was involved in a profane covenant between evangelization and colonialism had struck a blow to the very essence of the missionary endeavor. The Pope is aware of this past that at times was evangelically ambiguous, but it should not now be a determining factor in continuing the process of a clear proclamation of the gospel.

Third, the Pope during his later years insistently asked for a *new evangelization*, a theme dealt with in *Redemptoris Missio*. Such an evangelization is not only a new effort to preach the gospel in places where it had never been preached before; the Church also seeks to proclaim anew the gospel in those regions where the message has been weakened as a result of cultural movements that are directed against the gospel and where people have distanced themselves from faith in Jesus Christ. Then, this new evangelization impels us beyond re-evangelization toward a new apologetic between those who have

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<sup>31</sup> Editorial in *Misioneros de Tercer Milenio*, April, 2005.

rejected the gospel individually and collectively. Thus the new evangelization is not seen as simply a return to the discipline of the gospel for a people substantially faithful but not docile. In such a case we are talking about undertaking the task of proclaiming once again the message of salvation.

Fourth and last, placing the focus on the relation between faith and culture is seen as a primary characteristic of the Pontificate of John Paul II. As a philosopher and a writer, the Pope was deeply aware of the means by which culture forms the human subject. He was the first Pontiff to introduce the concept of *inculturation* into official ecclesiastical usage. He established the Pontifical Council on Culture in 1982. Based on the discussion of culture in *Gaudium et Spes*, his numerous addresses on this theme during his pastoral visits throughout the world have produced a formidable teaching on faith and culture.

The understanding of the missions in the new millennium in which we find ourselves takes on a variety of extraordinary elements. It is profoundly Trinitarian and ecclesial in its theology. It is a theology situated at the center of the Church and from this center moves outward to propose an irresistible, universal and implied vision of God's action in history. In the second place, the understanding of the missions implies an understanding of evangelization as the work of God in which the Church is called to participate. Above all it drives the concept of the new evangelization and attempts to be attentive to different groups and contexts in which evangelization is necessary and foresees a clear way of proceeding with the evangelization process. Thus this understanding of the missions has grown in sensitivity and has become a phenomenon of culture especially in light of its emphasis on the particularity of culture and its emphasis on the sources of a true unity among people. Everything considered, the ecclesial theology of the missions establishes a solid base upon which missiology can continue to build. Keeping all of this in mind we can now move on to the second point of our reflection which demands our attention as we look at the present challenges.

#### **1.4.4. *The XXXI Ordinary Assembly of CELAM in Aparecida, Brazil*<sup>32</sup>**

In this account of the missionary milestones of the Catholic Church it is impossible to ignore the Fifth Assembly of the Latin American Bishops that created so many expectations in Latin

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<sup>32</sup> CELAM, *V General Conference of the Bishops of Latin American and the Caribbean. Final Document*, May 13-31, 2007, Aparecida, Brazil.

America and the world. In an editorial of *Misioneros Tercer Milenio* dated June 2007 we read the following: "If there is one word that could sum up the content of the twenty days of work of the Fifth Assembly of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean held in the Brazilian shrine of Aparecida, then that word would be 'mission.' If we were to use one phrase, then we would use the words that the bishops wrote in their final message: 'We summon all our brothers and sisters so that united, with enthusiasm, we may carry out the Great Continental Mission.' Without a doubt the great challenge of the Church in Latin America involves commitment and a missionary spirit."

Among the intersecting themes of the Document of Aparecida we find that of the missions.<sup>33</sup> Among the many ideas in the Document special attention should be given to the following: the Church is in a permanent state of mission; this mission is not something that is exclusive of the Church but should have a world vision; poverty should be seen as a world of insignificance; a pastoral attitude that should guide our work in light of the phenomenon of the departure of Catholics from the Church; women as protagonists.<sup>34</sup>

## 2. Present missionary challenges

After having examined the teachings about the missions that the Church has presented during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century we are now able to look toward the future. What challenges are presented to us and what are the challenges that must be confronted? I will present my observations in two sections. The first will deal with missiology as a science or discipline and the second will examine some of the gaps in the concrete challenges, gaps that missiology must deal with.

As we briefly saw in previous pages of this article, missiology is relatively new as a discipline and distinct science.

In the post-Conciliar era, the concept of mission underwent an examination. It was accused of being too indulgent toward imperialism and colonialism. Because of the ambivalent condition of

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<sup>33</sup> The great intersecting themes of the Document of Aparecida are: life in abundance in a good world, even though it is a globalized and an exclusive world; the missionary disciples of Jesus Christ; the missionary disciples in the Church; the sacrament of the Kingdom; the Church animated by the Spirit is a community of small communities; the missionary disciples in the Church in the midst of the world; the proclamation of the gospel in a world that is predominately urban. Cf. AGENOR BRIGHENTI, *Criterios para la lectura del Documento de Aparecida (I)*, in *Adital*, September 24, 2007, [www.adital.org.br/site/noticia.asp?lang=ES&cod=29230](http://www.adital.org.br/site/noticia.asp?lang=ES&cod=29230)

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

the missions the question was raised whether or not missiology ought to form part of the theological curriculum.

The problem for missiology is twofold. First of all, the object of its study — the missions — has undergone a rapid change during the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. When Kaiser Wilhelm established a Protestant chair of missiology in Halle and a Catholic chair in Munster, he envisioned missiology as a means to help in the administration of the religious dimension of colonial life. In this way the missions seemed to be — at least in his judgment — the religious aspect of colonization. At the same time many missionaries became associated with and involved in independence movements which had destroyed colonialism in many parts of the world, especially during the decade of the 1960's. The petition for a moratorium on the missions during the 1960's, a moratorium that was especially strong from the continent of Africa, weakened the missionary project. During the 1980's the nations that at one time were considered the object of the mission were now sending missionaries to other places. This development challenged the territorial meaning of mission *ad gentes* which had prevailed for many centuries.

The emergence of Protestant missionaries who were fundamentalists and Pentecostal, especially in Latin America, gave birth to a series of problems when those persons who had been baptized with sacraments became the object of a primary evangelization. With this rapid change it has been difficult to maintain the focus on what the missions were and how these missions should be carried out. What should missiology study and how should it be studied? Because of the changes that have occurred in less than a century, it is not surprising that missiology has had to struggle to maintain itself as a branch of theological study that is clearly defined.

The second problem for missiology revolves around the question of whether it should be understood as a autonomous science or discipline. Should it be considered a discipline in its own right with its own methods, criteria and procedures? Or should missiology be seen as a field of study in which different disciplines — Scripture, theology, history and the social sciences — come together to examine from different perspectives the missions of the Church? The on-going differentiation of the traditional disciplines that has resulted from the explosion of knowledge and the pressures of the post-modern era clearly place before us the question of whether missiology is a distinct discipline. Seldom has it been able to occupy a central place in the theology curriculum and it has had to be content with occupying a place on the margins of theology. The loss of interest with regard to the missions has led some universities to abandon the chair of missiology (e.g., in the Catholic faculty of Wurzburg) perhaps believing that the days of missiology have come and gone. This has resulted in the fact that some schools, especially in the

universities of Northern Europe, have attempted to develop missiology as a theological science and thus deserves a rightful position in the university, believing that without such an articulation of missiology as a science it will totally disappear from the university.

On the other hand missiology has been seen as an area of study in which the different disciplines are applied to the phenomenon of the missions. The missions can be examined at the theological, historical and sociological level. This other understanding considers missiology as if it had its own particular method. Thus this enables the methods of many disciplines to make a contribution to the complex phenomenon of the missions in today's world. At the same time this understanding of missiology places the integration of the missions and missionary activity in a wider perspective of the Church. Missiology becomes a collaborative effort among schools of different disciplines. Frequently the missions are classified as "the world Church" or "world Christianity" and this is done as a way of distancing itself from the criticism of the colonial era.

The decision that missiology should be more or less a distinct discipline depends on the missionaries themselves. It is important to clearly state the problem: should missiology be regarded as a distinct science and what should its place be within the theological curriculum? In the case of missiology as a distinct science, one might wish to demand that it take its rightful place with the other disciplines that are part of the theological curriculum. In this case people will have to struggle in order to find space for this within a curriculum that is already overburdened. If missiology is defined as the object of study because of its methodology, then it ought to take a different path as it attempts to find a place within the university curriculum.<sup>35</sup> Within the theological curriculum of missiology there are three aspects that have been developed since Vatican II and here I refer to inter-religious dialogue, inculturation and the work on behalf of justice as a constitutive element in the preaching of the gospel.

Inter-religious dialogue has been affirmed and promoted by the Council in *Lumen Gentium* and *Nostra Aetate*.<sup>36</sup> The Council certainly envisioned and hoped that what was then a new movement would grow and develop, as in fact it did. Yet at the beginning of the new

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<sup>35</sup> Concerning these changes of direction in post-conciliar missiology cf. KARL MÜLLER, *Misionología: una introducción*, in SEBASTIÁN KAROTEMPREL, "Seguir a Cristo en la misión. Manual de misionología," 15-16. Besides analyzing questions concerning the missions and missiology, it examines *Redemptoris Missio* as a clarifying response to erroneous and mistaken positions.

<sup>36</sup> VATICAN II, *Nostra Aetate*, a declaration concerning the relations of the Church with non-Christian religions, October 28, 1965.

century we are still trying to understand more deeply the path of dialogue and especially its implications for a theology of religions. The problem of the theology of religions is one of the most sensitive aspects that Catholic missiology must confront, that is, how can we come to an understanding of the meaning of other religions in relation to Catholicism? What is the role of God's plan for human salvation? As the world becomes smaller and the interaction between religions results in conflict, how are we to evaluate the encounter with other religions? The Council and later teachings of the Pope have partially framed the problem: in a way unknown to us, God acts in these different traditions even though they are not formally part of divine revelation. Development of the inter-religious relation is still to be worked through. Certainly there are doctrinal questions but a greater obstacle has arisen with the new outbreak of so many different forms of fundamentalism.<sup>37</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, in harmony with his predecessor John Paul II, is making a great effort, in word and deed, to move this dialogue forward, this dialogue that is most urgent in light of the situation of the world today.

Inculturation, as we have said, is based on a vision of culture that is developed in *Gaudium et Spes*. While this may not be as sensitive an issue as the theology of religions, yet the relation between faith and culture draws us closer to the problems that the theology of religion must deal with, namely, the expression of the identity of Christian faith and, equally important, the method of evaluating and critiquing different cultural incarnations of Christianity. Furthermore, we still have need of a theology of culture compatible with the modern vision of culture that is the basis for discussions about inculturation.<sup>38</sup> In the third place, to work for justice or the transformation of society in light of the Kingdom of God is not properly a practical way of serving people. This is rather an integrating part of the missionary project. In the true sense of the word, to commit oneself to the world has implied a secularization of the mission. The presence of social works and services without an explicit reference to Jesus Christ or without gathering together believers in the Body of Christ has frequently destroyed missionary motivation and denied the public nature of the faith that the Church proclaims.<sup>39</sup> It seems that missiology must confront these problems in

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. JOSÉ MARÍA SÁNCHEZ MAYO, "El Fundamentalismo," in *Nuevos paradigmas y vicencianismo. XXXI Semana de estudios vicencianos*, CEME, 2006, pp. 373-389.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. LUIS GONZALEZ-SANTABARBARA, "Inculturación y fe cristiana," in *Nuevos paradigmas y vicencianismo. XXXI Semana de estudios vicencianos*, CEME, 2006, pp. 43-66.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. KARL MÜLLER, *o.c.*, 9-20.

a direct and immediate way. For these reasons missiology is at the center of theological exploration of some of the most critical theological problems that we confront today.

A final problem that has arisen during the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century is the meaning of direct proclamation. As we have seen, John Paul II confronted this question in *Redemptoris Missio*. But the problem persists in some areas of the Church. This concern is heightened by an increased awareness of the difficulties in inter-cultural communication especially in the way in which the process of acceptance of faith and culture is embraced. This is a communication problem rather than a theological problem, that is to say, this does not lead us to the heart of the debate concerning missiology as do the other three previously discussed situations. But it must be kept in mind that Catholic missionaries confront serious problems in this area in those places where proselytism is prohibited because of established state religions (such as occurs in several Muslim countries). This theme is very much present in the discussion and ought to be considered as one of the elements that missiology must confront today.

Present day missiology, as it is presented at the end of the twentieth century, is filled with methodological challenges that refer to its status as a discipline and these are not simply material challenges that confront the elaboration of the implications of inter-religious dialogue, inculturation, and the proclamation of the good news.<sup>40</sup>

### 3. The Vincentian mission: an action of love

From the perspective of the encyclical letter of Pope Benedict XVI<sup>41</sup> and the practices and teaching of Saint Vincent<sup>42</sup> we now come to the primary objective of this work.

Before entering into the theme I want to highlight the surprising and joyful acceptance that the document of Benedict XVI has received in all areas. As a recognized theologian and with precision and clarity the Pope has deepened the concept of love in the heart of all Christians. "It is not Christian to profess an ideology except

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<sup>40</sup> With regard to the burning challenges that missionaries confront today, their statements are very significant and appear in *Informe. A los 40 años del decreto Ad Gentes y 15 de la Redemptoris mission. La vigencia de la mission*, in *Misioneros Tercer Milenio*, February 2006, 28-33.

<sup>41</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Deus Caritas est*, December 25, 2005.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. ANDRÉS MOTTO, *La práctica del amor y elo charisma vicentino*, in *Vincentiana* (2006), 42-59; GIUSEPPE GUERRA, *San Vicente y Santa Luisa en la Encíclica "Deus Caritas est,"* in *Vincentiana* (2006), 106-110.

because of its relationship to the person.” At the same time it is surprising that this Pope, who is considered a hard-line theologian and one who has a long bureaucratic history, in his first encyclical demonstrates an understanding of the profound emptiness of the modern person, an emptiness that is translated in a thousand different ways but that in substance amounts to an absence of love.

In a classical society, impoverished, weighed down by enormous fear and violence, Saint Vincent proposed the proclamation of the word through popular missions and the practice of love as an organized and free service. In this way he was able to confront the serious problems of European society with regard to the nomadic and permanent poor.<sup>43</sup>

Since others have more thoroughly studied the encyclical of the Pope, I will now focus on the teachings of our founder.

*The life of Vincentian missionaries* is explained by their awareness of being called by Christ. Vincent prayed that the community would always keep alive this missionary desire: “Ah! Gentlemen, let us all ask God fervently for this sprit for the whole Company, this spirit which will carry us everywhere so that when men see one or two missionaries they can say: ‘Behold apostolic men on the point of leaving for different parts of the globe to bear the Word of God.’ Let us pray to God to grant us this heart. There are some of us who, by the grace of God, possess it and all such are servants of God. But to go there, O Savior! Not to allow oneself to be stopped, ah! that indeed is something! We should all have this heart, detached from all things so that we may have perfect confidence in the mercy of God without taking thought, without growing uneasy, without losing courage.”<sup>44</sup>

It was not I who chose Christ, but Christ chose me. This is the basis of a strong vocation: to belong to God, to be a part of God through complete love and chastity, through freedom which comes from poverty, and through the total donation of self in obedience. This is the light that I want to reflect. He is the road to the Father, the love with which I want to love, the joy I want to share, and the peace that I want to cultivate. Jesus is everything for me. We have been chosen to bring the fire of God’s love to others. Saint Vincent reminds us of this: “Now, if it be true that we are called to spread God’s love in all directions, if we are bound to kindle it among the

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<sup>43</sup> It is recommended that you read: IGNACIO BURGOS, *San Vicent y los pobres de us tiempo*, and PAUL CHRISTOPHE, *Para leer la historia de la pobreza*, 117-157.

<sup>44</sup> SV XI, 291-292; ES XI, 190; Conferences to the missionaries, Repetition of Prayer, August 22, 1655.

nations, if it is our vocation to spread this divine fire throughout the world, if this is so, my brothers, how should I myself not burn with the divine fire!"<sup>45</sup>

*The vocation of the missionary is fulfilled* only through a communion of intense love with the person of Jesus, a communion that endures for all of one's life. Thus, if our life grows in this unity with the Lord Jesus, then our love for the poor and our service with them is continually renewed. The missionary vocation is most simple: this vocation depends on the love that we have for the Lord and this leads us to be willing to make the Lord known regardless of the sacrifice. "You see, gentlemen, we should be all for God and the service of the people and we should give ourselves to God to that end, and give our lives to that end. We must strip ourselves bare, so to speak, to put on the new man. At least we should be disposed to come and go according to the good pleasure of God... lastly, we should willingly devote ourselves to the service of our neighbor and to extend the empire of Jesus Christ in souls."<sup>46</sup>

Let us ask ourselves, why there are few Vincentian missionary vocations in the world? We could give various and diverse responses. Possibly one of them is that we have lost the simplicity of the gospel. Young people today do not want to listen but want to see. When young people desire to become Vincentian missionaries it would be wonderful for them to be able to find in our communities a unity among the members, the newness of the gospel and service to the poor. They want to see a concrete plan for life and not simply listen to beautiful discourses. It would be sad if they could not see God in us. If Christ is not in us, we cannot make Christ known to other. If we do not live only for Jesus Christ, we cannot make Christ come alive in others. Saint Vincent insisted that his missionaries should continually clothe themselves anew in Christ.

*Let us be willing to go to the most distant countries: missions "ad gentes."* Vincent envisioned his missionaries working on the front lines in the missions. He wanted his missionaries to be generous, decisive, committed and free for the mission: "O gentlemen, how happy are those who feel this disposition, men to whom God has given the grace of being prepared and disposed to go to foreign lands to spend their lives there for Jesus Christ! History tells us of the many martyrs who have sacrificed themselves for God. And if we see that so many men in armies expose their lives for a

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<sup>45</sup> SV XI, 263; ES XI, 554; Conferences to the Missionaries, *On Charity*, May 30, 1659.

<sup>46</sup> SV XI, 402; ES XI, 281; Conferences to the Missionaries, *Repetition of Prayer*, June 17, 1657.

little honor, or perhaps in the hopes of a little earthly recompense, with what far greater reason should not we expose our lives to carry the gospel of Jesus Christ to the most distant lands to which his providence calls us.”<sup>47</sup>

It is necessary that we realistically present to our future missionaries the demands of our Vincentian vocation, our life in community and especially the demands of our missionary life.

### **3.1. A powerful proposal – A way of holiness**

In the depths of the heart of every Christian is the desire to be holy. Saint Vincent was a saint because he discovered Christ in those who were poor. Vincentians are called to be holy. God wants us to be holy.<sup>48</sup> Is there any clearer statement of God’s will for our Congregation? It is certain that God wants each one of the members of the Congregation to be holy. Holiness does not mean piety but rather means that one is possessed by God. Men and women who are truly holy reflect the presence of God. People are able to perceive God in them and those who are poor are also able to discover God in them. They communicate strength and peace and love in their actions. Those who are holy see with different eyes because God has taken possession of their eyes. They love with a different love because God, who knows how to join justice and love, has taken possession of their heart. Holy people listen to the profound voices of society because God has given them a new ability to listen. Truly holy people evangelize those who are poor because they understand that the poor person is their sister and brother. Their heart beats with the heartbeat of the poor. In the genuinely holy person, the poor experience a respect for their dignity and recognize that they are the creators of their own destiny.

We are called to be holy. We are called to allow the fire of God to purify our lives, our hearts. Let us allow God to take possession of us

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<sup>47</sup> SV XI, 51; ES XI, 362; Conferences to the Missionaries, On Indifference to Employments, August 30, 1658.

<sup>48</sup> Brothers and sisters, we earnestly ask and exhort you in the Lord Jesus that, as you received from us how you should conduct yourselves to please God — and as you are conducting yourselves — you do so even more.... This is the will of God, your holiness: that you refrain from immorality, that each of you know how to acquire a wife for himself in holiness and honor, not in lustful passion as do the Gentiles who do not know God; not to take advantage of or exploit a brother in this matter, for the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you before and solemnly affirmed. For God did not call us to impurity but to holiness. Therefore, whoever disregards this, disregards not a human being but God who also gives his holy Spirit to you (1 Thessalonians 4:1-8).

and then let us totally commit ourselves to God in the evangelization of those persons who are poor.

Today Vincentians are called to go to the poorest of the poor and to offer them integral promotion. We are sent to form groups of young people who are loving and filled with the Vincentian spirit. We are called to be saints!<sup>49</sup>

### **3.2. Jesus in the poor – A mission of love**

Here we draw near to our Vincentian identity. Vincent, with the power of his love of Christ and through his mission of love toward the poor knew how to stir up the hearts of thousands of people of his era and has continued to move the hearts of people today. For Vincent the poor were the abandoned children, the galley slaves, the infirm and those living in misery. For us the poor are: abandoned children lacking opportunity, and hungry young women and men who live on the streets, young mothers who need help in order not to abort their children, the elderly who live alone and are abandoned and feel as though they are not loved, refugees and those who live in the slums of the great cities. Vincent knew that people who are poor not only needed money but also needed respect. They need the hands of those who will serve them and they need the hearts of those who will love them. Today people who are poor not only hunger for bread but hunger to be seen as human persons. They hunger for dignity and want to be treated as persons. They hunger for love. Saint Vincent saw the poor as the sacrament of Christ. He spoke to the Ladies of Charity and said: "Jesus himself willed to be born poor, to welcome poor persons into His company, to serve those who were poor, to put Himself in their place, even going so far as to say that the good and the harm we do to those who are poor He will consider as done to His Divine Person.... What love can we have for Him if we don't love what He loved! That being the case, Ladies, loving those who are poor is to love Him in that way; serving poor persons well is to serve Him well."<sup>50</sup> In the same way he recommended that the missionaries turn over the medal so that they might see with the eyes of faith: "I should not judge poor peasants, men or women, by their exterior, nor by their apparent mental capacities. All the more is this so as very frequently they scarcely seem to have the appearance or mind of reasonable beings, so gross and earthly are they. But turn the medal and you will see by the light of faith that the Son of God, whose will it was to be poor, is represented to us by these creatures.... O my God, what a beautiful sight are the poor if we

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. [http://nuntia.cs.depaul.edu/china/spanish1\\_familiavincentina.htm](http://nuntia.cs.depaul.edu/china/spanish1_familiavincentina.htm)

<sup>50</sup> Cf. SV XIII, 811-812; ES X, 954-955; CCD XIIIb, 433-434.

consider them in God and according to the esteem in which they were held by Jesus Christ.”<sup>51</sup>

***Saint Vincent encourages us to bring the salvation of God to the poor.*** He said: “O Savior! O my Lord and my God! You have raised up a Company for this purpose; you have sent it to the poor and it is your will that it should make you known to them as the one, true God and Jesus Christ whom you did send into the world so that by this means they may have eternal life. Thus it is that we should prefer this occupation to all earthly conditions and employments and consider ourselves more happy therein. O my God! Who can comprehend it?”<sup>52</sup>

***To love the poor is to work for justice:*** “I praise God for the charity the city of Marseilles is showing to the poor in their present need and for the timely help you have procured for the convicts suffering from the cold weather and poverty. God will grant you the grace, Monsieur, of softening our hearts toward the wretched creatures and of realizing that in helping them we are doing an act of justice and not of mercy!”<sup>53</sup>

### **3.2.1. Prayer: support for the mission**

This mission of love is sustained only by the power and the strength of prayer. Only in this way are we able to understand why Saint Vincent insisted on the need for prayer. Looking at his own life he taught that prayer begins with silence, silence in which God speaks to us and we listen. We cannot be committed to love others if we ourselves do not have love. Saint Vincent provides us with a model of a life of prayer. He joined prayer and action, contemplation with action, prayer with his commitment to the poor: “Let us love God, my brothers, but let us love Him with all our strength and with the sweat of our brow. For very often many acts of love of God, of complacency, of benevolence, and such like interior affections and practices, although very good and very desirable, are yet to be suspected if they do not reach the practice of effective love. ‘In this,’ said our Lord, ‘is my Father glorified, that you bring forth much fruit’ (John 15:8). And this is what we ought to be on the lookout for because there are many who, if they have a recollected exterior, and

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<sup>51</sup> Cf. ANDRÉ DODIN, *Entretiens spirituels de Saint Vincent de Paul*, Editions du Seuil, Paris, p. 895; ES XI, 725; Conferences to the Missionaries, Extract from a conference on the spirit of faith.

<sup>52</sup> DODIN, *op. cit.*, 497-498; ES XI, 388; Conferences to the Missionaries, On the End of the Congregation of the Mission, December 6, 1658.

<sup>53</sup> SV VII, 98; ES VII, 90; CCD VII, 115.

an interior filled with lofty feelings about God, rest there; but when it comes to deeds and there is need for action, they stop short. They flatter themselves by the warmth of their imagination; they rest content with the sweet discourses they have with God in prayer; they even speak to Him as though they were angels. But apart from this, should there be question of working for God, of suffering, of self-denial, of instructing the poor, of going out to seek the lost sheep, of loving to be in want, of accepting illness or disgrace, alas! they are no longer to be found and their courage fails them."

"And this is so true that the holy Apostle tells us that only our deeds will accompany us into the next life. Let us therefore reflect upon this and with all the more reason because there are many in this age who seem virtuous, and in reality are so, who are nevertheless more inclined to a soft and easy life than to solid and hard-working devotion. The Church is compared to a great harvest field that needs laborers but the laborers are wanting. There is nothing more in keeping with the gospel than on the one hand to gather up light and strength for the soul in prayer, spiritual reading, and solitude and then to go forth and dispense this spiritual good to people. This is to do what our Lord, and his apostles after him, enjoined. This is to join the office of Martha and Mary. This is to imitate the dove, that half digests its food and then with its beak places the remainder in the mouths of its young to feed them. This is how we should act; that is how we should by our deeds bear witness to God and show that we love him."<sup>54</sup>

The life of the missionaries is one of lively prayer because they are in continual contact with the poor. This makes them contemplatives in the world. Prayer is their nourishment and support. To the missionaries who pray God grants them an incredible interior freedom to serve the most poor.

***Prayer is fundamental in the Congregation because it sustains our mission*** and reminds us of the fact that we are instruments of God's love: "Let us put much interest in the practice of prayer because all good things come to us through prayer. If we persevere in our vocation, it is because of prayer; if we are successful in our undertakings, it is because of prayer; if we do not fall into sin, it is because of prayer; if we continue to live a life of charity and if we are saved, all of this is because of God's grace and prayer. Just as God denies nothing to those who pray so also God grants almost nothing without prayer. *Ragate Dominum messis*. No, God grants nothing without prayer, not even the continued proclamation of the gospel or

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<sup>54</sup> DODIN, *op. cit.*, 905-906; ES XI, 733-734; Extract from a Conference to the Missionaries, On the Love of God, undated.

those things that would give him glory. *Rogate Dominum messis*. But Lord this matter concerns you and is something that is intimately bound up with you. This does not matter! *Rogate Dominum messis*. Therefore, with complete humility let us ask God to allow us to enter into this practice of prayer.”<sup>55</sup>

In the conference of December 6, 1658 Saint Vincent explains the end of the Congregation of the Mission and insists on the cultivation of an interior life: “Let us remain within the limits of our vocation; let us labor to become interior men, to conceive great and holy affections for the service of God; let us do the good that presents itself to be done and let us do it in the way we have said. I do not say that it is necessary to proceed to infinity and to undertake all things without distinction, but those things which God lets us see he asks of us. We are His and not our own; if He increases our work, He will also increase our strength. O Savior! what happiness! O Savior! if there were several paradises to whom would you give them if not to a missionary who shall have reverently persevered in all the works you have marked out for him and who shall never fail to carry out all the duties of his state! This is what we hope for, my brothers, and that is what we ask of His divine majesty, and now let us all render Him infinite thanks for having called and chosen us for such holy functions, sanctified as they have been by our Lord himself who first exercised them. Oh! what graces have we not reason to hope for if we exercise them in His Spirit, for the glory of His Father and the salvation of souls. Amen.”<sup>56</sup>

### **3.2.2. Our mission: to bring the love of God to the poor**

Today more than ever before, the mission to the poor is urgent. The poor not only lack that which is fundamental but they also need God so that their lives can have meaning. It is most necessary to place the person of Jesus Christ, the only Savior of the world, in the center of the life of people who are poor. The Vincentian mission is to bring God, through the love of Jesus Christ, to the poor wherever they might be found. Where there is misery there is human suffering and hunger for God and hunger for the love of others. Where there is misery there is not only hunger for bread but also hunger for love and goodness and dignity.

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<sup>55</sup> DODIN, *op. cit.*, 369-370; ES XI, 285-286; Repetition of Prayer, On Prayer, August 10, 1657 [Translator’s Note: this conference is not in the English edition of the Conference that was translated by Joseph Leonard, C.M. in 1963].

<sup>56</sup> DODIN, *op. cit.*, 509-510; ES XI, 398, Conference to the Missionaries, *On the end of the Congregation of the Mission*, December 6, 1658.

Saint Vincent reminds the missionaries that they are the ones who continue the mission of Jesus Christ: "The state of a missionary is one of conformity with the Gospel maxims; it consists in leaving and abandoning all things, as the Apostles did, in order to follow Jesus Christ and, in imitation of him, to do all that is becoming."<sup>57</sup>

The Vincentian missionary brings to others the esteem and love of God because to love another person is to desire that which is good for him/her. To love God is to desire that God's name be revealed, known, and honored throughout the world. Saint Vincent distinguishes between affective love, which as he says, is a certain movement of the lover toward the one who is loved, a certain complacency and kindness toward the one who is loved. Effective love consists in doing what the lover commands and desires. "The proof of this love, the mark or effect of this love, gentlemen, is that mentioned by our Lord, namely, that those who love Him will keep His word. Now the Word of God consists of His teaching and counsels. We shall furnish a proof of our love if we love His doctrine and teach it to others. According to this, the state of the mission is a state of love inasmuch as, in itself, it is concerned with the doctrine and counsels of Jesus Christ; and it professes to lead the world to esteem and love our Lord."<sup>58</sup>

***The Vincentian missionary has been called to bring the fire of God's love to others:*** "Now, if it be true that we are called to spread God's love in all directions, if we are bound to kindle it among the nations, if it is our vocation to spread this divine fire throughout the world, if that is so, my brothers, how should I myself not burn with the divine fire? How should I not be enkindled with the love of those with whom I dwell, how should I not edify my own brothers by the exercise of this love and lead my dear confreres to the practice of the acts that proceed from this love? At the hour of death we shall see the irreparable loss we have caused.... If not all of us, at least those who have not practiced this fraternal charity as we are bound to. How can we give it to others, if we have it not ourselves? Let us carefully consider if it is to be found among us, not in general but in each of us, and in the requisite degree; for if it is not enkindled among us, if we do not love one another as Jesus Christ loved us, if we do not produce acts like unto His, how may we hope to spread this love through the world? We cannot give what we do not possess.

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<sup>57</sup> DODIN, *op. cit.*, 859; ES XI, 697; Extract from a conference to the Missionaries, *On the vocation of a Missionary*, undated.

<sup>58</sup> DODIN, *op. cit.*, 910; ES XI, 736; A rough draft of a conference to the Missionaries, *On the love of God*, undated.

How, then, can a Company that has not true charity itself inflame the hearts of others?"<sup>59</sup>

Let us remember the uniqueness of our Congregation and the reasons why we are called to evangelize the poor: "There is not in the Church of God a single Company which has the poor for its portion and which gives itself so wholly to the poor as never to preach in large cities. This is what missionaries profess to do; it is their special characteristic to be, like Jesus Christ, devoted to the poor. Our vocation then is a continuation of His, or, at least, it is in harmony with His in its circumstances. Oh! what happiness, my brothers! but what obligations we are under to have an affection for it.

A great motive, then for us is the dignity of this employment. To make God known to the poor; to announce Jesus Christ to them; to tell them that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand and that it is for the poor. Oh, how great that is! But that we should be called to be associated with, and to share in, the words of the Son of God surpasses our understanding. What! to render ourselves — I do not dare to say it — so great, so sublime as to preach the gospel to the poor, for it is above all else the office of the Son of God, and we are applied to it as instruments by which the Son of God continues to do from heaven what He once did on earth. Great reason have we, my brothers, to praise God and to thank Him unceasingly for this grace!

Another motive for devoting ourselves entirely to this function is its necessity. You know, Gentlemen, how great that necessity is. You are aware of the ignorance of the poor people, which is almost incredible, and you also know that there is no salvation for those who are ignorant of the necessary Christian truths, truths that must be known, according to the opinion of Saint Augustine, Saint Thomas and others, who think that a person who does not know who the Father is, nor the Son, nor the Holy Spirit — who are ignorant of the Incarnation and of the other mysteries — cannot be saved. And indeed, how can a soul that knows not God, nor what God has done for love of it — how can that soul believe, hope and love? And how can it be saved without faith, hope, and love? Now God, seeing this necessity and the accidents that have occurred, in the lapse of time, through the negligence of pastors and the rise of heresies, which have caused such great losses to the Church, has willed, in His great mercy, to remedy this by missionaries, sending them to place those poor people in a state of salvation."<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> DODIN, *op. cit.*, 682; ES XI, 554; Conference to the Missionaries, *On Charity*, May 30, 1659.

<sup>60</sup> DODIN, *op. cit.*, 497; ES XI, 387-388, Conference to the Missionaries, *On the end of the Congregation of the Mission*, December 6, 1658.

## **Conclusion**

I want to draw this reflection to an end with three conclusions:

1. In the formation process we want to offer to the candidates a theoretical and practical knowledge of the missions. In other words, we want to introduce into the theological curriculum the study of this area that is most important for the future Vincentian missionary. Thus, in accord with the level of formation, we want to offer mission experiences (short term experiences and longer experiences be it on the national or inter-provincial level). This would enable us to recapture a value that in previous eras was insisted upon: on the international level we are a missionary Congregation.
2. In light of the new missionary challenges we want to be men of God who are open to the action of God and aware of our own limitations. The work of salvation and liberation belongs to God and not men/women. We ought to pray and reflect on these new challenges which for us are the “new signs of the times” through which the God of the poor speaks to us.
3. Let us be women and men who dedicate ourselves to live our missionary vocation without any complex or fear. Let us live our vocation as a continuation of the vocation of Jesus Christ. Our only strength is found in God; our energy is the light and fire that comes from God. Let us allow ourselves to be embraced by this fire and then in turn to transmit this fire, this love to others on behalf of those who are most poor in our time.

As Vincentians we have reason to be in the Church and in the world and our reason is the mission. It is the best service that we can offer. Our Holy Father, Benedict XVI, has stated in his message for Mission Sunday: “Therefore, as has often been said, missionary commitment remains the first service that the Church owes to humanity today to guide and evangelize the cultural, social and ethical transformations; to offer Christ’s salvation to the people of our time in so many parts of the world who are humiliated and oppressed by endemic poverty, violence and the systematic denial of human rights”; and since the missionary commitment is a sign of the maturity of the community: “Every Christian community is born missionary, and it is precisely on the basis of the courage to evangelize that the love of believers for their Lord is measured. Consequently, we could say that for the individual members of the faithful it is no longer merely a matter of collaborating in evangelizing work but of feeling that they themselves are protagonists and co-responsible. This co-responsibility entails the growth of communion between the communities and increases reciprocal help with regard to the personnel (priests, men and

women religious and lay volunteers) and the use of the means necessary for evangelization today.”<sup>61</sup>

Saint Vincent continues to encourage his missionaries to hand themselves over to this wonderful undertaking. In the repetition of prayer of June 17<sup>th</sup>, 1657 he says: “We should all be for God and the service of the people, and we should give ourselves to God to that end and wear ourselves out to that end and give our lives to that end. We must strip ourselves bare, so to speak, in order to put on the new man. At least we should desire to be so disposed, if we are not already. We should be disposed to come and go according to the good pleasure of God, either to the Indies or elsewhere; last, we should willingly devote ourselves to the service of our neighbor and to extend the empire of Jesus Christ in souls.”<sup>62</sup>

The Congregation of the Mission is called to continue the mission of Jesus Christ to the poor. The Vincentian charism is concretized in every Vincentian missionary. We humbly ask that God might allow us to hand ourselves over to this holy intention with joy and fidelity: to be authentic Vincentians during these modern times.

(Translation: CHARLES T. PLOCK, C.M.)

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<sup>61</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Message for the 81<sup>st</sup> World Mission Sunday, 2007*.

<sup>62</sup> DODIN, *op. cit.*, 364; ES XI, 281, Repetition of Prayer, June 17, 1657.