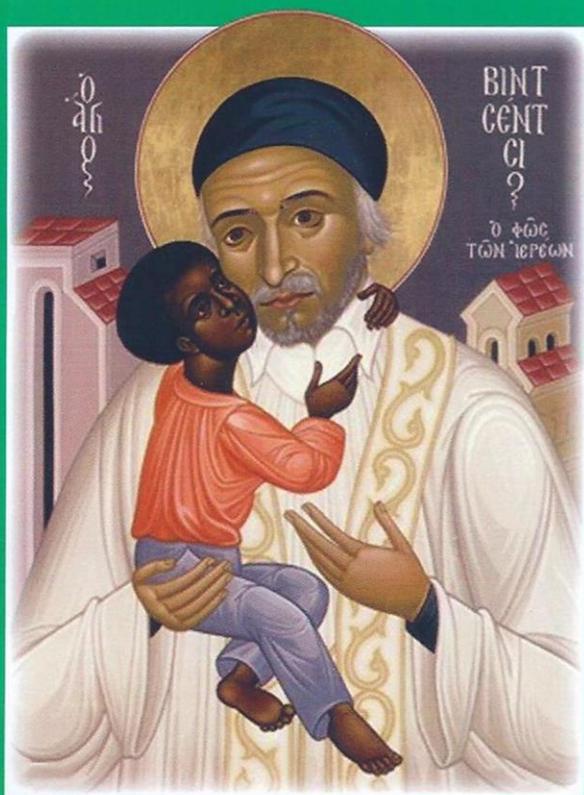


# VINCENTIANA

52<sup>th</sup> Year - N. 5

September-October 2008



ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

## Social Doctrine

CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION  
GENERAL CURIA

# GENERAL CURIA

## MISSION APPEAL

Rome, 1<sup>st</sup> October 2008  
*Feast of St. Therese of the Child Jesus  
Patroness of the Missions*

*To All the Members of the Congregation of the Mission*

Dear Confreres,

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

As St. Vincent, on one occasion, told the missioners:

*“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 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” (SV XI, 51).*

Once again I appeal to all the men 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 of those confreres who, after having read the needs that exist, feel the call from the depths of their heart, to respond to these petitions.

Following our traditional format, 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 2007. At the same time

I will also mention where the needs continue to exist and new petitions that we have received. The division of the letter 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,
- new petitions that have come from different Bishops throughout the world, and
- other missionary news.

## **INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS**

1. **The Solomon Island mission** under the General Curia is strongly supported by Asia Pacific Visitors Conference. Since our Mission Appeal of 2007 the following confreres have arrived to the mission in the Solomon Islands: Antonius Abimantrono from Indonesia, Flaviano Caintic from the Philippines and Joeli Nabogi from Australia as well Drago Ocvirk, from the province of Slovenia who has been helping out on a part-time basis now on two different occasions.

In a recent correspondence that I had from Greg Walsh, the superior of the international mission in the Solomon Islands, confreres asked for a confrere to take pastoral oversight of the parish in the care of the Congregation at Tenaru. The current parish priest, Father Ivica Gregurec, will be vacating that post in order to move into the formation role full-time. And as usual we are always open to the possibility of professors on a full-time or even a part-time basis. That would need to be coordinated with the rector of the seminary, as well as with the local superior. In addition, we have not yet received a response for assistance requested by one of the Bishops of the Solomon Islands who is very supportive of the Congregation of the Mission and has even recommended that one of his candidates begin his studies in the Congregation of the Mission. He has also expressed an openness to having other candidates who might feel called to a missionary spirit. He himself is a Dominican with roots in St. John's University. He would love to have men from a religious community or society of apostolic life like ours, since in his diocese at this time there are no other religious besides himself.

2. **Papua New Guinea.** Since our last Mission Appeal we received two positive responses, but unfortunately both are still awaiting

their working visas to enter Papua New Guinea. They are confronting, as many times we do in trying to place missionaries, the bureaucracies of governments who like to show their power by prohibiting good things from happening in their countries such as evangelization and promotion of the Good News for the poor.

As you well know, we have begun to accept candidates for the Congregation from the Mission in Papua New Guinea and we have initiated the beginnings of a parish. We have the need for volunteers both for work in the diocesan seminary, that is for formators and persons who would be able to teach in the institute in which the seminarians and other religious students study, as well as pastoral people who can help us to expand our evangelization experience in this international mission. At the end of this year, Father Tulio Cordero finishes his contract and will be returning to Puerto Rico, his province of origin. As with the Solomon Islands, the language is English and Pidgin English.

3. **El Alto, Bolivia.** In the mission in El Alto, Bolivia, our third international mission, presently we have four confreres. The mission is undergoing restructuring in order to improve the quality of service to the poor and the experience of community among the confreres in the mission there. The opportunities are various, and the need is for persons who have the capability of withstanding difficult situations regarding altitude and climate as well as language, which is Aymara besides Spanish.

## PROVINCIAL MISSIONS

4. **Province of Cuba.** This is one of our smallest provinces, and yet one where the confreres work with great enthusiasm. Recently, in my canonical visit to Spain, I had the opportunity to meet with one of the Bishops of Cuba who was passing through Spain after his *ad limina* visit in Rome. He put out an urgent call for more missionaries from the Congregation of the Mission to accompany the three that are already in his Diocese of Santiago de Cuba. They are beginning a new missionary experience and in order that the confreres might feel adequately supported, by one another, it would be of utmost importance that they have other missionaries to support them in this most important, delicate missionary experience. At present, there are ten confreres in Cuba. After a long period of time we are delighted to have ordained recently a native Cuban. Until more vocations arise, we need the support of confreres from other provinces.

5. **Vice Province of Saints Cyril and Methodius.** This is still on the list of most important needs. Recently one of the young Polish confreres who worked for a number of years in the province has been transferred to Kazakhstan where the Polish Province is initiating a new mission. The common language among the confreres is Russian.
6. **Vice Province of Mozambique.** They are continually in need of more support as it has one of its native Mozambicans continuing to do further studies in order to be better prepared to serve the mission and the formation of our own there in Mozambique.
7. Province of Salamanca. They continually ask for support for their mission in **Nacala, Mozambique** where since last year they have been joined by the Eritrean confrere, Weldeghebriel Amine. That mission continues with Eugenio López, of the Province of Salamanca and Maurice Pilloud of the Province of Toulouse. There is expansive mission territory and always a need of further support. The language, as is in the Vice-Province of Mozambique, is Portuguese and the native language of the peoples.
8. A new mission request has come from the Province of Paris which through its mission in Cameroon has extended assistance to the country of **Equatorial Guinea**. Recently they sent me a project in which they hope that confreres from the international Congregation might be able to form a team, hopefully made up of someone from Cameroon as well as someone from the international Congregation, to respond more fully to the needs of the people there. They would be working in conjunction with the Daughters of Charity. The language in Equatorial Guinea is Spanish. The confreres in Cameroon, whose language is French and some English, have made a great effort to learn the language under the guidance of Father Claudio Ojeda from the Province of Salamanca who had worked for many years in Cameroon, but had been at the same time supporting this mission in Equatorial Guinea. You may recall that Father Claudio was one of the victims of the recent plane crash in Madrid. He was heading home to the Canary Islands for a long-awaited vacation. May he intercede for us so that God might inspire other missionaries of the Congregation to carry on the work that he had begun.
9. Another province that continually asks for assistance and support and is one of the most international provinces of the Congregation is that of the **Province of China** where we have work both in Taiwan and in mainland China. Many of the provinces of Asia have been quite responsive in trying to fulfill

the evangelization efforts in Taiwan, especially those from Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam. Since my last Mission Appeal, or even more recently since my appeal for help in a special limited way in mainland China, I received two positive responses. At this time there are two confreres, Francisco Cruz from the Province of the Philippines, and Padraig Regan from the province of Ireland, who are working now on a temporary basis in mainland China helping to support the English-speaking people there. We hope, with the occasion of the Olympic Games, that the situation for evangelization in China might continue to move forward.

10. A standard missionary request to help us deepen our understanding of the ever-increasing Muslim presence, is that of the mission of St. Georg's in **Istanbul**. The language is Turkish; in the house the languages are English and German.
11. The mission of **Albania** is currently staffed by members of various provinces of Italy, but is continually in need of missionaries from around the world.
12. The missionary territory of **Honduras** is under the responsibility of the province of Barcelona. The language, of course, is Spanish and Moskitia. Since 2007 we have one confrere from the province of Madrid working in San Pedro Sula Honduras, Miguel Angel Renes, enthusiastically spreading the good news among the people in a far distant land.
13. In a recent letter from the Vice Visitor of **Costa Rica**, Father Oscar Mata, writes of an urgent need for a missionary who would dedicate his time to the indigenous mission in Talamanca. Presently there is only one missionary in the area who is responsible for all of the pastoral commitments. The language would be Spanish and also the native language of the people of Talamanca.

## OTHER NEW REQUESTS

14. I recently had a meeting with the Bishops of the Antilles Episcopal Conference. As I stated in an earlier request to English-speaking provinces, they are in need of formators for their seminary in **Trinidad, West Indies**, and for persons with the ability to teach, particularly philosophy or liturgy on a full-time or part-time basis. The language is English.
15. Another request received was from a Bishop where a team of MISEVI Spain works in **Cochabamba, Bolivia**. He has requested

missionaries to help support this team of lay members of the Vincentian Family as well as the Daughters of Charity who work in his Diocese. Pastoral needs are great and the Bishop is very enthusiastic about the possibility of Vincentian missionaries joining the rest of the Vincentian Family.

## **MISSION NEWS**

The Province of Nigeria continues to prepare men to serve in different international missions, taking seriously the need to have missionaries available to respond to the needs in Africa. Ethiopia as well has supported and will continue to support Mozambique along with the Province of Eritrea.

A little bit of missionary news from the Superior General himself. I considered July to be my mission month. It began with the Bathurst Vincentian Youth meeting prior to World Youth Day. There were over 300 young people from the Vincentian Family, mostly from the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, but also from Vincentian Marian Youth, gathered from 32 different countries in order to strengthen and deepen our spirituality and charism prior to celebrating this wonderful tri-annual event. I was quite impressed with the openness on the part of the young people to get to know one another, breaking barriers of language, culture and country boundaries that oftentimes keep people apart. They are a true witness for harmony and peace in the world.

After my experience there I went on to the Cook Islands, to visit a mission that was begun by the Daughters of Charity in 2005 where there are presently four Daughters working in two of the fifteen islands of the Cooks. The Sisters are working with the marginalized, that is persons with special needs as well as prisoners. It is a very isolated part of the world. I was happy to be with them for a week, visiting both Rarotonga Island and the Mauke Island.

After that I moved on to one of the mission territories of the Province of Indonesia, West Kalimantan, where eight confreres work in four different missions: an urban parish in the capital city of Pontianak, one confrere is the rector of a minor seminary, two work in a center for lay formation, two work in two different parishes a distance up the river. In one parish there are 38 villages and in the other 48 villages that are tended by the confreres and members of MISEVI Indonesia. The Daughters of Charity also work in one of these river parishes.

I visited these mission places in order to affirm our Vincentian presence among the poor who would otherwise be pastorally and

spiritually abandoned. From now until the end of my term as Superior General I expect to continue to have similar experiences in my visits to the Vincentian Family throughout the world.

I pray that God will inspire many missionaries to give themselves in this most special way.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "G. Gregory Gay, C.M." The signature is fluid and cursive, with the initials "G." and "C.M." clearly visible.

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.  
Superior General

### INFORMATION AND CRITERIA FOR THOSE WHO WRITE

1. After a period of serious discernment, if you should feel moved to volunteer, please send your letter or e-mail to Rome no later than 27 November 2008.
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 also 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 not available at one moment might be available at another.
7. **If you are unable to give yourself as "gift," consider a monetary contribution for the Vincentian Solidarity Fund.**

**VINCENTIAN SOLIDARITY FUND:  
TO MAKE A CONTRIBUTION**  
**Provincial, House and Individual Contributions**

1. 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

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

**In every case:**

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

## 350<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY PREPARATION

Rome, 7 October 2008

*To: Members of the Vincentian Family*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

May the peace and joy of Christ evangelizer of the poor be with you always!

After the meeting last February of the Vincentian Family International Presidents and Heads, we launched the celebration of the **350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary (2010) of the death of St. Vincent de Paul and of St. Louise de Marillac**. Today I am happy to send you materials on the plans and programs for this anniversary on the international level.

Our celebration will primarily focus on honoring St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac as witnesses and examples of love and service of the poor. Concretely in this time of grace we will seek to deepen our Vincentian charism and spirituality as well as our relationship with the poor and with one another, and to celebrate their heritage by, among other things, promoting the service of the poor through concrete projects in partnership with other organizations in the Church and in society, particularly projects that bring about systemic change in the lives of the poor.

In view of all this, we formed various committees to coordinate at the international level the activities that would carry out these objectives. Thus, the **Heritage Committee** will coordinate sessions and programs relative to reflection on and deepening of our Vincentian spirituality. The **Celebration Committee** will take care of the major liturgical celebrations during these occasions. And the **Projects Committee** will coordinate plans towards a collaborative project. These Committees, together with two auxiliary committees — **Finance**, and **Secretariat** — will assist the **International Executive Coordinators** headed by Fr. Josef Kapusciak, C.M., with the help of Sr. Palmarita Guida, D.C., and Fr. Manuel Ginete, C.M. A more precise picture of the responsibilities of these committees is outlined in the attachment I am sending you.

The above-mentioned structure for the 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration, although primarily for the international level of the

Vincentian Family, may be adopted on the continental or national levels of the Vincentian Family, if they so wish. Certainly, a similar structure will facilitate our coordination on various levels and with various branches, and thus make our celebration a truly international event.

The year 2010 is likewise the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the death of St. Justin de Jacobis, our celebrated missionary in Abyssinia (Ethiopia), on whose missiological contributions a study has been made recently. It would indeed be a wonderful occasion for all of us in the Vincentian Family to be imbued once again with the love for the poor and the mission that St. Vincent, St. Louise, and St. Justin have so beautifully exemplified in their lives and works.

Once more, wishing you the special blessings at the time of these great anniversaries, I remain

Your brother in Saint Vincent de Paul,

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

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.  
Superior General

*"I beg the Lord to renew all of you in his Spirit,  
so that all your undertakings will belong to him  
and the fruits obtained will lead you to eternal life."*

(Letter to J. MARTIN, SV VIII, 333)

**TEMPO FORTE CIRCULAR**  
**(6-10 October 2008)**

Rome, 3 November 2008

*To the Members of the Congregation of the Mission*

Dear Confreres,

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

From 6-10 October we held our *tempo forte* meeting. Among the more interesting items that we discussed were the following:

1. We had an update on the **350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the deaths of our holy Founders, Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac**. The international Executive Committee for this event, Father Józef Kapuściak, Vicar General of the Congregation of the Mission, Father Manuel Ginete, the delegate of the Superior General for the Vincentian Family, and Sister Palmarita Guida, Daughter of Charity from the Province of Naples, met on 20 September with all the heads of the Commissions that have been created to organize the Anniversary. The major commissions are the Heritage Commission, the Celebration Commission and the Project Commission, which are supported by the Secretariat Commission and the Finance Commission. The Heritage Commission will be organizing ongoing formation sessions on Vincentian history, spirituality and experiences with the poor. The Celebration Commission at this time is planning two celebrations: one in Paris in March 2010 and the other in Rome in September 2010. The Project Commission is suggesting a specific project or projects for the poorest of the poor where various groups in the Vincentian Family may work together on the international level.
2. Within the Curia, we are **remodelling the General Archives**, which is taking place in three of the large rooms of the sub-basement floor of the General Curia.
3. Among the different items that were discussed in the **Econome General's report** was the Mission Distribution Fund for 2008 which was divided in the following way: Asia 22%, Africa 34%,

Eastern Europe 9% and Latin America 35%. This has been distributed for matters of formation, care of the elderly confreres and needs of our missionaries.

4. Brother Peter Campbell, Director of the **Vincentian Solidarity Office**, presented a report. Since our last *tempo forte* meeting the Vincentian Solidarity Office has taken on seven new projects, has looked for funding for ten projects and provided funding for five micro project grants. Brother Peter, also gave a report to the Superior General and his Council on the merger of the Vincentian Solidarity Office with the International Development Office. This report was prepared by Brother Peter Campbell, Father Miles Heinen, the new Director of the Vincentian Solidarity Office, and Mr. Scott Fina. You are encouraged to check out the website of the Vincentian Solidarity Office [www.famvin.org/vso](http://www.famvin.org/vso).
5. The Council received a report from Manny Ginete, delegate for the Vincentian Family. Since our last *tempo forte*, Manny has been working with **Vincentian alumni international** with the hope of encouraging the alumni of the Congregation of the Mission and the Vincentian Family to strengthen their existing bonds with the charism of Saint Vincent de Paul which they have learned.

Father Ginete participated in the **Vincentian Family celebration** in Bathurst, New South Wales, Australia as well as at the international meeting of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul that was held during the World Youth Day in Sydney. At the Vincentian Family celebration, there were some 300 participants from 32 different countries. As many may know, the next World Youth Day will be held in Madrid in 2011 and we hope that the Vincentian Family might be able to organize something for and with our youth, perhaps again, prior to the World Youth Day event itself.

Father Ginete then visited the Vincentian Family, giving them a retreat in Nairobi, Kenya, as well as visiting a number of the different centers of the Vincentian Family. He met there with the Brothers of Charity who live a mere five kilometers away from DePaul Center where our confreres and Daughters of Charity have a well-established apostolic center. Then Father Ginete visited the Vincentian Family in Lima, Peru where he contributed a conference on systemic change and its repercussions on our Vincentian mission during their week of Vincentian studies. Every night, an average of 300 persons from among the confreres, Daughters of Charity, Sisters of Charity and lay

members of the various Vincentian organizations actively participated. There are 19 groups of the Vincentian Family in Peru.

Father Ginete visited the Vincentian Family for a meeting and prayer on 26-28 September in Czestochowa, Poland, where 500 people from among the Congregation, the Daughters, the Ladies of Charity, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, the Vincentian Marian Youth and the Association of the Miraculous Medal participated. There was even representation from Belarus.

Father Ginete also gave an updated report, not only on his activities for the 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration, but also on the preparation for the continental sessions on systemic change for Vincentian leaders and advisors. In 2009 there will be four sessions: in Mexico in February, Brazil in June, Africa-Cameroon in July and Asia-Thailand in November. In addition, our Executive Secretary of the Vincentian Family Office, Sister Maria Pilar, attended a meeting of the Federation of the Sisters of Charity of Strasbourg in Untermarchtal and also a meeting of the Vincentian Family in Central America, which was held in Honduras.

6. **Other international news from the Vincentian Family.** Father Enrique Rivas, the National Director of the Association of the Miraculous Medal in Spain has been appointed as International Sub-Director of the Association of the Miraculous Medal. His responsibility will be to help in the coordination of the Jubilee Year, culminating in the international gathering in the rue du Bac, Paris, in November 2009. We thank Benjamin Romo, the previous Sub-Director for his generous contribution to the development of the AMM at an international level and we thank Enrique Rivas for his generous acceptance of undertaking this role, replacing Father Romo.
7. In a report that we received from Father Robert Maloney, the coordinator of the **Commission for Promoting Systemic Change**, he wrote to inform us that we have now in publication the book *Seeds of Hope, Stories of Systemic Change* in both English and Spanish. The French edition is in the process of being published. The English version of the book can be ordered for \$7.00 by e-mail at [jmorse@svdpusa.org](mailto:jmorse@svdpusa.org) or [kkneaves@svdpusa.org](mailto:kkneaves@svdpusa.org). The Spanish version can be obtained from the press of La Milagrosa, García de Paredes, 45 28010 Madrid, Spain, [lamilagrosa@auronet.es](mailto:lamilagrosa@auronet.es).
8. **CIF Program.** We received a report from the Director of CIF on the last session that was held in Paris on Leadership, where there were in attendance a good number of Visitors from the

Congregation of the Mission, members of their Councils and other Regional Superiors

The Superior General and his Council have named as the Director of CIF Father Marcelo Manimtim of the Province of the Philippines for a period of five years renewable for three years. The Vice-Director of CIF is Father José Carlos Fonsatti of the Province of Curitiba. He has been exercising his responsibility since September of this year.

9. We reviewed the report from Father Joseph Foley, our **UN representative** and have asked that his report be published on the famvin website.
10. We then reviewed some items from the different **Conferences of Visitors**. The Superior General has prepared a letter to be sent to the Visitors of the Provinces of CLAPVI. He will be represented in their meeting in Argentina during October by Father José Antonio Ubillús. The meeting will be the opening of the Jubilee Year for the Province of Argentina which is celebrating 150 years of Vincentian presence.  
With regard to COVIAM, we reviewed a report that was prepared by our delegate for formation in Africa, Father Sy Peterka.
11. We also reviewed some **petitions for candidates for different international mission experiences** as well as made a review of the reports that were received from the international missions of El Alto, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. We continue receiving requests from Bishops in different parts of the world for missionaries. We only hope and pray that the Lord might send us those laborers to work in his vineyard. One of the petitions came from a bishop who had worked with the Daughters of Charity in a previous diocese in Angola and now has been named to his own diocese. Another came from the Bishop of Rarotonga in the Cook Islands.
12. We completed our *tempo forte* with a report from the **SIEV Commission** which held its most recent meeting from 1-4 September in Barcelona, Spain. Because of the proximity of the General Assembly in 2010, SIEV has placed in its future program another session for Vincentian Scholars in 2011. Contents of the workshop that was held for the young investigators earlier will be presented in the first number of *Vincentiana* in 2009. The SIEV Commission also presented some initiatives on how we could celebrate the 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the deaths of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise. Their suggestions include a symposium, publications, competitions and prizes of a literary and

artistic perspective. The SIEV Commission continues to prepare an introductory guide for Vincentian studies which when completed will be published in *Vincentiana*. Their next meeting is planned for October 2009 in the General Curia in Rome.

These are the major matters discussed and decided on in our most recent *tempo forte* meeting which I present for your reflection and information in regard to what is happening in the Congregation of the Mission at an international level.

Recall and reflect on the theme for our General Assembly 2010:  
**Creative Fidelity to the Mission.**

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "G. Gregory Gay, C.M." The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "G" and a long, sweeping underline.

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.  
Superior General

## NOMINATIONS

### **New Director of the CIF**



Father Greg Gay, Superior General, and the General Council have appointed **Father Marcelo Manimtim** of the Province of the Philippines as the Director of the International Formation Center in Paris (CIF). Father Marcelo will officially begin his term in September 2009 for a period of five years, renewable for another three years.

At the same time I am grateful for the wonderful work that Father Hugh O'Donnell continues to do as the Director of the CIF program. Beginning in the middle of this month, he will begin transitioning with Father Marcelo Manimtim and with Father José Carlos Fonsatti, the Vice-Director of the CIF program. Father Fonsatti officially began his term in September 2008. He too has a commitment of five years, renewable for another three years.

Thank you Fathers Manimtim and Fonsatti for your generous giving of yourselves to this most important piece of our Vincentian Formation.

### **New Sub-director of the International AMM**



The Superior General, Father Greg Gay announces the appointment of Father Enrique Rivas as Sub-Director of the International Association of the Miraculous Medal.

Father Enrique assumes this responsibility after Father Benjamín Romo submitted his resignation due to conflicts with his present apostolic endeavors and the leadership role of the International Association of the Miraculous Medal.

I want to thank Father Benjamín Romo for the leadership that he has shown in the International Association and extend our prayers for Father Enrique Rivas as he begins this new responsibility.

Father Enrique is presently the National Director of the Association of the Miraculous Medal in Spain. He will continue that responsibility coupling it with the responsibilities at the international level. His main activity, among other things, will be the organization of the international gathering which will be held in rue du Bac, Paris, in November 2009, bringing a closure to our jubilee year of the Miraculous Medal.

# FEATURE

## Presentation

by Julio Suescun Olcoz, C.M.

The title of this issue of VICENTIANA can appear to be presumptuous. Undoubtedly, it is. The intention is not to present the entire social teachings of the Church, not even a summary. What is included in this issue are various studies by Vincentian missionaries.

For the past several years, SIEV (International Secretariat for Vincentian Studies) has thought that the social teachings of the Church ought to be thoroughly integrated in Vincentian continuing education programs. SIEV asked some of the missionaries to write about these topics. This effort brought about a brief summary of studies of the social teachings of the Church from a Vincentian perspective. These studies would be able to be published in various issues of VICENTIANA, as well as one issue devoted to this specific topic. There were not many who responded, and we gave minor effort to the birth to this project. The completed studies were stored in the archives of SIEV.

As an instrument of service for the formation of missionaries, VICENTIANA has been thinking that these efforts of our thinkers ought to be used and not remain dormant. Thus, VICENTIANA has prepared this edition as a small tribute to those who with so much good will and skill responded to the invitation of SIEV.

The titles are suggestive in themselves. The titles and themes cover the spectrum of Vincentian spirituality, since the time of Vincent de Paul, "totally given to God," in a commitment in favor of the poor and in the practice of charity with its implications for justice. In response to the Church's urgings, many today are committed with eyes wide open to the same reality of the poor that exist in our world. Because of the poor and because of the demands of our vocation, and not because of church rules, we need to apply ourselves to the study of the social teachings of the Church.

VICENTIANA ends this issue with a remembrance, one more time, of the Common Rules, on the 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of their being given to the confreres. The Common Rules were not done in a day and were not the original thinking of one person. They were formed day by day, from the very beginning of the first missionaries giving themselves to God in prayer and in the experience of reflection and dialogue. These first missionaries were discovering the way of fidelity that God was asking of them.

Translation: JAMES G. WARD, C.M.

# Vincent de Paul: the Social Commitment of a Man of Spirit

by Jaime Corera Andía, C.M.

## *Three ways of looking at a saint*

The Soviet historian, Boris Porschnev, is witness to the first way, which is also the most common: Vincent de Paul is the great “organizer of charity.”<sup>1</sup> This is not to say that before Vincent de Paul there was no organized charity. There is abundant evidence of it in the history of the previous centuries of the Church and of European civil society, as well as outside them, as in the Muslim world. But Vincent de Paul would stand out in the history of charity for having known how to organize it on a large scale and with “modern” means, such as the creation of stable organizations dedicated to charity, the use of media such as printed advertizing, the systematic collection of public and private funds, the accounting and careful administration of resources, as well as other aspects.

All of this is certain; Porschnev is not mistaken in his assessment of Vincent de Paul. But there remains another question for the historian: Is being the “organizer of charity” the only relevance of Vincent de Paul for history? In this portrait have other more decisive and defining aspects of a figure such as Vincent de Paul, and his influence in social history, been omitted?

The second way is put forth by A. Ménabréa when he writes: “We owe the revolution that in the past three hundred years has transformed the social life, and the spirit of our laws, to Saint Vincent de Paul. The past had no idea of the institutions that the states... have created since then: help for the poor, health insurance, the legal obligation to aid the unfortunate, to go to the aid of the victims of war, of disasters..., the public organization of education, the learning of vocational skills.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In *Les soulèvements populaires en France au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Flammarion, Paris, 1972, p. 359.

<sup>2</sup> A. MÉNABRÉA, *La révolution inaperçue: Saint Vincent de Paul, le savant*, Marcel Daubin, Paris, 1948, pp. 9-10.

If Porschnev's vision is limited in expressing the importance of Vincent de Paul's influence in social history, it is possible that Ménabréa has exaggerated in his presentation. On the one hand, not all that Ménabréa attributes to Vincent de Paul can truly be ascribed to him. For example, the awareness on the part of public authorities of the obligation to help the needy is much earlier than Saint Vincent himself. Thomas Aquinas, witness to an even earlier way of thinking, writes in the 13<sup>th</sup> century that: "The one who governs should care for the poor using the funds of the public treasury."<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, Vincent de Paul is not the only one whose influence was felt in all the areas that Ménabréa attributes to him. Let us briefly remember the ideas of many writers and leaders of the Enlightenment, or of the movements for social change that were so prevalent in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. But Ménabréa points to an irrefutable historical reality: no one before Vincent de Paul had as keen a vision of the social needs of the poor population, as well as of their solutions; none of the important figures of his time... neither in the ecclesiastical institution (Bérulle, Saint Francis de Sales...), nor in civil society as a whole (Descartes, Pascal...).

To sum up: to attribute to Vincent de Paul such a decisive influence in the evolution of social consciousness could be somewhat of an exaggeration, although Ménabréa is not totally mistaken when he does this. Without a doubt, the figure of Vincent de Paul is very important in the evolution of social consciousness. This was clearly seen by some of the minds of the French Revolution who rescued Vincent de Paul as the only figure in the canon of saints who could inspire their own plans for the reconstruction of society.

But there is a third way of defining Vincent de Paul which can be summed up in this affirmation: Vincent de Paul was a saint. If this affirmation is not seen as fundamental to the personality of Vincent de Paul, and as the source of all that he did, as well as the source of the historical influence of his ideas and his works, then we cannot understand Vincent de Paul.<sup>4</sup> Neither can the figure of Jesus Christ, nor can the final reasons for his influence in the history of humanity be understood, if we try to ignore, as has been attempted unsuccessfully many times in the last three centuries, that he was the human incarnation of God.

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<sup>3</sup> "Princeps debet providere pauperibus de aerario publico," in *De regimine principum*, book 2, chapter 15.

<sup>4</sup> "The one who does not see him above all as a mystic imagines a Vincent de Paul who never existed."

H. BRÉMOND, in *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France*, A. Colin, Paris, 1967, Vol. III, p. 219.

Vincent de Paul: a saint, a spiritual man, a man of the Spirit who manifests the richness and the fruitfulness of his spiritual experience in works with a broad social influence. Although in the history of the Church Vincent de Paul was by no means the first to manifest the strength of his spiritual life in works with social implications, it seems to us that with regard to this dimension, he is the most notable figure within this history. Not all spiritual men or women have known how to turn their spiritual experience into a source of important social action and influence.

### *Vincent de Paul and the histories of spirituality*

Can one write a history of spirituality without mentioning Vincent de Paul at all, or giving him, at most, a tiny space in that history? Without a doubt it can be done, and in fact, has been done many times. There have been experts in the history of spirituality who certainly mention Vincent de Paul, but in order to make observations such as “his personal spirituality does not offer anything original,”<sup>5</sup> or that “in strictly religious material, he is no more than a disciple of St. Francis de Sales, and even more so, of Bérulle.”<sup>6</sup>

What the authors of these two quotes mean is that in *their* visions of the history of spirituality, based on works written by men and women of different spiritual experiences, it is hardly worth mentioning Vincent de Paul as an important figure. And certainly Vincent de Paul did not leave any written work. But neither of the authors considers an interesting possibility: Would it be possible, on the one hand, that spiritual experience might be expressed, not in writings, but rather in actions,<sup>7</sup> and that, on the other hand, here is an important spiritual experience, quite original, that has not been studied by the histories of spirituality that are based on books?

Without a doubt, this is the case with Vincent de Paul, a man of spirit who expressed the depth of his spiritual life, not in writings, more or less systematic, (as in Saint John of the Cross or Saint Teresa of Avila), but rather in works with a tremendous social projection.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> L. COGNET, *De la Dévotion Moderne a la spiritualité française*, Flammarion, Paris, 1972, p. 359.

<sup>6</sup> H. BRÉMOND, *op. cit.*, Vol. III. p. 218.

<sup>7</sup> This is how Garrigou-Lagrange, for example, sees him, and comparing him with Saint John of the Cross, considers him a mystic of action. See also G.L. COLLUCIA, *Spiritualità vincenziana, spiritualità dell'azione*, M. Spada editore, Rome, 1978.

<sup>8</sup> Although Vincent de Paul did not write works of a systematic nature, he certainly expressed his spiritual vision in his abundant conferences to his

### *The spiritual roots of Vincent de Paul's social action*

The evangelical basis of Vincent de Paul's spiritual-social vision could be founded in that teaching of Jesus Christ which transcends merely human goodness: "The second commandment is like the first: You shall love your neighbor as yourself..." (Mt 22:39), a teaching which one of his most faithful disciples would express years later in this unequivocal manner: "Whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen... whoever loves God must also love his brother" (1 Jn 4:20-21). For his part, Vincent expressed the same idea with a well-known phrase that is typical of him, and which could scandalize a little the first time it is heard: "It is not enough for me to love God, if my neighbor does not love him" (XII, 262).

This phrase, by itself, dismantles in one swift blow all theology or spiritual vision which is centered exclusively in God, and which does not take into account at the same time, the human person. Every theology, if it seeks to be Christian, must be anthropological theology, or theological anthropology. That is because outside of Christianity theological-spiritual constructions and even mystical constructions of great heights are possible (Judaism, Islam...). It also dismantles at once every spiritual vision, no matter how mystical, which is centered exclusively in the union of the individual soul with God, which pretends to ignore all that is human to come to a pure union with the divinity,<sup>9</sup> including laying aside the humanity of Christ, as some authors who were contemporaries of Vincent taught.

But Vincent de Paul could not lay aside the humanity of Christ, not in the beginnings of his spiritual life, nor as he progressed, nor even in his most advanced state. Through the humanity of Christ, one goes to the Father ("I am the way"), and through the humanity of Christ one also goes to all human beings, above all to the human

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missionaries and to the Daughters of Charity and the Ladies of Charity, as well as in his several thousand letters. But, naturally, it is much more difficult and more labor-intensive to draw out his spiritual vision from this abundant occasional material than from systematic writings. Nevertheless, there are excellent works that have attempted to do so. We cite as the most complete and systematic: C. RICCARDI, *Perfezione evangelica, tutto il pensiero di S. Vincenzo de Paoli esposto con le sue parole*, Rome, 1965.

<sup>9</sup> It would not be wise to be scandalized, nor even surprised by this affirmation, above all if one knows the authentic thinking of the true mystics. Saint Teresa of Avila writes for example: "The Lord only asks two things of us: love of His Majesty, and of our neighbor. The surest sign that we keep both commandments is to keep the one of loving our neighbor; for it cannot be known if we love God... but it can be known if we love our neighbor." *The Interior Castle*, fifth mansion, chapter 3.

being who is poor and suffering, as was Christ Himself: "Turn the medal around, and you will see by the light of faith that the Son of God, who desired to be poor, is represented to us by the poor" (XI, 32). This is the faith of Vincent de Paul; this is the basis of his spiritual life and of the social projection of his works.

### ***The social roots of the social action of Vincent de Paul***

Every human being is my neighbor, including the stranger and the Samaritan (Lk 10:36-37). And so no Christian, who wants to nourish his spiritual life with the spiritual experience of Christ, needs to go very far to practice, as he did, compassion, true love and even the giving up of one's life, on behalf of the neighbor. Unless one lives a solitary life on an island, or in the desert, there will always be someone nearby in need of help. This has always been well known and practiced by men and women of all spiritual styles and in all stages of the spiritual life.

However, neither in every age nor in every individual, is there a clear awareness about the social dimensions of human life. The modern society of today is, without a doubt, more conscious of these dimensions than the societies in past times. Its awareness includes the limits of humanity itself. Now the neighbor is not simply the individual who is near; rather, all human beings are neighbors. Human persons do not see themselves as mere members of closed institutions (small rural communities, feudal structures, guilds, parishes...), to which they owe all their loyalty. Rather they see themselves, more and more, as citizens of the world, members of one humanity.

Faced with this reality, Christian charity must clearly put into practice, without forgetting "close" relationships with those who are near, a vision and practice of "distant" relationships which take into account not only the needs of individuals in close proximity to us, but also the needs of social groupings, both near and far, and of the individuals who make up these groupings, in whatever part of the world they may be. Both Paul Ricoeur and Father Chenu opportunely warned us of this over half a century ago. This is also without a doubt the vision of what has been called the Social Doctrine of the Church since the encyclical of Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, in 1891.

But, as we have said, not every age has had a clear awareness of, nor do all Christians today understand, this new social and universal content of the word "neighbor" and consequently, the new obligations that flow from faith in Jesus Christ (although he certainly had this awareness: see, for example, Mt 28:19).

But Vincent de Paul also had this awareness: the conviction that, although it was necessary to continue feeding the hungry, it was also necessary to improve the spiritual and social conditions of the masses of peasants, war refugees, slaves, abandoned children, prisoners, and the masses of poor heathens. But in order to have this vision of charity as a social virtue, it was necessary to have a social vision of human reality which was not easy to come by in earlier times, times of small “closed” social structures, that began to disintegrate with the discovery of new worlds and the creation of political structures much broader than the feudal structures (nation states), structures that were collapsing in all of Europe under Vincent de Paul’s own eyes.

### ***A new vision: Christian spirit and social consciousness***

In the long history of Christian charity, Vincent de Paul occupies a place which, although quite original, also drinks from the same source which gave rise to this history, the charity of Christ. The historian Henry Kamen correctly framed this idea as he observed that Vincent de Paul’s action, although new in its forms, was grounded in the medieval vision of charity.<sup>10</sup> Medieval means, in this case, Christian, based on the conviction that “God loves the poor, and He loves those who love the poor,” as Vincent de Paul himself would say. To sum up briefly: the theological suppositions of the work of Saint Vincent are grounded in the Gospel and in early Christian tradition.

What is new in Vincent de Paul is the conscious projection of these theological suppositions, now not only to alleviate individual cases, but rather to improve the social conditions for different groupings of the poor. The function of charity is not only to alleviate hunger and clothe the naked, but rather it is about trying to improve in a stable way the living conditions for all kinds of needy who are hungry and lack clothing, the uprooted (emigrants), personal difficulties (abandoned children), unemployment (elderly craftsmen, peasants expelled from their lands), the lack of freedom (slaves), lack of culture (rural schools), religious ignorance (the peasant world of his time). Traditional charity must be manifest now also in works with a social projection to try to build a more just society in all aspects, including the religious dimension, and not simply to alleviate the material or spiritual needs of some poor persons.

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<sup>10</sup> H. KAMEN, *The Iron Century: Social Change in Europe, 1550-1660*, Weindenfeld & Nicholson, London, part III, chapter 8.

We say “must” because undoubtedly in Vincent de Paul’s vision, the exercise of the virtue of mercy is not (as it was in the traditional vision, and continues to be in the general Christian mentality) an optional practice that depends on the capacity for compassion and the generosity of the individual, but rather it is something which is demanded by justice: “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>11</sup> Vincent, by implication and by contrast, attributes not seeing the situation this way as “hardness of heart,” and so he asks God for the grace of softening or moving our hearts so that we can see and understand the situation in this way. This calls for a radical change of vision, a true conversion of mind and heart.

This new vision does not in any way suppose a rejection of the virtue of mercy, but rather the opposite; it supposes the radical consolidation of mercy (that mercy which is not optional, but which is demanded by justice) and at the same time places mercy in the social sphere, for justice is the cardinal virtue which governs the social relations between individuals, groups and institutions.

For example: in the “spiritual” sphere, it was unjust that the institutions of the Church center their activities primarily in the cities and neglect the rural world. Religious instruction and the pastoral activity of the institutions of the Church are owed to the peasants (or to the pagans) by strict justice, for they have the right to them. All this cannot be left, as though by fate, to the personal zeal or mercy of the pastoral agents of the moment. In the “material” sphere, it was also unjust that in French society there were those who lived with an abundance of economic and cultural goods, while the masses of peasants and workers were barely able to exist at subsistence level, or not even that, or that they were illiterate. And so there exists the obligation of justice to try to raise the economic and cultural level of the underprivileged masses. The heart filled with mercy (as Vincent de Paul’s certainly was) must dedicate itself to trying to alleviate these evils. And it must be convinced that it is acting strictly out of justice, a justice that calls for the reform or change of social or legal structures that produce injustice.

This vision seems new to us in social history and in the history of the Church. And we do not exaggerate when we attribute its originality and innovation to Vincent de Paul. Today this vision has

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<sup>11</sup> Saint Vincent writes this to one of his missionaries who worked to improve the religious and material conditions of those who were condemned to the galleys. See VII Letter 2546.

begun to spread powerfully both within and outside the Church, thanks be to God. It is the action of the Spirit that promotes ideas that directly attack the powerful egotism of individuals, of certain social classes and of all nations.

We do not mean that Vincent de Paul was, by any means, the inventor of this vision. As was said above, all that is meaningful in the life, the work and the sayings of Vincent de Paul, has its roots in the Gospel and in the charity of Christ. But Vincent de Paul knows his Gospel well, and he knows that it is said of Christ (citing Isaiah 42:1-4) that, "he will announce righteousness to the nations." However it is this righteousness which establishes the (new) justice, a justice which is above and beyond the concrete demands of Mosaic Law. Moreover this righteousness is proclaimed to all the nations, and not only to the chosen people. All the nations must govern themselves from now on by the righteousness that Jesus of Nazareth announces moved by the Spirit of God (Mt 12:18).

### *The Kingdom of God and his justice*

After thirty or forty years of speaking about this, there is a consensus among exegetes and theologians that, although Jesus said many things about God and about himself, he did not come into the world precisely to speak about God, or about himself. Rather, he came to announce the Kingdom or the reign of God in the history of humanity and in the life to come. Discrepancies of interpretation arise when we try to define the signs that effectively manifest that God reigns in human history. But there are no discrepancies about the fundamental affirmation: Jesus teaches us that God wants us to allow him to reign in our personal life and in all our interpersonal and social relationships.

Moreover it is a question of the reign of God and of his justice (Mt 6:33). Because when justice, as God understands it and as Jesus has revealed it to us, is established, then the reign of God becomes real in both personal life and in social life. This is valid for every human being and for all his social relationships: marriage, family, the world of work, of leisure, of culture, in the economic world, and in politics. No dimension of human life should remain at the margins of the demands of God's justice. And so what is called justice in different human societies, will in fact be justice, to the degree that it reflects God's own vision of justice. We learn in the teachings of Jesus Christ exactly what the justice of God entails.

That is how Vincent de Paul sees it, and he says as much in a conference to his missionaries on seeking the Kingdom of God

(XII, 130). As he speaks about (human) justice, he employs the usual terms of the Christian moral tradition, which in turn, borrows them from Greek philosophy and from Roman law: commutative justice and distributive justice. But what is truly interesting in Vincent de Paul's vision is the clearly expressed conviction that justice is not just an invention of the human mind, or of human moral sensibility. Rather, it depends upon God himself: "Our justice maintains a certain relationship and similarity to divine justice, for ours depends upon it" (XII, 335-336).

If Vincent de Paul has understood it well, all human justice, as well as having its source in God, also finds in God's justice the criteria for judging its authenticity. Not all that passes for being just in a given society is necessarily just in the eyes of God. There are social relationships based on human law (which in a positivist vision of law is the only source of justice) which would be clearly seen as unjust if viewed in the light of God's justice. To give an example that seems evident to (almost) everyone: if slavery were permitted by the law of a given country, it would be unjust precisely because it is unjust in God's eyes. Human law could make slavery legal in that country (a judge could not condemn a person who owned slaves) but it could not make slavery just. Almost all of the human rights which today are accepted (almost) universally as "clear" demands of justice, have been violated by the legislation of practically all societies throughout history.

The differences and conflicts that are false in their theoretical aspect, but which are quite real in practice which occur, on the one hand, because of the flaws and imperfections of what is frequently called justice in the human legal world, and on the other hand, the demands of God's justice taught by Jesus Christ, have caused problems for the Christian conscience. In theory, the demands of justice and charity that proceed from God coincide. They are the same. Remember the phrase of Saint Vincent which was quoted above about mercy as a requirement of justice. In practice, and in the traditional mentality even today, the situation is quite different. And so it is said, as though it were quite evident, that charity should try to accomplish what justice alone is not able to do, that charity and justice should be complementary, etc.

But all of this is certain only because very often human justice does not take into account the demands of God's justice, and even rather often goes against the justice of God. When this happens, then charity is seen as the virtue which remedies the evils caused by human (in)justice. But in God himself, and in the evangelical vision out of which Vincent de Paul lived, this is not the way things are

presented. In that vision, charity and justice are fused.<sup>12</sup> In order to truly love, one must truly be just; to be truly just, one must truly love. Justice and charity, yes; but as two concepts which refer to the same reality from two different points of view, and not as two realities with different content. Because of this, the charitable soul cannot dedicate itself to doing works of charity without also considering as proper to itself the work of establishing true justice both in the society in which it lives, and in the entire world.

To sum up and return to Vincent's idea of seeking the reign of God: what the Gospel asks of us is that we work ("seeking implies concern for, it means action" XII, 131) so that by means of the justice which is in accord with God's own heart, the reign of God be made possible in this world. But in order to do this, one must be animated by a love like that which Christ had for all of humanity, above all for that part of humanity that suffers from human injustice, injustice which is all too often embedded in the legal systems of the nations.

### *The heritage of Saint Vincent de Paul*

The institutions recognized by the Catholic Church that make up what is known as the Vincentian Family, are constituted by hundreds of thousands of men and women who recognize themselves explicitly as members of these institutions and recognize the spiritual vision (that is to say: the way of being Christian, of being a follower of Christ) of Saint Vincent de Paul as their own. This spirituality should animate all aspects of their lives. Three of these institutions were founded by Vincent de Paul: the International Association of Charity or Volunteers of Charity, the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity. Other institutions, some two hundred, were founded in the following three hundred years by other persons, some of whom were members of one of the three which were founded by Vincent himself. Among these institutions which were not founded by Vincent, nor by a member of the three which he founded, the Society or Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul stands out, both because of its number of members and its extension. The Society was founded in 1833 by a small group of young university students in Paris, among whom was Blessed Frederic Ozanam, who was only

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<sup>12</sup> Blessed Frederic Ozanam, at the tender age of twenty, also saw this. He was one of the best, if not the best, of those who have been inspired by the spirituality of Saint Vincent de Paul. He wrote to his friend Auguste Materne on April 19, 1831: the law of love "should be the only law which governs all human actions."

twenty years old when it was founded and who would be remarkable in later history.

This imposing group of institutions and of Christians belonging to the Vincentian Family has not had a single or homogeneous history; although there have always been more or less close relationships among some of them. Moreover, in the majority of them, there is no written history of the institution. Keep in mind these two realities in order to appreciate the value, or the lack of value, of the considerations about the history of the spiritual heritage of Saint Vincent de Paul that we will offer below.

On December 3, 1852, at the age of 39, eight months before his death, Frederic Ozanam wrote to a friend while he was on a pilgrimage to the birthplace of Vincent de Paul: "I owed a visit to this much loved patron who preserved me from many evils in my youth, and who showered so many unexpected blessings on our humble conferences. There we have seen the old oak tree under which Vincent, who was a shepherd as a boy, took cover while he watched over the flock. This tree is still standing, supported by the bark of its trunk, which has been devoured over the years. But its branches are magnificent, and they still have green foliage, even at this advanced age. I see in it what seems to me an image of Saint Vincent de Paul's foundations."

This image of the tree, worm-eaten but still full of life (and it is this way even today, more than 150 years after Ozanam's letter), serves as a metaphor for the state of the spiritual heritage of Saint Vincent de Paul, throughout the three long centuries since his death in 1660.

Like all human institutions which have not been swept away by the march of history, the institutions of Vincentian inspiration have lived, during the more than three long centuries since the death of the founder, moments of splendor here and there, years of little more than mere survival, and in some cases they have simply disappeared. But without a doubt many of the branches of that old trunk continue to be full of life, even today, some one hundred fifty years after the death of Ozanam.

A catalogue of the charitable works maintained today, at the beginning of the Twenty-first Century, by the branches of the Vincentian Family, of the financial bases that maintain them, and of the number of volunteers who work in them (the young and the not so young, the married, single or widowed, priests and lay brothers, Daughters of Charity) would doubtless impress a reader of whatever faith, or of none at all, including even those who are dedicated to and recognized for works which are similar to those maintained by Vincentian institutions. We will not insist on this point, for it is well

known in the wide circles of public opinion. Truly the old tree trunk has given in the past, and continues to give today, signs of vitality in practically all the nations of the world.

This investigation has not attempted to describe in detail the various social ideas of Saint Vincent de Paul; and in fact it has not done so. It is focused on only one idea that seems fundamental to us: the necessity of integrating work for social justice into the traditional demands of charity, and moreover as a central aspect of charity, and not merely as an application or consequence of charity.

Today, after the unequivocal teachings of the Social Doctrine of the Church, and those of Vatican Council II, after much study, and much rhetoric, after so much social movement centered on the defense of human rights, the awareness of the need to integrate justice into the demands of charity is spreading rapidly within the Catholic Church, and also of course, outside it, and independent of it.

Looking at this phenomenon, an inevitable question arises: Do all of those who belong to one or another of the institutions of Vincentian inspiration have the clear awareness of the necessity and the priority of integrating into their vision the work of justice on behalf of the poor, and not simply to alleviate the needs of the poor who suffer injustice? If we examine the official documents of the Vincentian institutions over the last thirty years, the question has a clear answer: yes, they do have this awareness and it is clearly expressed in those documents.

But historical inertia also weighs heavily. Many members of the Vincentian institutions continue to practice charity as if nothing had changed in the awareness of the Church or the world. We must admit frankly that for many members of the Vincentian institutions the theme of justice demanded by charity would seem perhaps to be something new taught by the Church today, but which is not found in the spiritual vision of Saint Vincent de Paul as it has been transmitted to them. Over and against this vision, it must be affirmed that the theme of the relationship between charity and justice, lost in the process of transmission, is in fact solidly present in the charitable practice and the spiritual vision of Saint Vincent de Paul himself.

# Vincent de Paul: the Social Commitment of a Man of Spirit

by Jaime Corera Andía, C.M.

## *Three ways of looking at a saint*

The Soviet historian, Boris Porschnev, is witness to the first way, which is also the most common: Vincent de Paul is the great “organizer of charity.”<sup>1</sup> This is not to say that before Vincent de Paul there was no organized charity. There is abundant evidence of it in the history of the previous centuries of the Church and of European civil society, as well as outside them, as in the Muslim world. But Vincent de Paul would stand out in the history of charity for having known how to organize it on a large scale and with “modern” means, such as the creation of stable organizations dedicated to charity, the use of media such as printed advertizing, the systematic collection of public and private funds, the accounting and careful administration of resources, as well as other aspects.

All of this is certain; Porschnev is not mistaken in his assessment of Vincent de Paul. But there remains another question for the historian: Is being the “organizer of charity” the only relevance of Vincent de Paul for history? In this portrait have other more decisive and defining aspects of a figure such as Vincent de Paul, and his influence in social history, been omitted?

The second way is put forth by A. Ménabréa when he writes: “We owe the revolution that in the past three hundred years has transformed the social life, and the spirit of our laws, to Saint Vincent de Paul. The past had no idea of the institutions that the states... have created since then: help for the poor, health insurance, the legal obligation to aid the unfortunate, to go to the aid of the victims of war, of disasters..., the public organization of education, the learning of vocational skills.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In *Les soulèvements populaires en France au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Flammarion, Paris, 1972, p. 359.

<sup>2</sup> A. MÉNABRÉA, *La révolution inaperçue: Saint Vincent de Paul, le savant*, Marcel Daubin, Paris, 1948, pp. 9-10.

If Porschnev's vision is limited in expressing the importance of Vincent de Paul's influence in social history, it is possible that Ménabréa has exaggerated in his presentation. On the one hand, not all that Ménabréa attributes to Vincent de Paul can truly be ascribed to him. For example, the awareness on the part of public authorities of the obligation to help the needy is much earlier than Saint Vincent himself. Thomas Aquinas, witness to an even earlier way of thinking, writes in the 13<sup>th</sup> century that: "The one who governs should care for the poor using the funds of the public treasury."<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, Vincent de Paul is not the only one whose influence was felt in all the areas that Ménabréa attributes to him. Let us briefly remember the ideas of many writers and leaders of the Enlightenment, or of the movements for social change that were so prevalent in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. But Ménabréa points to an irrefutable historical reality: no one before Vincent de Paul had as keen a vision of the social needs of the poor population, as well as of their solutions; none of the important figures of his time... neither in the ecclesiastical institution (Bérulle, Saint Francis de Sales...), nor in civil society as a whole (Descartes, Pascal...).

To sum up: to attribute to Vincent de Paul such a decisive influence in the evolution of social consciousness could be somewhat of an exaggeration, although Ménabréa is not totally mistaken when he does this. Without a doubt, the figure of Vincent de Paul is very important in the evolution of social consciousness. This was clearly seen by some of the minds of the French Revolution who rescued Vincent de Paul as the only figure in the canon of saints who could inspire their own plans for the reconstruction of society.

But there is a third way of defining Vincent de Paul which can be summed up in this affirmation: Vincent de Paul was a saint. If this affirmation is not seen as fundamental to the personality of Vincent de Paul, and as the source of all that he did, as well as the source of the historical influence of his ideas and his works, then we cannot understand Vincent de Paul.<sup>4</sup> Neither can the figure of Jesus Christ, nor can the final reasons for his influence in the history of humanity be understood, if we try to ignore, as has been attempted unsuccessfully many times in the last three centuries, that he was the human incarnation of God.

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<sup>3</sup> "Princeps debet providere pauperibus de aerario publico," in *De regimine principum*, book 2, chapter 15.

<sup>4</sup> "The one who does not see him above all as a mystic imagines a Vincent de Paul who never existed."

H. BRÉMOND, in *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France*, A. Colin, Paris, 1967, Vol. III, p. 219.

Vincent de Paul: a saint, a spiritual man, a man of the Spirit who manifests the richness and the fruitfulness of his spiritual experience in works with a broad social influence. Although in the history of the Church Vincent de Paul was by no means the first to manifest the strength of his spiritual life in works with social implications, it seems to us that with regard to this dimension, he is the most notable figure within this history. Not all spiritual men or women have known how to turn their spiritual experience into a source of important social action and influence.

### *Vincent de Paul and the histories of spirituality*

Can one write a history of spirituality without mentioning Vincent de Paul at all, or giving him, at most, a tiny space in that history? Without a doubt it can be done, and in fact, has been done many times. There have been experts in the history of spirituality who certainly mention Vincent de Paul, but in order to make observations such as “his personal spirituality does not offer anything original,”<sup>5</sup> or that “in strictly religious material, he is no more than a disciple of St. Francis de Sales, and even more so, of Bérulle.”<sup>6</sup>

What the authors of these two quotes mean is that in *their* visions of the history of spirituality, based on works written by men and women of different spiritual experiences, it is hardly worth mentioning Vincent de Paul as an important figure. And certainly Vincent de Paul did not leave any written work. But neither of the authors considers an interesting possibility: Would it be possible, on the one hand, that spiritual experience might be expressed, not in writings, but rather in actions,<sup>7</sup> and that, on the other hand, here is an important spiritual experience, quite original, that has not been studied by the histories of spirituality that are based on books?

Without a doubt, this is the case with Vincent de Paul, a man of spirit who expressed the depth of his spiritual life, not in writings, more or less systematic, (as in Saint John of the Cross or Saint Teresa of Avila), but rather in works with a tremendous social projection.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> L. COGNET, *De la Dévotion Moderne a la spiritualité française*, Flammarion, Paris, 1972, p. 359.

<sup>6</sup> H. BRÉMOND, *op. cit.*, Vol. III. p. 218.

<sup>7</sup> This is how Garrigou-Lagrange, for example, sees him, and comparing him with Saint John of the Cross, considers him a mystic of action. See also G.L. COLLUCIA, *Spiritualità vincenziana, spiritualità dell'azione*, M. Spada editore, Rome, 1978.

<sup>8</sup> Although Vincent de Paul did not write works of a systematic nature, he certainly expressed his spiritual vision in his abundant conferences to his

### *The spiritual roots of Vincent de Paul's social action*

The evangelical basis of Vincent de Paul's spiritual-social vision could be founded in that teaching of Jesus Christ which transcends merely human goodness: "The second commandment is like the first: You shall love your neighbor as yourself..." (Mt 22:39), a teaching which one of his most faithful disciples would express years later in this unequivocal manner: "Whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen... whoever loves God must also love his brother" (1 Jn 4:20-21). For his part, Vincent expressed the same idea with a well-known phrase that is typical of him, and which could scandalize a little the first time it is heard: "It is not enough for me to love God, if my neighbor does not love him" (XII, 262).

This phrase, by itself, dismantles in one swift blow all theology or spiritual vision which is centered exclusively in God, and which does not take into account at the same time, the human person. Every theology, if it seeks to be Christian, must be anthropological theology, or theological anthropology. That is because outside of Christianity theological-spiritual constructions and even mystical constructions of great heights are possible (Judaism, Islam...). It also dismantles at once every spiritual vision, no matter how mystical, which is centered exclusively in the union of the individual soul with God, which pretends to ignore all that is human to come to a pure union with the divinity,<sup>9</sup> including laying aside the humanity of Christ, as some authors who were contemporaries of Vincent taught.

But Vincent de Paul could not lay aside the humanity of Christ, not in the beginnings of his spiritual life, nor as he progressed, nor even in his most advanced state. Through the humanity of Christ, one goes to the Father ("I am the way"), and through the humanity of Christ one also goes to all human beings, above all to the human

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missionaries and to the Daughters of Charity and the Ladies of Charity, as well as in his several thousand letters. But, naturally, it is much more difficult and more labor-intensive to draw out his spiritual vision from this abundant occasional material than from systematic writings. Nevertheless, there are excellent works that have attempted to do so. We cite as the most complete and systematic: C. RICCARDI, *Perfezione evangelica, tutto il pensiero di S. Vincenzo de Paoli esposto con le sue parole*, Rome, 1965.

<sup>9</sup> It would not be wise to be scandalized, nor even surprised by this affirmation, above all if one knows the authentic thinking of the true mystics. Saint Teresa of Avila writes for example: "The Lord only asks two things of us: love of His Majesty, and of our neighbor. The surest sign that we keep both commandments is to keep the one of loving our neighbor; for it cannot be known if we love God... but it can be known if we love our neighbor." *The Interior Castle*, fifth mansion, chapter 3.

being who is poor and suffering, as was Christ Himself: "Turn the medal around, and you will see by the light of faith that the Son of God, who desired to be poor, is represented to us by the poor" (XI, 32). This is the faith of Vincent de Paul; this is the basis of his spiritual life and of the social projection of his works.

### ***The social roots of the social action of Vincent de Paul***

Every human being is my neighbor, including the stranger and the Samaritan (Lk 10:36-37). And so no Christian, who wants to nourish his spiritual life with the spiritual experience of Christ, needs to go very far to practice, as he did, compassion, true love and even the giving up of one's life, on behalf of the neighbor. Unless one lives a solitary life on an island, or in the desert, there will always be someone nearby in need of help. This has always been well known and practiced by men and women of all spiritual styles and in all stages of the spiritual life.

However, neither in every age nor in every individual, is there a clear awareness about the social dimensions of human life. The modern society of today is, without a doubt, more conscious of these dimensions than the societies in past times. Its awareness includes the limits of humanity itself. Now the neighbor is not simply the individual who is near; rather, all human beings are neighbors. Human persons do not see themselves as mere members of closed institutions (small rural communities, feudal structures, guilds, parishes...), to which they owe all their loyalty. Rather they see themselves, more and more, as citizens of the world, members of one humanity.

Faced with this reality, Christian charity must clearly put into practice, without forgetting "close" relationships with those who are near, a vision and practice of "distant" relationships which take into account not only the needs of individuals in close proximity to us, but also the needs of social groupings, both near and far, and of the individuals who make up these groupings, in whatever part of the world they may be. Both Paul Ricoeur and Father Chenu opportunely warned us of this over half a century ago. This is also without a doubt the vision of what has been called the Social Doctrine of the Church since the encyclical of Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, in 1891.

But, as we have said, not every age has had a clear awareness of, nor do all Christians today understand, this new social and universal content of the word "neighbor" and consequently, the new obligations that flow from faith in Jesus Christ (although he certainly had this awareness: see, for example, Mt 28:19).

But Vincent de Paul also had this awareness: the conviction that, although it was necessary to continue feeding the hungry, it was also necessary to improve the spiritual and social conditions of the masses of peasants, war refugees, slaves, abandoned children, prisoners, and the masses of poor heathens. But in order to have this vision of charity as a social virtue, it was necessary to have a social vision of human reality which was not easy to come by in earlier times, times of small “closed” social structures, that began to disintegrate with the discovery of new worlds and the creation of political structures much broader than the feudal structures (nation states), structures that were collapsing in all of Europe under Vincent de Paul’s own eyes.

### ***A new vision: Christian spirit and social consciousness***

In the long history of Christian charity, Vincent de Paul occupies a place which, although quite original, also drinks from the same source which gave rise to this history, the charity of Christ. The historian Henry Kamen correctly framed this idea as he observed that Vincent de Paul’s action, although new in its forms, was grounded in the medieval vision of charity.<sup>10</sup> Medieval means, in this case, Christian, based on the conviction that “God loves the poor, and He loves those who love the poor,” as Vincent de Paul himself would say. To sum up briefly: the theological suppositions of the work of Saint Vincent are grounded in the Gospel and in early Christian tradition.

What is new in Vincent de Paul is the conscious projection of these theological suppositions, now not only to alleviate individual cases, but rather to improve the social conditions for different groupings of the poor. The function of charity is not only to alleviate hunger and clothe the naked, but rather it is about trying to improve in a stable way the living conditions for all kinds of needy who are hungry and lack clothing, the uprooted (emigrants), personal difficulties (abandoned children), unemployment (elderly craftsmen, peasants expelled from their lands), the lack of freedom (slaves), lack of culture (rural schools), religious ignorance (the peasant world of his time). Traditional charity must be manifest now also in works with a social projection to try to build a more just society in all aspects, including the religious dimension, and not simply to alleviate the material or spiritual needs of some poor persons.

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<sup>10</sup> H. KAMEN, *The Iron Century: Social Change in Europe, 1550-1660*, Weindenfeld & Nicholson, London, part III, chapter 8.

We say “must” because undoubtedly in Vincent de Paul’s vision, the exercise of the virtue of mercy is not (as it was in the traditional vision, and continues to be in the general Christian mentality) an optional practice that depends on the capacity for compassion and the generosity of the individual, but rather it is something which is demanded by justice: “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>11</sup> Vincent, by implication and by contrast, attributes not seeing the situation this way as “hardness of heart,” and so he asks God for the grace of softening or moving our hearts so that we can see and understand the situation in this way. This calls for a radical change of vision, a true conversion of mind and heart.

This new vision does not in any way suppose a rejection of the virtue of mercy, but rather the opposite; it supposes the radical consolidation of mercy (that mercy which is not optional, but which is demanded by justice) and at the same time places mercy in the social sphere, for justice is the cardinal virtue which governs the social relations between individuals, groups and institutions.

For example: in the “spiritual” sphere, it was unjust that the institutions of the Church center their activities primarily in the cities and neglect the rural world. Religious instruction and the pastoral activity of the institutions of the Church are owed to the peasants (or to the pagans) by strict justice, for they have the right to them. All this cannot be left, as though by fate, to the personal zeal or mercy of the pastoral agents of the moment. In the “material” sphere, it was also unjust that in French society there were those who lived with an abundance of economic and cultural goods, while the masses of peasants and workers were barely able to exist at subsistence level, or not even that, or that they were illiterate. And so there exists the obligation of justice to try to raise the economic and cultural level of the underprivileged masses. The heart filled with mercy (as Vincent de Paul’s certainly was) must dedicate itself to trying to alleviate these evils. And it must be convinced that it is acting strictly out of justice, a justice that calls for the reform or change of social or legal structures that produce injustice.

This vision seems new to us in social history and in the history of the Church. And we do not exaggerate when we attribute its originality and innovation to Vincent de Paul. Today this vision has

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<sup>11</sup> Saint Vincent writes this to one of his missionaries who worked to improve the religious and material conditions of those who were condemned to the galleys. See VII Letter 2546.

begun to spread powerfully both within and outside the Church, thanks be to God. It is the action of the Spirit that promotes ideas that directly attack the powerful egotism of individuals, of certain social classes and of all nations.

We do not mean that Vincent de Paul was, by any means, the inventor of this vision. As was said above, all that is meaningful in the life, the work and the sayings of Vincent de Paul, has its roots in the Gospel and in the charity of Christ. But Vincent de Paul knows his Gospel well, and he knows that it is said of Christ (citing Isaiah 42:1-4) that, "he will announce righteousness to the nations." However it is this righteousness which establishes the (new) justice, a justice which is above and beyond the concrete demands of Mosaic Law. Moreover this righteousness is proclaimed to all the nations, and not only to the chosen people. All the nations must govern themselves from now on by the righteousness that Jesus of Nazareth announces moved by the Spirit of God (Mt 12:18).

### *The Kingdom of God and his justice*

After thirty or forty years of speaking about this, there is a consensus among exegetes and theologians that, although Jesus said many things about God and about himself, he did not come into the world precisely to speak about God, or about himself. Rather, he came to announce the Kingdom or the reign of God in the history of humanity and in the life to come. Discrepancies of interpretation arise when we try to define the signs that effectively manifest that God reigns in human history. But there are no discrepancies about the fundamental affirmation: Jesus teaches us that God wants us to allow him to reign in our personal life and in all our interpersonal and social relationships.

Moreover it is a question of the reign of God and of his justice (Mt 6:33). Because when justice, as God understands it and as Jesus has revealed it to us, is established, then the reign of God becomes real in both personal life and in social life. This is valid for every human being and for all his social relationships: marriage, family, the world of work, of leisure, of culture, in the economic world, and in politics. No dimension of human life should remain at the margins of the demands of God's justice. And so what is called justice in different human societies, will in fact be justice, to the degree that it reflects God's own vision of justice. We learn in the teachings of Jesus Christ exactly what the justice of God entails.

That is how Vincent de Paul sees it, and he says as much in a conference to his missionaries on seeking the Kingdom of God

(XII, 130). As he speaks about (human) justice, he employs the usual terms of the Christian moral tradition, which in turn, borrows them from Greek philosophy and from Roman law: commutative justice and distributive justice. But what is truly interesting in Vincent de Paul's vision is the clearly expressed conviction that justice is not just an invention of the human mind, or of human moral sensibility. Rather, it depends upon God himself: "Our justice maintains a certain relationship and similarity to divine justice, for ours depends upon it" (XII, 335-336).

If Vincent de Paul has understood it well, all human justice, as well as having its source in God, also finds in God's justice the criteria for judging its authenticity. Not all that passes for being just in a given society is necessarily just in the eyes of God. There are social relationships based on human law (which in a positivist vision of law is the only source of justice) which would be clearly seen as unjust if viewed in the light of God's justice. To give an example that seems evident to (almost) everyone: if slavery were permitted by the law of a given country, it would be unjust precisely because it is unjust in God's eyes. Human law could make slavery legal in that country (a judge could not condemn a person who owned slaves) but it could not make slavery just. Almost all of the human rights which today are accepted (almost) universally as "clear" demands of justice, have been violated by the legislation of practically all societies throughout history.

The differences and conflicts that are false in their theoretical aspect, but which are quite real in practice which occur, on the one hand, because of the flaws and imperfections of what is frequently called justice in the human legal world, and on the other hand, the demands of God's justice taught by Jesus Christ, have caused problems for the Christian conscience. In theory, the demands of justice and charity that proceed from God coincide. They are the same. Remember the phrase of Saint Vincent which was quoted above about mercy as a requirement of justice. In practice, and in the traditional mentality even today, the situation is quite different. And so it is said, as though it were quite evident, that charity should try to accomplish what justice alone is not able to do, that charity and justice should be complementary, etc.

But all of this is certain only because very often human justice does not take into account the demands of God's justice, and even rather often goes against the justice of God. When this happens, then charity is seen as the virtue which remedies the evils caused by human (in)justice. But in God himself, and in the evangelical vision out of which Vincent de Paul lived, this is not the way things are

presented. In that vision, charity and justice are fused.<sup>12</sup> In order to truly love, one must truly be just; to be truly just, one must truly love. Justice and charity, yes; but as two concepts which refer to the same reality from two different points of view, and not as two realities with different content. Because of this, the charitable soul cannot dedicate itself to doing works of charity without also considering as proper to itself the work of establishing true justice both in the society in which it lives, and in the entire world.

To sum up and return to Vincent's idea of seeking the reign of God: what the Gospel asks of us is that we work ("seeking implies concern for, it means action" XII, 131) so that by means of the justice which is in accord with God's own heart, the reign of God be made possible in this world. But in order to do this, one must be animated by a love like that which Christ had for all of humanity, above all for that part of humanity that suffers from human injustice, injustice which is all too often embedded in the legal systems of the nations.

### *The heritage of Saint Vincent de Paul*

The institutions recognized by the Catholic Church that make up what is known as the Vincentian Family, are constituted by hundreds of thousands of men and women who recognize themselves explicitly as members of these institutions and recognize the spiritual vision (that is to say: the way of being Christian, of being a follower of Christ) of Saint Vincent de Paul as their own. This spirituality should animate all aspects of their lives. Three of these institutions were founded by Vincent de Paul: the International Association of Charity or Volunteers of Charity, the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity. Other institutions, some two hundred, were founded in the following three hundred years by other persons, some of whom were members of one of the three which were founded by Vincent himself. Among these institutions which were not founded by Vincent, nor by a member of the three which he founded, the Society or Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul stands out, both because of its number of members and its extension. The Society was founded in 1833 by a small group of young university students in Paris, among whom was Blessed Frederic Ozanam, who was only

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<sup>12</sup> Blessed Frederic Ozanam, at the tender age of twenty, also saw this. He was one of the best, if not the best, of those who have been inspired by the spirituality of Saint Vincent de Paul. He wrote to his friend Auguste Materne on April 19, 1831: the law of love "should be the only law which governs all human actions."

twenty years old when it was founded and who would be remarkable in later history.

This imposing group of institutions and of Christians belonging to the Vincentian Family has not had a single or homogeneous history; although there have always been more or less close relationships among some of them. Moreover, in the majority of them, there is no written history of the institution. Keep in mind these two realities in order to appreciate the value, or the lack of value, of the considerations about the history of the spiritual heritage of Saint Vincent de Paul that we will offer below.

On December 3, 1852, at the age of 39, eight months before his death, Frederic Ozanam wrote to a friend while he was on a pilgrimage to the birthplace of Vincent de Paul: "I owed a visit to this much loved patron who preserved me from many evils in my youth, and who showered so many unexpected blessings on our humble conferences. There we have seen the old oak tree under which Vincent, who was a shepherd as a boy, took cover while he watched over the flock. This tree is still standing, supported by the bark of its trunk, which has been devoured over the years. But its branches are magnificent, and they still have green foliage, even at this advanced age. I see in it what seems to me an image of Saint Vincent de Paul's foundations."

This image of the tree, worm-eaten but still full of life (and it is this way even today, more than 150 years after Ozanam's letter), serves as a metaphor for the state of the spiritual heritage of Saint Vincent de Paul, throughout the three long centuries since his death in 1660.

Like all human institutions which have not been swept away by the march of history, the institutions of Vincentian inspiration have lived, during the more than three long centuries since the death of the founder, moments of splendor here and there, years of little more than mere survival, and in some cases they have simply disappeared. But without a doubt many of the branches of that old trunk continue to be full of life, even today, some one hundred fifty years after the death of Ozanam.

A catalogue of the charitable works maintained today, at the beginning of the Twenty-first Century, by the branches of the Vincentian Family, of the financial bases that maintain them, and of the number of volunteers who work in them (the young and the not so young, the married, single or widowed, priests and lay brothers, Daughters of Charity) would doubtless impress a reader of whatever faith, or of none at all, including even those who are dedicated to and recognized for works which are similar to those maintained by Vincentian institutions. We will not insist on this point, for it is well

known in the wide circles of public opinion. Truly the old tree trunk has given in the past, and continues to give today, signs of vitality in practically all the nations of the world.

This investigation has not attempted to describe in detail the various social ideas of Saint Vincent de Paul; and in fact it has not done so. It is focused on only one idea that seems fundamental to us: the necessity of integrating work for social justice into the traditional demands of charity, and moreover as a central aspect of charity, and not merely as an application or consequence of charity.

Today, after the unequivocal teachings of the Social Doctrine of the Church, and those of Vatican Council II, after much study, and much rhetoric, after so much social movement centered on the defense of human rights, the awareness of the need to integrate justice into the demands of charity is spreading rapidly within the Catholic Church, and also of course, outside it, and independent of it.

Looking at this phenomenon, an inevitable question arises: Do all of those who belong to one or another of the institutions of Vincentian inspiration have the clear awareness of the necessity and the priority of integrating into their vision the work of justice on behalf of the poor, and not simply to alleviate the needs of the poor who suffer injustice? If we examine the official documents of the Vincentian institutions over the last thirty years, the question has a clear answer: yes, they do have this awareness and it is clearly expressed in those documents.

But historical inertia also weighs heavily. Many members of the Vincentian institutions continue to practice charity as if nothing had changed in the awareness of the Church or the world. We must admit frankly that for many members of the Vincentian institutions the theme of justice demanded by charity would seem perhaps to be something new taught by the Church today, but which is not found in the spiritual vision of Saint Vincent de Paul as it has been transmitted to them. Over and against this vision, it must be affirmed that the theme of the relationship between charity and justice, lost in the process of transmission, is in fact solidly present in the charitable practice and the spiritual vision of Saint Vincent de Paul himself.

# A Point of View of the Poor from Experience

by Pedro Pablo Opeka, C.M.

We know all of the miserable and inhuman conditions in which millions of people currently live throughout the whole world in the different countries of our planet. In this third millennium, we are obliged again to ask ourselves: Who are the poor of today?

Why are there more poor in this era of computers and the Internet where the phenomenon of internationalization imposes itself? What can be the reasons for this growing poverty that rages in the different parts of our planet, notably in all of the countries of the Continent of Africa? What precisely do the poor want as they face their situation of distress? And would we, so many priests of the Congregation of the Mission, be able to propose concretely to fight against the poverty of the majority of the inhabitants of the world?

It is not as a theoretician, nor as one giving a lesson that I speak in this article, but simply as a son of Saint Vincent de Paul, as a man of the land, living currently for some fifteen years with homeless people excluded/marginalized by society, abandoned in the streets of the capital of Madagascar or driven back in 1985-1986 by the municipal authorities from this city in a veritable return to death!

## **1. WHO ARE THE POOR?**

By definition, someone is poor when he does not have the necessary minimum to live. He is poor because he does not have what is needed to live with dignity according to his human condition. But the criteria that govern this definition vary according to times and circumstances. In the present context of internationalization, the European Union gives us a very suitable definition and without ambiguity as to what one calls "poor." Indeed for the European Union, one understands that "poor people are individuals, families or groups of people whose material, cultural, and social resources are so weak, that they lack the minimally acceptable means as a member of the place in which they live!"

In this third millennium, we can note with bitterness that more than one billion human beings live in these conditions. They are without any security, protection or social amenities, and they are without any help! They are the elderly, single women, children without a future, without education, without school, without work and without lodging, but also without leisure. One does not need to be an expert to foresee the tragic consequences that are going to ensue from such a situation, particularly, when we know that this underprivileged layer is the majority in Africa and Madagascar and even on a world-wide level. In short, the poor are the people and the families who do not even have access to the basic services of society. And the most forgotten among the poor are the aged people, single women and children.

Our own experience among the poor reveals to us that the poor do not have a future! The poor person is the one who lives from day to day. To be able to look to the future, it is necessary to enjoy a certain clarity that there will be a following day. For the poor, the future is the very day. For the poor person the only objective is to survive in the present. All problems that appear in the future are disregarded. In this extreme misery, the poor forget the whole spiritual dimension. It is necessary to survive!

And in despair, the poor lower their arms in the face of difficulties. They receive so many strokes that they are too tired to fight. They undergo the sense of injustice as their destiny. What is astonishing is that often the poor try to survive without hate against the one that lives better and those who govern life. They do not hope anymore for much from life. And one understands that for the poor, alcohol is the most accessible drug, capable of being considered a means to recover a little dream, a little happiness; in the end the final illusion!

In the ambiance of poverty, indeed, people look most often to passive leisure, sometimes to make money, as in playing card games or dominoes, while not excluding and affected by the consumption of alcoholic drinks.

## **2. THE CAUSES OF POVERTY**

But can one speak of the poor and their point of view without speaking first of the causes of poverty?

One notices that the more poor a country is, the more its controlling class is absent from the life of the society. It remains passive to the conditions of the inhumane life of its population, especially of the children of the street who do not stop increasing in number. Without education, without the minimum to live, without moral and spiritual

reference guides, these children and youth are lost as in a jungle, where the law of the strongest reigns without mercy.

Yes! We are there today! Why?

### ***2.1. INDIFFERENCE AND THE SELFISHNESS OF THOSE HAVING THE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL POWER***

In any case, in the political and diplomatic world, one truly feels a certain fear to speak the truth, to denounce this evil and these injustices. Goodness and truth are not the first worries of the politicians, but rather they are concerned to preserve their power and privileges. One is aware of a flagrant gap between what political decision-makers say and what they do, between the propositions of the economists and what they make effective.

Everywhere administrative blockage, indifference and the passivity of the countries to solve the social problems, push individuals or groups to take the path of violence to make themselves heard. It is the case of Haiti today. Finally the drama can only grow. How much longer can leaders who do not want to see, rule in the face of the sad reality in which the people live!

The facts are there: the failure of political will, the insufficiency of conviction and resolution and the lack of perseverance in the realities of the social policies. In every age, in every change of régime, the same policies, the same selfish gestures repeat themselves. To be sure there are other forms, but the bottom line remains the same. Every régime knows how to justify its politics, even when there was not any change from the previous regime. Every régime exaggerates and uses the terms “reason of State” or “national sovereignty” dishonestly. Here or there when there is a coup with the new possessors of the power there may be some who have their own ideology, a country must always start from scratch again. In some countries, the new leaders very often make a claim of what one might call “continuity of State” as a principle on which a State rests its rights for respect of itself. Struggles for power are often accompanied by civil wars or ethnic wars. We are all witnesses of these holocausts and genocides as in the Second World War, in Africa, in the Balkans, in Asia. Yes! In this third millennium, one is again aware of what went on in Rwanda, in Kosovo, in Sierra Leone, in Liberia, in Burundi, or in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Uganda, etc.!

Are the countries of the African Continent, in particular, obligated to make their “Hundred Years War,” to find their place in the concert of Nations?

The experience of a country or a continent is not able to act as a lesson to others.

Is it human logic that all change must pass by human sacrifices before finding an outcome and a solution in the dialogue around the same table?

Behind ideological slogans and emptiness of meaning, hide the selfishness of a minority who try to protect, in excessive ways, the privileges bound to actually capturing power. And in the same way, the poverty of the majority does not stop increasing. In reality there are plays on words. The gap between the rich and the most underprivileged layers becomes wider and wider! Who does not know it? Who does not see it? The media does not very often speak of it.

In the face of these miseries and this poverty that cry to the heavens, one cannot be quiet, especially for us priests of Saint Vincent de Paul. Encouraged by so many of the saints that gave their lives for the poor, one has the right to wonder the reason for this resignation of persons from countries who are responsible for these conditions. One only need to have common sense, as Saint Vincent had, to see and to react, in order to relieve the situations that lead us in the circle of misery, violence and hate!

The last straw is that the rich countries and the international institutions had helped some state-parties, whereas, their help for the development of the local population was in reality diverted for political propaganda or to protect a régime.

In addition, the reports of the international organizations are based on numbers and percentages, often inflated and arranged well; the heads of state use with trickery the statistical data, as compared to actual growth rates, to say that the country is doing well. But can one see the human beings who suffer behind these abstract numbers? Can one see their pain, their suffering? It is not about empty numbers, is it? Cannot one measure the degrees of success of the policies with other means than statistics?

We are all accomplices of the systems that generate poverty and insecurity, even with the phenomenon in vogue, known by the name internationalization.

## **2.2. THE PHENOMENON OF INTERNATIONALIZATION**

The present internationalization is bound to the era of the computer and the internet, and expertise belongs to a minority having an elevated place in society. Internationalization makes claim that a big group of the inhabitants of the earth do not have enough to eat to take care of hunger and do not have access to education, to health care, to lodging, to potable drinking water. Therefore, there is inequality of access to the universal goods of humanity. It only makes the social fracture enlarge the gap between the poor majority

and a rich minority. More than the economy of the market, the motor of internationalization is a system without mercy or compassion for those who remain on the periphery and changes itself literally to exclude many in relation to the universal requirements of humanity.

Some make believe that all are equal. But knowledge and other human riches are distributed badly. Between rich and poor, the gulf continues to widen itself. Pope John Paul II, time and time again, did not stop repeating it. Equality is the Christian tradition and the social doctrine in which the church always defended the universal destination of goods and wealth!

The poor are those who are always behind in their progress in relation to the degree of progress in the world. The criteria for poverty change according to the times and the places. But the poor are always set aside. Some fool them, some distract them in a sort of mirage, while insisting that they know their rights and how to accomplish their duties, while finally promising them an unattainable happiness in a multi-dimensional world.

Nothing on our African Continent — malaria, tuberculosis, AIDS and civil and ethnic wars that cause the devastations — come before the total indifference of the international community. Some big powers only intervene for the moment when their interests are threatened, as in Iraq.

Internationalization is also the relocation of enterprises to countries where the workers are underpaid and without social guarantees. In these poor countries, there are the clear areas that give some jobs to a lot of young people. But in what difficult conditions and at what price?

### **2.3. INTERNATIONALIZATION OF POVERTY**

Increasingly in a short time, the number of poor have become throughout the world the majority of the whole and become more impoverished on the cultural, moral and spiritual levels. And they are caught up in hate and violence teaching them to dissociate instead of uniting. Increasing internationalization is made up of a selfishness that not only blinds the rich and the leaders of a lot of countries, it also affects the poor.

Is not internationalization, in this sense, a factor of spiritual and moral poverty? And while giving special stature to only one way of life as compared to others, does it not also contribute to the destruction of the tradition, culture and spiritual strength which harmonized the lives of millions of people over the centuries from different nations?

The dream of a just, fraternal world seems to go away. Where does the humanity go? Do we have a direction? Do we have a sense of purpose for the younger generations? Commencing with the eldest, have we not arrived before a Great Wall that we cannot surmount anymore and before which we all were pedestrians?

If we do not react as human beings, as a church and a Community of the Mission, we are all going to collapse before this immense defensive wall that does not have a door for an exit.

Yet this defensive wall: it is beautiful, attractive, and irresistible. But it has a logic that produces poverty, war and insecurity. Indeed, everywhere in the world insecurity prevails in the capitals and the big cities from the North and the South, of the developed countries and of those so-called in development. We only have to see what goes on in New York, in Buenos Aires, in Algiers, in Johannesburg, etc.

In short, it points out the indifferent selfishness of the leaders of a certain number of countries, from their political decisions, their economic choices and their technical progress which are also at the origin of the unceasing increase of the number of the poor! The economic thinking of the present world finally generates the poor.

Once one was born poor. But today, in a context of internationalization and excessive liberalization of the economy, one becomes poor because of the bad management of the universal goods and the lack of human solidarity. The maximum of gain and profit constitutes the logic of the market economy. As in sports competitions, the logic that excels in the present context is to win.

How do we recapture our original self and recover in this modern world what makes us dream so?

For some, it is the economy and money that lead the world. For others, it is concrete action and spiritual strength that change the world; again for others it is ideas! Between these three conceptions, these three visions, one can have a complementary balance. They are all necessary to advance toward a just and universal progress that is for all in a world where all citizens of the earth can enjoy the "necessarium vitae," the necessary minimum to live humanly: access to employment, to energy sources, to potable drinking water, to the possibility of taking care of family members, to access of children to schooling and to healthful lodgings, and also access to leisure worthy of this name.

Do we want a society indeed with less social injustice, fewer poor, fewer marginalized or excluded people?

Often, one wants to diminish misery and poverty. But is this an attitude that contributes to serve justice? Do we want true peace in our world?

### **3. THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE POOR TO LEARN FROM THE EXPERIENCE OF AKAMASOA**

To speak honestly, one does not fight for the poor from his office. It is quite necessary to be among the poor, to be situated in the middle of the poor and to start from there for a realistic and concrete action as in the time of Saint Vincent, who took courageous initiatives in France to bring help to those ravaged by the wars, without anyone officially investing in this humanitarian action!

Courage, realism, and charity lived in our founder, Saint Vincent, who was involved in the social problems that first were seen as insurmountable! However, his love and his goodwill for the poor moved mountains!

We have ourselves lived in this kind of experience with the actions of the humanitarian association AKAMASOA that we founded fifteen years ago, that has advanced by Divine Providence, and that continues to work in favor of the marginalized and the most underprivileged of the Big Island of Madagascar, according to the means at its disposition.

The name given to our Association expresses well our humanitarian actions in favor of the poor because the Malagasy word Akamasoa means good friend

#### **3.1. A STRUGGLE LED WITH FAITH AND CONVICTION**

Effectively, the history of Akamasoa is a history of a handful of young Malagasy laymen, who concluded with faith and conviction that poverty is not the fruit of luck, but a sad reality that has causes that can be defeated because it is not a destiny.

And we always have, in that conclusion, profound reason to believe that the excluded/marginalized people can stand up well and can recover their dignity.

With faith and the impetus of the heart, and also with a certain firmness and indispensable discipline, this small number of volunteers wove relationships of respect and friendship with this population of the excluded/marginalized who were abandoned everywhere in the streets of the capital of Madagascar, or driven back to its garbage dumps outside of the capital on an isolated hill, that turned in reality to death and dying.

Then, with an unshakable will and certain courage, it was necessary for us to look into the deepest part of ourselves, where the force of the Spirit of God manifests itself, so we could go forward. In the beginning no one believed in our work.

We have cleared some obstacles permanently. We had real life difficult moments. But today, we are all together in our work.

Certainly, we know without illusion that all that we constructed remains fragile because of the economic environment of the country that is slow to improve in spite of the good will of the new government that came from the crisis of 2002!

But we have faith that nothing will stop us from continuing to fight, to strengthen and to consolidate again what we had acquired a few years ago for the wellbeing of these thousands of children and families without shelter.

In spite of the adversities, daily effort and perseverance allowed us to see the first fruits. We are delighted for the work accomplished by these young, honest and devoted Malagasy laymen. And we are anxious to underline that Akamasoa especially speaks of the courage of the poor who want to come out of poverty and to break the vicious cycle of misery. It is not ever a question of those who are destitute.

However, next to our joy, we cannot forget the thousands of children and families who wander again in the streets and the markets of some big Malagasy cities and who live there in inhuman conditions, without any dignity and unfortunately without any future, before the indifference of nearly all of the authorities of the communities!

In spite of the menacing dangers and disappointments that threaten us, we are going to continue to constantly awaken the consciences of the responsible people and of the poor to what it means for them that poverty can and must be eradicated. We will have this thought before us at all times and especially as a attitude for the direction of our work and our actions, supported by faith and prayer, that constitute the most efficient expression to convince those who do not believe in the strength and the capacity of the poor to lift themselves up in dignity. The actions achieved until now by Akamasoa with its needy members are already an irrefutable proof of this.

And we can sincerely say that the pains, as well as the lies and deceptions met during these fifteen years of humanitarian actions, are not anything in relation to the joy that the handful of 270 educators could feel before the dignity recovered by the thousands of children and families formerly marginalized and homeless people. "God is to be praised for this miracle!"

### **3.2. SOME OF THE CONCRETE ACTIONS ACHIEVED FOR AND WITH THE POOR**

Everything that Akamasoa could achieve for the profit of the poor would not have come to good term without the power of prayer or the consent and the active involvement of the poor themselves. For Akamasoa, the struggle against poverty consists in encouraging and sustaining the poor to take into their own hands their own progress to recover their human dignity.

Everything that we had projected to do for the poor was done concretely by themselves beyond all forms of assistance which instead paralyzes the initiatives of one or the other. The best way to help the poor is to support them to take their destiny progressively in their own hands. It does not get done without a big dose of perseverance and being put to the test, but it is there, the way *par excellence* that permits them to regain slowly but surely their human dignity that had been ridiculed.

And the outcome of such a march to concrete and palpable realizations was a certain world recognition which the humanitarian association Akamasoa enjoys today. Our actions, as discreet as they were, did not escape the world media.

In truth, we worked in a difficult environment that one could speak of as hell. This is a place forgotten by all that leaves nothing to be seen on the horizon except survival at any price. It was truly a place where violence, prostitution, epidemics, hunger, and falsity reigned as master. It was a social environment where the urgency was to live for that day.

And in such a milieu, with the progression of the concrete results of our humanitarian actions, we were invaded by the media, by the researchers or by the makers of films, who came to analyze us and to study us.

What we are doing interests them from their point of view and not from the point of view of the poor, not from our point of view, those of us who have tried to save human lives and to return to thousands of poor their human dignity.

During their filming and their investigations in the course their work, the journalists and the researchers were nearly all taken to the bowels of the earth. The extreme misery of so many thousands of children, the courage of so many single women, who attempt to live with their children in such a horrible state and who make inestimable sacrifices, could not leave them insensitive to what they experienced. Before such a drama, they could not remain indifferent. And finally, we won a lot of friends in these surroundings. They understood the deep sense of human solidarity that we lived in.

After 15 years of life as a Lazarist missionary in the region of the southeast of Madagascar, in September 1988 I had to return to the Malagasy capital to be responsible for the Scholasticate of the young Lazarists, candidates to the priesthood, a position which has nothing to do with the direct service of the underprivileged homeless persons.

But I could not remain indifferent on seeing the revolting situation that I had personally seen in Antananarivo and in its immediate vicinity; of the destitution of entire families who spend the night under the stars, under the arcades of the Avenue of Independence, in the center of the City or in the tunnels; of people living in some cardboard houses or in material of plastic or fabric or jute, all along the railroad, behind the reserved luxurious administrative district of several governmental ministries. Nor could I remain indifferent to the hundreds of families that the municipal authorities of the Malagasy capital had driven back, 25 years after the independence of Madagascar in 1985, into the periphery of the city, notably close to the garbage dump of the capital, to about ten kilometers to the east of Antananarivo, on the side of the National Road n° 2 in the direction of the big port of Tamatave.

In short, there were excluded/marginalized and homeless persons everywhere throughout and around the Malagasy capital. And in most cases, it is while searching in the trash cans of the capital or in the famous discharge of Andralanitra that they found directly what to put into their mouth to survive. This kind of searching also allowed them to earn for themselves a little money and to buy themselves a little food, by recovering particular resellable objects or some things suitable for recycling. Otherwise, a lot of full grown young people fell automatically into the trap of multiform delinquency to survive while the girls and some single women or single mothers were caught up in the system of prostitution. And we will not speak of the proliferation of drugs and alcohol, whose aftermaths continue again to weigh on some of our old excluded/marginalized.

In any case, the centers where these marginalized were returned to by the transformed municipal authorities were, in fact, real places to die, notably where we currently have our main welcome Center, on the high Hill of Ambohimahitsy. I had gone up to it, for the first time, on May 14, 1989. And I remember well, during that first meeting with these numerous poor families, abandoned by society, that I had to crawl on the ground to be able to go into their homes. I conversed, in fact, in the small houses of the fortunate which were hardly one meter in height and constructed of cardboard, plastic or jute.

By God's strength, in an atmosphere of reciprocal confidence, I had to start fighting together with the marginalized against this

extremely tragic poverty. It is there that I called on the young Malagasy laymen who answered and became present. And today, one does not crawl on the ground, but one walks with head held high to enter the dwellings/shelters of these marginalized, who enjoy domestic lodgings worthy of human beings!

Yes! The persistent struggle against poverty, led by the Akamasoa association, but with the active involvement of the poor themselves, allowed thousands of families to recover their human dignity. Indeed, the community Akamasoa counts today 17,000 people, of which 8,000 are children. This population is distributed in four different sites, which are in rural environments, 70 Km to the northwest of the capital, where more than 300 formerly homeless people today enjoy fully and proudly the status of peasant agriculturists, accepting the challenge to rebuild the earth in order to remake their lives.

Other jobs have been created for the social rehabilitation of those poor who chose to remain in the sites where we met them and that we arranged one after the other with them thereafter to work in: embroidery, sewing and vestment making; weaving; sales of the traditional craft objects; manufacture and sale of compost instead of the municipal dumping of garbage; business career; sale and transportation of stone blocks, of quarry stones, etc.; works of construction and framing; carpentry; studio for metallic works; mechanical shop for autos and motors of electrical machines; shoe stores and shoe repairs; preparation of the daily school canteens; education and teaching (helpers of schoolmistresses and teachers); maintenance of the squares and public places in the Akamasoa cities; and other works of communal interest (restocking, welcome, cooks for the hosts of tourists, etc.). In all we created jobs for 4,000 people.

In the area of education, some school establishments have been constructed progressively during the fifteen years of the humanitarian actions of our association. At our different sites, we have in all today: three nurseries, six nursery schools, four primary schools, three colleges of general teaching and one high school — all near the rubbish dumps in Andralanitra. And the school population has risen to more than 7,000 children and young, trained by 170 educator-teachers.

With regard to “lodging,” the association has 1,544 solid houses currently and 426 made of wood and clay. Most of the solid houses are lodgings for single families.

For the newly welcomed families and the single people requiring particular care, there are common dormitories serving them that are very healthful group living shelters.

If the financial backers are willing to sustain us, in the next two years, we could conduct the construction of new sturdy houses, 326 made of wood and clay/brick. This project would allow all families in temporary residences to have their respective permanent lodgings, insofar as they have the firm will seriously to remake/reform their lives. And in this way one would have the opportunity to avoid the proliferation of the ghettos and the rising new violence in our cities.

Note that our policies for construction of lodgings in different places always takes place with deliberate town planning: creation of districts; installation of infrastructures for athletics; planning of paved streets with sidewalks and channels for water drainage; as well as public gardens and parklands. In short, we moved toward the creation of new cities which includes disciplinary regulations created by the inhabitants themselves to assure their own security.

During these 15 years, on the level of health care, respectively for each of our four cities, five Centers of Basic Health or clinics have been constructed, two maternity facilities and a dental office were set up in Manantenasoa, the main site of our activities.

Indeed, the thousands of poor which we take care of were for the most part in a very fragile health state. It was, therefore, impossible for us to send them all into a hospital in the capital. With the few means at the disposal of our association, the costs of hospitalization of its members would have been too expensive. Much more of a need that our patients had was emotional attention. The collaboration for some years with Physicians Without Borders was for us indeed a big help. And since 1994 notably, Malagasy physicians not employed have been hired. Currently our staff for Health Care is made up of eight general practitioner physicians, a dental physician, three midwives, a laboratory technician, and about twenty nursing aides.

Today these clinics not only constitute the centers for community basic care, but they are also centers for permanent education in matters of preventive health, hygiene and family planning. They also educate concerning nutritional food, because food deficiencies and the illnesses undergone by the poor always have a dramatic impact, not only on the intra-uterine formation of children, but also on the physical and psycho-intellectual development of those whom we manage to see every day.

With all that we have achieved in favor of the very poor, in the domain of employment, education, lodging and health, of the thousands of excluded/marginalized adults, young people and children, they were able to recover their human dignity with a new impetus of solidarity and the ability to take on even greater responsibility.

At the end of these fifteen years of struggle for and with the poor, I understood my mission as a priest of Saint Vincent de Paul more deeply. Since rereading the life of Saint Vincent, I now understand better his engagement with and his love for the poor, the little method and the five virtues that he asked of the priests of the Mission.

Also Jesus' words in the Gospel have made sense and given more weight on my heart for my priestly life as a missionary.

In 1994, the Visitor and his council saw in this work Saint Vincent's charism applied to the abandoned poor, and they gave us their blessing and their spiritual and brotherly support. The Province allocated a confrere for the ministry of Akamasoa.

In the same way the Daughters of the Charity responded with a lot of love in this work of rehabilitation of the very poor! Without a doubt the poor bring us closer to God and they are the shortest path to reach God.

I clearly understood that the poor when they feel they are listened to, welcomed and shown love, in spite of the duress of their life, have an extraordinary joy for living!

But this work of social rehabilitation of the excluded/marginalized would not be possible without an appropriate ministry in this place of poverty!

Cardinal Armand Razafindratandra, Archbishop of the Diocese of Antananarivo, granted us, according to Canonical Privilege, a Private Parish allowing us to provide for all the spiritual needs of the people of the street and the dumps. A ministry for sacramental care has been in place since 1994. A very important event of the week is the Sunday Mass with the presence of four to six thousand people, a majority of whom are children and young people. The Mass is often attended by tourists who come to Madagascar!

To see formerly excluded/marginalized people singing and participating in the liturgy by chants, dances and devotion, makes converts of the tourist visitors. The excluded/marginalized people have become apostles of God's love! Truly, God knows how to turn the biggest miseries and sufferings in this place to joy and hope!

What would we be able to propose, as a concluding example, for reducing poverty on our planet, as our holy founder St. Vincent began it!

#### 4. SOME PROPOSITIONS

1. With humility but with determination we should create and cultivate, at every level of each country throughout the world, an authentic spirit of solidarity. It would be necessary to have the willing attitude to create a human society where there is a just social protection and minimum social guarantees for all!

In the global solidarity perspective, is the North not able to use the service of all humanity in the very important social services with which it is endowed? But would those who have power like them indeed share social service for the entire human family?

2. One thing is certain: human selfishness is a reality. Does not one see for oneself, among other matters, the different level of salary the experts of the countries of the North have as compared to the poor in the countries of the South? In one of our projects, for example, we worked with another European organization. This one sent us an expert to work in a very poor environment in which he did not know the language, the culture or the tradition. Every time that he wants to go to the beneficiary population of the project, he must make the visit with the help of a local interpreter. And yet according to the level of his monthly salary, under the terms of the contract stipulated in the project financed by a European institution, he is paid 85 times more than our Malagasy agent, responsible for the project in question. What a waste of money! And all this is done in the name of human development and solidarity with the poor.

Are the reduction of poverty and the development of the poor truly the goal of these projects and these reports of evaluation skillfully elaborated by the experts working in countries of the South? Do not the poor become the springboards for the promotion of the experts of the countries of the North? And would not the reduction of such a gap between the salary of a European expatriate expert and a local responsible person constitute already in itself a concrete form of solidarity between the North and the South?

3. The countries one calls developed also are not without problems. In spite of their very elevated standard of living, the rich are confronted by spiritual indifference, and the lack of good life choices by their children. Thus, some come to be inspired by the courage the poor took to help their own children in dealing with a consumer society. When the First Lady of France toured in Madagascar, she had the opportunity to see in one of our cities the manner in which our people fight daily against poverty. She had taken some photos of our people fully working in their career,

confessing that these photos could really help their children to act more reasonably/responsibly in dealing with the material wealth which they enjoy.

Do not the materially poor also have, in a sense, great wealth? In other words, the excessive competition and the immediate profitability of all wealth is not always a criteria or value for the poor. For the rich countries and business men, time is money. This is not the case for the poor. Even the problems of time and immediate efficiency do not constitute for them important criteria. Their criteria is that their physical fragility, due to considerable food deficiencies, often forces them to work slowly. The affluent have something, therefore, to learn from the poor.

4. Authentic human solidarity may be possible in a context of monitoring and mutual respect, quite beyond the complexities of superiority or inferiority. Material assistance does not solve all human problems in spite of its important necessity. It is solidarity, mutual respect and spiritual wealth that would permit the inhabitants of the earth to share true happiness.

5. Children of wealthy countries who live in great wealth are also not very safe from the loss of values due to drugs, delinquency and crime, because they are not appropriately educated in the spirit of sharing and solidarity.

6. Workers of the North and the South would do best to be more united in a bond. Indeed, while the worker of the South earns in one week what the worker of the North earns in one or two hours, with greater solidarity, the too flagrant inequalities could well disappear or at least decrease.

7. There is no recipe ready made related to the struggle against poverty. Theories are well proposed that often prove to be inapplicable in concrete situations, because such a struggle is above all an engagement of all of life's issues among and close to the poor.

Through the concrete actions dictated by this kind of solidarity, one must constantly review the approach to the existing forms of poverty in view of the decisions and more realistic and adequate actions beyond simple formality. In the service of the poor, indeed, it is necessary often to have the courage to make courageous and legitimate decisions, without too many legalistic processes for the service to so many underprivileged. It is always the common sense of the Gospel and the good sense that Saint Vincent had in his time that must excel. And this is how we succeeded for the most part in the enterprise of our association AKAMASOA.

In the struggle against poverty, the on-going actions engaged in and committed to ought to be the preservation of justice, dignity and love. When hundreds of millions of people live in an extreme poverty, certainly, there are violations of human rights.

The struggle against poverty also implies a struggle against corruption under all its forms. Otherwise, to allow thousands of families to enjoy true autonomy, freedom of access to the ownership of property is indispensable. All local involvement for every project of development should have a greater view for autonomy, beyond any form of dependence and assistance.

And it is in such a context that we all should constantly multiply aid given to decrease the nuisances that the market economy produced and caused people to move back to the distresses which are produced by bad governance and the money/materialistic logic that lead to war.

8. True internationalization in this third millennium is the internationalization of love and sharing goods. It is also the erasing of the debts of poor countries by rich countries and other financial backers in order for them to invest in the development of the most underprivileged social layers of poor countries. But all should be under the rigorous control of the financial backers to avoid new diversions by those holding power.

9. Finally, in this construction of a more just and fraternal world, the media must have an important role. With their power, the media are well able to provoke and cultivate in people of all horizons, not only generosity, but also the spirit of solidarity in multiple ways, beyond the indifference and the selfishness that prevail.

At the end of this article, I would like to encourage all colleagues who are committed to the service of the poor and to say to them that we have a great opportunity to serve the poor by imitating our Lord and our founder Saint Vincent who have given us an example to follow!

Let us as the Congregation of the Mission rise to the height of this challenge!

# The Relationship of Justice with Charity in Vincentian Thought<sup>1</sup>

by Andrés Roman María Motto Gaglia, C.M.

Vincentian thought makes charity and justice the basis for the treatment of others. In fact, when St. Vincent introduces people into the world of the poor, he does not do it to ease their conscience, but rather to disturb it more; to provoke a serene and adult examination of conscience about whether one was evangelically just. He cannot understand a religion that is not interested in the other or exploits him/her. Thus he says sorrowfully "... there is a big difference between being Catholic and being just."<sup>2</sup>

The seventeenth century was a time of great iniquities and waste. Numerous injustices of all kinds were perpetrated in the government, in education, among Christians whether Catholic or Protestant, etc. The inequalities occurred for many reasons, most of them as old as humanity itself: 1) Not considering the other as an equal 2) Exaggerating what one thinks is owed to oneself and lessening what one considers owed to the other 3) Thinking that what is fair is what is good for the strong (cf. *Rep.* 332d). It is like the old Spanish refrain: "The laws go where the kings want them to" 4) Using judicial structures for one's own good and the detriment of the other (cf. *Rep.* 332d)

Although it was not very just, the seventeenth century was very juridical. Legal demands were so frequent that a small diocesan seminary, like that of Montauban, retained a lawyer six months of the year to untangle and defend its interests, its rights and its honor before civil and ecclesiastical tribunals. Furthermore, in moral

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. BAYLACH, JOSE, "Justicia," in AA.VV., *Diccionario de Espiritualidad Vincenciana*, Salamanca, CEME, 1995, 312-329. AA.VV., "San Vicente de Paul y la Justicia," *Cuadernos Vicencianos. En Tiempos de San Vicente de Paul... y hoy*, Tomo II, Salamanca, CEME, 1999, 163-175. CARBALLO, FRANCISCO, "Dimension Política del evangelio en la acción vicenciana," en AA.VV., *Justicia y Solidaridad con los pobres en la vocación Vincenciana*, Salamanca, CEME, 1988, 97-114. GALINDO, ANGEL, *Moral Socioeconomica*, Madrid, BAC, 1996, 187-206.

<sup>2</sup> SV II, 494.

theological reflection, the tracts *De iustitia et iure* gave greater weight to commutative justice, with a tendency to fall into a certain formalism.<sup>3</sup>

St. Vincent was attracted to the field of law and had a licentiate in Canon Law. He saw it as a man with a strict sense of the duties of justice. Furthermore, because of the huge network of foundations he set up and because of the multitude of charitable works he managed, he had to execute many contracts and agreements. He operated with the traditional definition of justice: "The virtue by which one has a firm and constant will to give to each one what belongs to him."<sup>4</sup> He follows St. Thomas who sees in the concrete the preeminence of justice over the other moral virtues.<sup>5</sup> Likewise he assumes the classical three part division of justice: legal, distributive and commutative. In fact, we find that St. Vincent theologized much about this virtue, making it a continuation of prophetic and evangelical preaching. And he joined the practice of justice to the service of the poor.

In the face of a context which placed justice on a secondary level, the Vincentian ethic places a high value on this virtue. So much so that the first thing St. Vincent asked of the people associated with him was that they be just; since the Kingdom of God demands the establishment of justice. For him, justice makes present the kingdom brought by Jesus Christ. Faith demands the acceptance of the entire legacy of Jesus Christ including the social aspects. And thus the following of Jesus brings with it specific social alternatives and concrete positions in the face of power as the gospel teaches. While trying to make the gospel effective, Vincent places special emphasis on charity and justice. He insists that the imitation of Christ means paying attention to his words and works. These lead to the option for the poor. This is a prophetic option which implies being present in every area in which the humble are mistreated. The evangelization of the poor brings with it the promotion, as well as the defense, of the poor on the personal and social levels.

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. VIDAL, MARCIANO, *Moral de Actitudes*, Tomo III, Madrid, Ed. PS, 1981, 22-23.

<sup>4</sup> SAINT THOMAS, *S.th.* II-II, q. 58, a. 1. Since Plato, justice has been considered one of the four cardinal virtues. Aristotle understood it as "giving to each one his own" for the purpose of establishing harmony and order. Later Ulpiano understood it as "the virtue by which each one, with a constant and perpetual will, attributes to each one his right" (*Constans et perpetua voluntas ius sum unicuique tribuendi*) in *Dig.* I, leg. 10. St. Thomas takes this and systematizes this rich heritage by establishing a valuable treatise on justice located in *S.th.* II-II, qq. 57-122.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *S.th.* I-II, q. 66, a. 4.

## THE THEOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF JUSTICE

In the seventeenth century it was common to refer to God as the "Sun of Justice." St. Vincent also used this expression. For him, the expression "Sun of Justice" refers to the God who stirs us up to share his life. For this reason, writing to a priest who was tempted to discouragement because of the lack of progress in his pastoral work, he makes this beautiful comparison:

*"... you have to convince yourself that God only asks of you that you cast your nets into the sea, not that you catch fishes, since it is his job to make them come into the net. And do not doubt he will do so if, after fishing all night despite the difficulties of the work and the hardening of hearts, almost all of them unconscious of the things of God, you wait patiently for the day to come when the Sun of Justice awakens them and his light illumines and warms them. To this work and this patience one must also add humility, prayer and good example."*<sup>6</sup>

Vincent de Paul affirms that the justice of God is sovereign.<sup>7</sup> He exercises it by giving to each one according to his works, keeping exact and strict justice.<sup>8</sup> God exercises his justice commutatively and distributively.<sup>9</sup> Explaining the two kinds of justice of God he has recourse to mathematical examples which were in fashion at that time. In his commutative justice God grants his merits with an arithmetic measure; in his distributive justice he grants them in geometric measure. The justice of God shows itself fully the day of one's death. God exercises commutative justice awarding our good will by giving us the virtues; he carries out distributive justice giving heaven to the good and hell to the bad:

*"Commutative, since God transforms the works of men into virtues, and his merits into reward; and when bodies corrupt, the souls will take possession of the glory which they have deserved. This commutation of merits into reward is done by measure and by number, or as the theologians say, in arithmetic proportion. Yes, God gives the virtues according to the effort one makes to acquire them, and he gives glory according to the number and value of good works.... God will reward us according to justice and the number of our works.... It is also distributive inasmuch*

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<sup>6</sup> SV VII, 358. Other texts that refer to God as the Sun of Justice are: E.S. XI/2, 536; XI/2, 780.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. E.S. XI/1, 432.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. E.S. XI/1, 434.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. E.S. XI/1, 432-436.

*as it guards a certain proportion called geometric, when God distributes heaven to the good and hell to the bad.... Why? Because heaven is the pay and the salary with which he rewards his servants, and hell is the suffering with which he punishes the wicked. It is characteristic of God to give to each one according to his works.”<sup>10</sup>*

St. Vincent refers to the justice of God by pointing out that it is characteristic of God to punish evil.<sup>11</sup> He shares the sacral and vindictive mentality of his time, which sees in God a severe being unwilling to let man’s sin pass. In this way, he interprets illnesses, wars and other public calamities as punishments from God.<sup>12</sup>

However this implacable image of God is only one aspect of how he views the Almighty. He completes the description by showing how God is always open to mercy. Therefore, on every occasion he will urge people to trust in the love of God: “May God have mercy on her and grant to all who provoke his justice the grace of repentance and conversion of life!”<sup>13</sup> God is simple, but we humans cannot take him in with just one look. Therefore when St. Vincent speaks of the divine justice he notes the strict aspect of God; and referring to his merciful charity, he emphasizes the oceans of tenderness and compassion of God. Both aspects should be kept in mind in order to capture the true image of God expressed in Vincentian theology. Moreover, as a reflection of divine action, humans should practice this same charitable justice. In this way he points out to St. Louise that if on one hand she should punish a person, at the same time she should help her so that “justice be accompanied by mercy.”<sup>14</sup>

He formulates these considerations on the justice of God, not to remain in mere abstract contemplation, but rather so that each one may be responsible for his own life: trying hard to achieve virtue, living an interior life, extending the Kingdom of God within and without oneself, combating vices, fearing for one’s salvation, etc.

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<sup>10</sup> E.S. XI/1, 433-434.

<sup>11</sup> E.S. XI/1, 434.

<sup>12</sup> Referring to an epidemic which struck Rome and Genoa he points out: “The truth, Father, is that we are deeply worried, especially seeing that neither the change of seasons nor the prayers the whole church has offered during the jubilee have been able to stop the course of this sickness nor cause it to lessen. Christians’ sins must be very great to cause God to exercise his justice in this way. May his mercy wish to come quickly to those poor cities and console so many afflicted towns that suffer throughout the world, some in one way and others in another,” SV VI, 169.

<sup>13</sup> SV VI, 90.

<sup>14</sup> SV I, 449.

Such reflections in no way remain in mere interiority, rather they should foster the missionary vocation inherent in the Christian: "It is not enough to work so that God may reign in us, thus seeking his reign and his justice; rather it is also necessary that we desire and try to extend God's reign everywhere, that God reign in every soul."<sup>15</sup>

The Vincentian organization of charity springs from the question that God and the poor asked of Vincent de Paul in the face of the spiritual and material misery, the exploitation and injustice in which the people lived. How to remedy it? If the question comes from God and the poor, St. Vincent knows that only from that same God and those same poor can the answer come. For him the center of Jesus' message is the coming of the kingdom (cf. Matthew 1:14-15). The most surprising characteristic of this kingdom is that it is destined preferentially to the poor (cf. Luke 6:20). For Vincent de Paul, telling the poor that the "kingdom of God is for them" means that Jesus Christ takes on the defense of the poor today just as he did in his time. On this earth, the Lord Jesus defended the poor by doing justice for them and giving them salvation. In our day, Jesus Christ continues doing justice for the poor to the degree he finds available instruments who desire to carry on his mission. The relationship of Christ with the poor and of the poor with Christ takes on fundamental importance in the discovery of the dignity that the dispossessed assume within the church. It is for this reason that for the Vincentian ethic, serving the poor is the path towards serving God: committed service which seeks to reestablish justice since Jesus Christ is the justice of God for the poor. The poor person is the bearer, many times without knowing it, of the demands of the justice of God. The Kingdom of God and the justice proclaimed by Jesus Christ are made effective when the integral defense of the poor is taken on.

It was not for nothing that St. Vincent took as the motto of the Congregation the verse "My mission is to proclaim the gospel to the poor" (Luke 4:18). Present day exegesis tells us that the coming of the Kingdom proclaimed by Christ means that God has decided to manifest his power by showing compassion for the poor, by showing forth his justice by rescuing and saving the oppressed and down trodden just as Second and Third Isaiah had announced. This text makes Christ a prophet whose mission is the prelude to the establishment of God's Kingdom in favor of the poor. Jesus will make explicit and real its content throughout his whole life through the defense in favor of the poor and the liberation of the oppressed (cf. Luke 7:18-23). All this means that under the kingship of God,

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<sup>15</sup> E.S. XI/1, 435.

those who lacked every right acquire rights. Jesus Christ is the one charged with doing justice for the poor inasmuch as he is the one who fulfills the Father's will with regard to the marginalized.<sup>16</sup> In this way Vincent de Paul joins charitable justice with Christology, the will of God and the service of the poor. In the integral service of the poor Vincent de Paul makes clear that God is their protector and defender. And so he wants to organize a company in the church which would have the poor as its heritage and would give itself entirely to them. Therefore the evangelizing service to the poor is nothing less than the continuation of the mission of Christ who came to preach the gospel to the poor.

Along with the option for the poor, St. Vincent observes that Jesus Christ shows his love for justice by fulfilling the civil laws of his time, among them paying the coin of tribute. Paraphrasing Matthew 22:15-22 he says: "When they were suspicious of him, to show his accusers they were wrong he asked them to show him the coin of tribute; and seeing there the image of Cesar, he told them one must give to Cesar what was Cesar's. He chose to perform a miracle rather than not pay the tribute they asked of him although he had every right to be exempt from it."<sup>17</sup>

Vincent de Paul liked to reflect on the fact that Jesus Christ did not inject himself as judge in civil disputes or merely temporal matters. He invited all to live as children of God, and from that fundamental experience he healed people's attitude with regard to possession and power.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, in a century when judges and disputes were abused, St. Vincent held firm to the evangelical maxim: "And if someone takes you to court to sue you for your shirt, let him have your coat as well" (Matthew 5:40). He interpreted this as meaning that Jesus chose to act only when there was a grave violation of justice. But if it is merely a minor affair, let it pass. It is more evangelical to yield than to get worked up and obstinate in the defense of one's own rights. However, if, as we mentioned, the matter is serious, one ought to have recourse to judicial action; but before that one should exhaust all possible options of dialogue, prayer and condescension. One should never have recourse to the courts without having honestly sought a settlement.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. GANOCZY, ALEXANDER, *De su plenitud todos hemos recibido*, Barcelona, Herder, 1991, 51-67. GONZALEZ-CARVAJAL, LUIS, *Los signos de los tiempos: El Reino de Dios esta entre nosotros*, Santander, Sal Terrae, 1987, 136 and following.

<sup>17</sup> SV VI, 30. Cf. SV VI, 2.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. SV II, 493-495.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. E.S. XI/2, 423-424.

Living as a Christian is carrying out what Jesus proposed to the crowds: "Seek first the kingdom of God and his justice" (Matthew 6:33). Vincent de Paul interprets this passage by pointing out that one should seek with all one's strength that God reign, striving so that in one's own interior God be sovereign. He reigns in his creation, in the government of the church and especially in those who are just, by means of the virtues they practice and have received from Him. Moreover, God extends his justice through two kinds of justice: commutative and distributive.<sup>20</sup>

## THE PRACTICE OF JUSTICE

Vincentian ethics have a great appreciation for justice. This shows itself through a non-negotiable respect for the law. Therefore, the various laws existing in the various kingdoms should be respected and obeyed; in the same way, one should not fail to ask permission of the competent civil authorities in the situations where this is necessary.<sup>21</sup> Ordinances coming from magistrates should be obeyed,<sup>22</sup> since Vincent understands these are, or should be, drawn up on principles of justice. Furthermore, he accepts that the government of princes is of divine right.<sup>23</sup> The respect owed to judges and other public authorities, apart from how they might be in the concrete, is due to them because of their investiture, since God exercises his justice indirectly through those men robed with legitimate authority. Basing himself on this conviction he tells the President of the Parliament of Rennes: "You are the principal minister of God's justice in this province."<sup>24</sup> What we have said does not detract from the fact that Vincent knew that the drama of his age was that scandalous legal injustices were perpetrated. He could affirm sadly that, in many cases, the justice of God did not coincide with the justice of men.

As we have already pointed out, Vincent de Paul lived in a hyper-judicial age. Everything had to be done before a notary; and disputes and legal actions were raised for any reason at all. St. Vincent himself in his lifetime had to face numerous judgments.<sup>25</sup> As a

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. E.S. XI/1, 428-432.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. SV I, 22.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. SV I, 231.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. SV VI, 30.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. SV III, 55.

<sup>25</sup> Recall the judgments with regard to the matters of Annecy, Crecy, Orsigny, San Lazare, Saint Meem and Toul. Cf. SV III, 43; VII, 422.

general rule, he proposed not getting involved in judgments.<sup>26</sup> His motives for proposing this were many:

1) the example of Christ:

*“There is a maxim which forbids going to court. ‘If they take your cloak, give them your shirt as well’ (Matthew 5:40). When justice calls us we are obliged to respond; but beforehand it is advisable that the Company, to honor the counsel of Our Lord and to show devotion to this maxim, be disposed to prefer losing to litigating; and should endeavor to extinguish every kind of disagreement, cost what it may, rather than being obstinate in sustaining its rights, in such a way that it never turn to the courts without first seeking a settlement.”<sup>27</sup>*

2) Judgments are slow and costly.<sup>28</sup>

3) Often enough the judges are not concerned with the truth and they themselves are examples of corruption.<sup>29</sup>

4) Because of the passions enflamed by the judgments themselves, the neighbor is frequently disedified.<sup>30</sup>

In the course of human life men frequently reproach one another for different reasons. Generally they go to court for matters of money and other goods, as well as for affairs of honor or power.<sup>31</sup> Taking up again what was mentioned in the previous point, St. Vincent, realist that he was, thinks about the most effective way to resolve conflicts. He proposes what we would call today “mediations,” outside of the judicial sphere since this instance lives off fomenting suits or rousing the anger of some against the others. Vincent de Paul proposes respectful dialogue and the capacity to see one’s own rights without forgetting the other’s. When conflicts arise, one should be reasonable, knowing how to be accommodating and prudent, showing good will and even contributing more than what is owed. In fact, it is advisable to seek the mediation of a common friend.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Cf. SV II, 480; V, 384, 408, 412, 599; VI, 990; E.S. XI/2, 537.

<sup>27</sup> E.S. XI/1, 423-424. He would also counsel, with a certain disguised humor, a bishop friend of his to initiate judgments and legal actions to follow the example of Jesus Christ “who condemned legal processes, but nevertheless underwent one and lost it,” SV II, 480.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. SV VI, 36.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. E.S. X, 221.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. SV III, 69.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. SV II, 494.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. SV V, 903; VII, 95-97.

For this reason one of the purposes of the popular missions was the settling of processes and the reconciliation of adversaries. Vincent was convinced that if with preaching one achieved that people lived according to the gospel and conformed themselves to the way of acting of Jesus Christ, then judicial conflicts would practically disappear or at least would diminish greatly. Despite the general rule of not becoming involved in judgments, there are times one must participate. If friendly dialogue were not sufficient, Vincent would see the judicial way as the last resort. The motivation for involving himself in a judgment was based upon the gravity of the matter, and on the principle “when justice calls us we are obliged to answer.”<sup>33</sup> Concretely he initiated judgments to defend legitimate property (e.g. when someone did not pay debts after having waited sufficient time; when someone wanted to retain property that had been honestly donated, etc.); or to defend the right of the poor (e.g. when someone wanted to retain goods placed at the service of the poor).<sup>34</sup>

Once a judgment is begun one should act with diligence to defend the truth. From a certain point of view, St. Vincent was a model litigant since he showed us how to act in a judgment. Justice moves one to bravely defend one’s rights and those that have been entrusted to us. But this does not justify disloyal means, like wanting to win over the judge to one’s cause; or winning by unethical means. One should respond with objectivity and transparency. In these moments also one should remember the basic principles of morality taught by Jesus Christ: “Do to others what you want them to do to you” (Matthew 7:12). This maxim is the basis for all morals, and upon this principle all the actions of secular justice can be regulated. Upon this principle Justinian established his laws and jurists have regulated civil and canon law.<sup>35</sup> Once justice has rendered its ruling Vincent teaches us to submit to it with meekness. In fact even when the verdict was contrary and had been patently erroneous, Vincent preferred to accept it except in certain cases. And so he writes, not without a touch of irony, to Fr. Pesnelle who has suffered a contrary and arbitrary verdict from the court: “Long live justice! We must believe the loss of your case is just. God himself who, before, granted you that good, now takes it away — blessed be his holy name! That good is bad when it is where God does not want it to be — do not think of those sterile years of which you speak. If they are so, it will

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<sup>33</sup> E.S. XI/1, 423.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. SV VII, 97.

<sup>35</sup> E.S. XI/1, 419.

not be through your fault, but rather the disposition of Providence whose will is always adorable.”<sup>36</sup>

Another way of living according to justice is to abandon a partisan spirit, not abuse one's power nor use it against the people who are under our mandate, nor to promote unduly those who share our faith. With respect to this, what he points out to Fr. Gallais, the superior of the Sedan mission where there was a Calvinist majority in the magistracy, is remarkable:

*“And if it is a case of a Catholic against a Huguenot, how do you know if the Catholic has just motives in his suit? There is a great difference between being Catholic and being just.... What, you will tell me, can I see a Catholic oppressed by one of (their) religion and do nothing for him? I will answer you that the oppression will be for some motive and will be because the Catholic owes something to the Huguenot, or for some injury or damage he has done him. And so, in that case, is it not just that the Huguenot have recourse to justice to arrange a solution? Is the Catholic less worthy of censure because he is a Catholic? Or will you have more reason to meddle in these affairs than Our Lord had for not touching the matter of the man who complained about his brother? Yes, but the judges are Huguenots. It is true, but they are also jurists and they judge according to laws, customs and ordinances; and besides their conscience, they profess their honor.”<sup>37</sup>*

The practice of justice cannot be reduced to fulfilling legal justice. St. Vincent proposes a more interior justice which leads to a more delicate conscience in all that has to do with giving to each one what belongs to him. It is for this reason that he asks for great honesty in handling money.<sup>38</sup> Money is an efficacious means for the interchange of goods and services. The danger comes when it becomes an end in itself, bringing the person to the idolatry of money. It is the “Mammon of Iniquity” about which Jesus warns us in the gospel (cf. Matthew 6:24). St. Vincent knew the havoc money brought about in the whole world since the excessive desire for it causes great injustices. “A powerful gentleman Sir Money” was a phrase sadly current at that time. Having and unchecked power went hand in hand. From that arose the pride of the rich, bad administration of

<sup>36</sup> SV VIII, 175.

<sup>37</sup> SV II, 493-495.

<sup>38</sup> AA.VV., “San Vicente de Paul y el dinero,” *Cuadernos Vicencianos. En tiempos de San Vicente de Paul... y hoy*, Tomo I, Salamanca, CEME, 1977, 281-290.

public affairs where many functionaries confused public money with their own, the pillaging of the army, robbery in the streets and roads, etc. In the face of the damage brought about by avarice, Vincent said: "See, my dear brothers, the danger there is in handling money. I say it for every kind of person, without exception, men and women."<sup>39</sup> From the moment St. Vincent de Paul discovered the poor in their material and spiritual misery, money would become for him a means to live simply and to serve the poor. He knew from experience with what difficulty the poor earned it, and how easily the rich wasted it. For this reason, without fomenting hatreds, he would act as a link between the two groups; he would be the administrator of the generosity of one group and the provider of the necessities of the other. In this way, in charity, he reestablishes justice.

He will remind the rich that they are responsible before God for the money they have. The use they make of it for the service of the poor will be one of its most noble uses. He will obtain from them enormous sums to distribute in immediate help or to set up the patrimony of the wounded. He will show himself to be a brilliant and rigorous administrator of the capital of the poor. He will be guided by the strictest rules for the administration of property, investing in lands, in buildings, in a stage coach line. By means of the money both the nobles and middle class and the government gave him, as well as what his Congregations produced, he established a network of permanent assistance and promotion of the poor.

The poor handling of money also occurred in ecclesiastical and religious administration. Avarice, greed and robbery were realities which sullied the church. Therefore he would look for ways to "fence in" the money and other goods, so they would not be diverted from their specific mission. He did this because justice demands transparency in the handling of money. Let us look at some of the ways he proposed: one of them was to respect the intention of the giver.<sup>40</sup> This takes precedence over every other consideration and need. To act in any other way is to go against justice. Another way of being just with money is to keep an orderly administration which clearly shows the amounts of income and expenditures. This accounting should be accompanied by the greatest possible number of receipts. Thus one should ask for a receipt for alms given, as well as for other kinds of expenditures. Vincent tells a priest:

*"I beseech you also that in every monastery, ask for a receipt for what you are given; and with regard to the distributions which*

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<sup>39</sup> E.S. IX/2, 896.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. SV II, 228; VI, 8.

*must be made in the other cities where there are persons of the company, tell them to follow to the letter the orders Mr. Villarceaux has given them, and to ask for a receipt for everything they hand out. For it is necessary to avoid that, for any pretext, even one centime be diverted or applied to other needs. Also please do me the favor of sending me with Br. Matthew a copy of the accounts, signed by Mr. Villarceaux, and on his orders, if there is one; and you will let me know each month the amounts that have been distributed or ordered distributed in other places.”<sup>41</sup>*

In these matters he emphasized that one should always avoid “rounding off” when it was time to close accounts. This way of acting, little by little, causes one to lose exactness in the economic area. In fact, more than once, he did not accept a foundation if it meant having to accept any rounding off of accounts. Furthermore, due taxes and assessments should always be paid, avoiding any kind of evasion.<sup>42</sup> Neither should one accept a loan at interest for there is always a danger of usury. Vincent follows the opinion of the theologians of the Sorbonne even though the monarchical courts permitted it. Vincent de Paul sees as ethical that money produce profit by investing it, not by loaning it at interest.<sup>43</sup>

To love one’s own community is something licit, but he points out that one should not want it to grow at others’ expense. For example, he rejects a donation that an ecclesiastic wanted to make to the Congregation of the Mission in Geneva because it would have brought harm to a religious community.<sup>44</sup>

A key concept in commutative justice is *restitution*. It “does not seem to be anything but returning one’s property to one’s possession and dominion.”<sup>45</sup>

To establish the equality of justice, restitution is the solution when someone appropriates and keeps a good against the will of its legitimate owner, as in the case of robbery or theft. What the person loaned or what was taken from him should be restored. Restitution implies, therefore, returning to its legitimate owner those external

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<sup>41</sup> SV II, 74.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. SV VI, 2.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. SV VI, 283. St. Vincent wanted his missionaries to be properly formed in these complex matters. Whether it was in the free moments during the missions, or more specifically, in the conferences given between missions, questions of the administration of the sacraments or moral matters, among them usury, were specifically treated.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. SV VI, 26.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. SAINT THOMAS, *S.th.* 1, q. 62, a. 1.

goods which have been taken from him unjustly. In this way the equilibrium and equality of commutative justice is reestablished. Clearly restitution concerns mainly the objective sphere. St. Vincent maintains the classic teaching which is ordinarily applied in pastoral practice through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. In it, when someone has taken, robbed or used badly some good he should make restitution. This can be done in different ways, but it should always be done so that the sacrament be properly administered.<sup>46</sup> Justice also implies not abusing anyone's goods even with the pretext that they are rich people.<sup>47</sup> And he would not permit anyone to eat at another's expense.<sup>48</sup>

Still another way of being just is loving work. This is so decisive for St. Vincent that to him, the person who could work and did not was unjust. It is unworthy to want to live at another's expense: "The just one lives this way, my dear sisters; he lives, according to God's commandment, by the work of his hands and is not a burden to anyone. But the unjust person does not act that way; for not wanting to be bothered with working, he will be a burden for others, he will begin to beg and rob."<sup>49</sup> Love of work leads one to treat kindly and respectfully the employees of the house. In fact, he says they should be given even more than the labor laws of his time allowed. For example, he asks that an employee be paid even for the months he was sick, and even that his medicines be bought for him. An interesting step ahead of its time that the working classes would achieve later with much effort.

St. Vincent dedicated his whole life to evangelical peace. But when a kingdom is unjustly attacked, he infers it is legitimate to defend itself. He holds, with the majority of the theologians of his time, the theory of just war. And so, when Casimir, the king of Poland, suffered a series of invasions (Cossacks, Russians; later Charles Gustav, the king of Sweden, in alliance with George III, the prince of Transylvania) he writes to him: "I hope against all hope that the justice of your arms prevails over the force and iniquity of your adversaries."<sup>50</sup> He understands that it is fair to pray and act in favor of one who upholds a just cause.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Cf. SV VI, 606.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. SV I, 379.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. SV I, 421.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. E.S. IX/1, 443.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. SV V, 454.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. SV VII, 83.

**JUSTICE AND CHARITY IN THE PROMOTION OF THE POOR**<sup>52</sup>

Let us give special attention to treating the point St. Vincent emphasizes, one should be just to the poor.<sup>53</sup> St. Vincent was effective in the promotion of the poor during his age because he was one of the best informed and formed men of his time in the matters of poverty and marginalization. But it was not a cold and theoretical knowledge; rather it was a questioning knowledge that called him to action. He knows the world of poverty and experiences it as a call and accusation, as a challenge and commitment, as a cry which goes to the throne of God and asks him to act. This also implies living the heart of the gospel message and the authentic criterion of the faith. He understands that the Kingdom that Christ brought is made real by giving a preferential place to the needy.

The Vincentian motive for working in favor of the poor is discovering that the defense of the rights of the poor and the service of the disenfranchised is being involved in the affairs of God. Another motive is that the full encounter with God takes place in the service of the poor. Without ruling out the mystical path nor the life of silence and study, St. Vincent vindicates as a “theological place” work in favor of justice and charity towards the poor. In this way, the new crises that augmented poverty and at times appeared unexpectedly were for him a new judgment of the poor who demanded action. Through the situation of the defenseless Vincent feels that God’s justice is expressed and obliges every baptized person to work in favor of the poor. We see that this ethical combat to prevent the poor

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<sup>52</sup> Cf. IBÁÑEZ, J.M., “El compromiso con la justicia, dimensión esencial del servicio vicenciano,” in AA.VV., *Justicia y solidaridad con los pobres en la vocacion vicenciana*, Salamanca, CEME, 1988, 115-157. ETIENNE, IVONNE, *Sur laroute avec Monsieur Vincent*, Paris, Ed. Saint-Paul, 1960, 114-117.

<sup>53</sup> As we mentioned, between 1617 and 1635 St. Vincent was discovering more and more the pain of the people. The experiences which put him in most direct contact with the poor are the numerous missions he gives in the countryside. While he gives the missions, he sets out to create institutions which help to ease the material and spiritual misery of the marginalized. We can point out a third period. Between 1635 and 1660 he becomes a many faceted and creative promoter of works in favor of the poor. He does this in a time when the French government had become an enormous superstructure which grew by the force of the people’s misery. Furthermore, a considerable sector of the nobility and the bourgeoisie were highly indifferent and insensible to them. In the face of this, St. Vincent feels the judgment of the poor weighing upon himself. This poverty he takes as a personal challenge, because he understands that a Christian cannot be indifferent to the pain of others. The experience of this terrible misery embedded itself in his heart causing him to oppose the causes which produced poverty and seeking ever more people who would help him to reduce it.

from becoming miserable and disenfranchised is founded upon a solid practice of the virtues of charity and justice. What is striking is that in the midst of a society disconnected from the poor (even by many mystics), St. Vincent calls for indignation at the injustices committed against them, an indignation that is not a violent response, but rather charitable justice which reestablishes an excessively asymmetrical relationship. Ibañez Burgos summarizes the Vincentian option in the following phrase: "The worshippers of God have to live in the creative charity of justice in favor of the needy."<sup>54</sup>

The eminence of the poor is so great that Vincent de Paul asks his congregations to use their goods with such moderation that they can always use significant amounts in favor of the poor. He sees the improper use of goods as a sin against justice since he understands that the poor person is its rightful owner.<sup>55</sup> For St. Vincent, doing justice is one of the ways of helping the weak and the small by returning to them their rights. In this way he inculcated in his contemporaries the habit of seeing present day misery, of understanding its causes and of seeking solutions. What was in his time the object of non-binding charity he caused to be seen as proper to demanding charity, and in many cases, as an obligation of justice. He came to see that the basic goods should be available to all. He put this in practice, although humankind would take a long time in giving support and juridical formulation to these values. St. Vincent contributed to the recognition of these rights and to assuring the application of them.<sup>56</sup> He had the insight that if a society did not attend to its weakest members it was not really Christian. He realized that European society grew by withholding from the most defenseless part of what was due to them. And so he said: "May God grant us the grace of being tender-hearted towards the miserable and of believing that, while succoring them, we are doing justice and not mercy."<sup>57</sup>

The following reflections serve as a basis for the Vincentian ethic of service to the poor. Putting this into practice means, first of all,

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<sup>54</sup> IBAÑEZ, J.M., *op. cit.*, 125.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. E.S. IX/2, 906.

<sup>56</sup> With great effort humanity came to define every person's right to life, safety, sufficient food, health, housing, a healthy infancy, a dignified old age, work, education, religious freedom, etc. St. Vincent worked for abandoned children, the distribution of food, the promotion of hospitals, home care for the sick, welcome for refugees, attention to the mentally ill, the galley slaves, aid for aged, and provision of tools and seeds to devastated areas, job training, the creation of schools for basic education, systematic instruction in the faith during missions, etc.

<sup>57</sup> SV VII, 115.

treating the poor with the same respect we would have for all. For example, in the Mother House of St. Lazare there was a group of mentally ill people who had remained when the house was donated to the Congregation. St. Vincent would ask that they, like all the pensioners, be treated well. He would say in a Repetition of Prayer:

*“With regard to the pensioners, brothers, I have learned that sometimes they are given badly prepared food, and even the meat and wine left over from the day before. This is not right, brothers; they are people whose relatives pay a good pension. Is it not just that they be given good and well prepared things to eat? In the name of God, let this not be repeated; treat them as you would us, as you would the priests. Because, look brothers, you are committing an injustice against these poor people, some of whom are totally innocent, who are locked up and cannot complain of the injustice you commit against them. Yes, I call it an injustice.”<sup>58</sup>*

The option for justice led Vincent to become involved in political action.<sup>59</sup> Obviously he does not do it within present day parameters, so enriched by the Social Doctrine of the Church, but he sees very clearly that easing the situation of the poor is not just an economic question. For St. Vincent one cannot serve the poor if at the same time he is not struggling against poverty and the deep causes which produce it.

This forgetfulness on the part of his contemporaries is so grave that it is the same as not being Christian. Jesus Christ was sent by the Father to proclaim that the Kingdom of God is near and it is for the poor. If that is so, how is it possible that in Christian kingdoms the poor live in such inhuman conditions? St. Vincent lists a series of vices that have damaged correct coexistence as we will see later on. But basically he understands that the only valid answer is to take on and have others take on a commitment in favor of the poor.

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<sup>58</sup> SV XI/1, 299.

<sup>59</sup> We see Vincent acting in the political arena when he considers it necessary to defend the poor. Thus he meets with cardinals and Prime Ministers, first with Richelieu and later with Mazarin to seek to ease the cause of the people's misery. For example, he speaks with Richelieu to ask him plainly to stop the war; he publicly opposes Mazarin in 1649. In 1652 he appeals to Pope Innocent X to ask him to intervene for the sake of peace in the Fronde of the Princes. And he writes to Mazarin in 1652, asking him to leave the kingdom, simply because he judges him to be the principal cause of the people's suffering. He intervenes in politics, even though he usually loses, because he understands that without sound policies of governments and the powerful, permanent change is impossible.

Vincent de Paul understood that a great part of the inhuman situation of the poor stemmed from the ills of the “Ancien Regime”: a policy centered on the strengthening of the monarchy at the cost of promoting war, high taxes for the lower classes, the waste of the upper classes and the indifference in the face of the pain of the poorest sectors of society. This system, even though it created a strong state on one level, provoked terrible crises in the weakest groups. It filled the country people with sorrow, concentrated riches in the hands of a few, multiplied popular rebellions and increased the number of poor, beggars, vagabonds and bandits. The experience of this terrible misery which embedded itself in the world of the poor led Vincent to plunge more deeply into the misery, oppose its causes and to look for people who would work to reduce it.

## **JUSTICE IN RELATION TO CHARITY**

We come at last to the main theme of this article — seeing how St. Vincent resolves the conflictive connection between justice and charity. The way out of this labyrinth consists in referring to God, and especially to the Incarnate Word, the most perfect response on how to link these two virtues. Finally, from the viewpoint of Vincentian realism, we have treated a few vices which go against a good life, and especially against justice.

For St. Vincent justice is an essential virtue; but, as every moral virtue it has to tend towards the theological ones, especially charity. And so with Vincent de Paul one can speak of charitable justice, because he always understands justice in the Christian context of charity. The Vincentian ethic tries to resolve the difficult “theological cross” of harmonizing the principles of charity with those of justice. It holds that the ideal of Christian coexistence lies in knowing how to harmonize justice and charity. This harmonizing is achieved by making clear the rights of justice, but rethinking them in a broader framework like that of charity which can always seek more creative responses aimed at healing the bonds.

Vincent affirms that the practice of justice shares with charity the attitude in the one who exercises it of going out of oneself (although charity effects an even greater self-forgetfulness). One may transgress the law in the face of the absolute of love because charity can construct a way of greater perfection in favor of the neighbor. He understands that charity takes precedence, not insofar as it annuls the duties of justice, but rather it broadens and deepens the good relationship between people (the aspiration of justice) by inviting them to total gratuity, to pardon and reconciliation. Charity even attains what justice desires but cannot achieve by itself.

We have already pointed out that the saint understands that charity should be affective and effective. Both of these aspects are important and complementary. But Vincent de Paul gives priority to effective charity. And from this primacy of effective charity he closely joins charity with justice.

The Father of the Poor wished for a reform in the church and in society; and his way of bringing it about was through charity. We know that the society of the 17<sup>th</sup> century was highly stratified.<sup>60</sup> What is special about Vincent is, by respecting this “order,” he made it flexible, bringing the different social groups together by the virtue of charity. He brings about that goods are distributed and that respect and dignity are shown. With regard to help for the poor Vincent understands that it is fostered by charity which makes us see the great truth that we are all brothers. This help is changed into an act of justice for two reasons: 1) Because of our greed we are responsible for our neighbor’s poverty. 2) Even if we did not cause it, we have the obligation of succoring a “brother” who is also the owner of what I possess:

*“I give thanks to God for the charity that the city of Marseilles is showing for the poor in the need in which they find themselves and for the help it has opportunely given to the forced laborers in this time of cold and shortages. May God grant us the grace to soften our hearts in favor of the miserable; and to believe that, while aiding them, we are doing justice and not mercy. These people that God orders us to help are our brothers.”<sup>61</sup>*

The primacy of charity can never bring us to justify unjust situations. In fact, there will be situations where, in order to be truly charitable, the first thing that must be done is struggle in favor of justice. Only a badly understood charity can be negligent with regard to the duties of justice. It would be unjust “to do works of charity” with some at the cost of not giving others what I owe them. Giving importance to natural right, he says that “the duties of justice are preferable to those of charity.”<sup>62</sup> Asking a priest to respect the intention of the donor in the use of alms even though there are many needs to attend, he says: “There can be no charity if it is not accompanied by justice; and nothing can oblige us to do more than

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<sup>60</sup> Cf. GOUBERT, PIERRE, *Louis XIV et vingt millions de Français*, Fayard, Collection Pluriel, 1966, 22-50. GUITTON, JEAN PIERRE, *La société et les pauvres en Europa (XVI-XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles)*, Paris, Ed. P.U.F., 1974, 57-68.

<sup>61</sup> SV VII, 115.

<sup>62</sup> SV VII, 633.

we can reasonably do.”<sup>63</sup> In the same way he asks a priest who was rescuing captives to recover the money sent to free a captive, but which had been used for other things. The striking thing about the following text is that it concludes that respecting an obligation of justice in the context of charity (money sent for redeeming captives) makes the person more charitable:

*“Blessed be God for all the inquiries you have made and because you can probably get back through the consul the money that captain did not hand over to the slaves of Havre-de-Grace in Algiers. You can be sure there is no difficulty with the priests of the Mission seeking justice for the poor slaves so that what is held back from them can be returned to them. It is rather very meritorious and very edifying for all the good souls who know what true charity makes charitable people do.”*<sup>64</sup>

As we have already pointed out, Vincent de Paul held that whenever possible judgments and legal problems were to be avoided. But if there is no other option but to become involved in them, they should be conducted in such a way that charity is not sacrificed.<sup>65</sup> Also, he pointed out when one must legitimately punish, it should be done to satisfy justice; but on the other hand, charity tends to soften the punishment, to not make it so hard or lasting, giving another chance. Clearly, the punishment should not be washing one’s hands of the other. This is another way of reconciling justice with mercy.<sup>66</sup>

If the sense of organization is evident from the beginning of Vincent de Paul’s charitable works, during the periods of greater social turbulence and public calamities, this organization becomes socially ingenious and creative. Such a socialization of charity is, without doubt, the expression of social responsibility of the evangelical person in the face of the misery which invades society and the lives of people. St. Vincent applied this harmonious alliance between justice and charity to the solutions he tried to give to the different kinds of problems he attended to through his vast “social network.” And so when he asks a priest to take care of and help the prisoners, he explains to him that is not for the sake of fostering vice, but rather to make them more just through merciful love as Jesus did with Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10). And so, mysteriously, what justice seeks for, charity achieves. Furthermore, St. Vincent knew how unjust penal justice could become and what prison life was like in his

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<sup>63</sup> SV II, 68. Cf. SV II, 74.

<sup>64</sup> SV V, 398.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. SV VII, 97.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. SV I, 449.

time. And so he says that those who work with the prisoners “exercise mercy, seeking it for the guilty and demanding it for the innocent.”<sup>67</sup>

Let us update this rich Vincentian heritage by pointing out that the Social Doctrine of the Church frequently shows the insufficiency of justice alone in resolving the conflicts between people. Therefore it seeks to unite justice and charity. It does so by including justice in love: “Love, so to speak, is the condition of justice and, without doubt, justice is at the service of charity” (QA 12). Charity is never constructed against justice, but it can transcend it. In this way it frees justice from its great danger: seeking justice it falls into vengeance. Although they are two different virtues, the frontiers between justice and charity are far from unchanging. Quite the contrary, the ideal is that by respecting justice, one goes a step beyond, establishing charity which surpasses justice without cancelling it out.

Finally let us say a word about solidarity which for John Paul II is a bridge between justice and charity. Solidarity is defined by John Paul II as “the firm and persevering determination to strive for the common good; that is, for the good of each and every one so that all may be truly responsible for all” (SRS, 38). In this way, solidarity is presented as a virtue linked to *justice* when it collaborates in building up the common good. It is presented as a principle which can transform the structures of sin and produce more human structures. In the face of burning social problems it is necessary: to directly help the poorest nations (many of them former colonies plundered by their former powers); to reform the international economic and financial institutions; to support the efforts of the poor countries to develop themselves with dignity (cf. CA 26; SRS 16; CIC 2440). The subjects of this supportive justice are all the social groups which produce and distribute goods. This distribution should be carried out according to the necessity and the productive capacity of the different actors. The relationship between justice and solidarity favors equality among peoples.<sup>68</sup>

Solidarity is not just a human virtue, but also a Christian one. As such it is linked to charity. Therefore it has the notes of total gratuity, pardon and reconciliation. It aims for the conversion of the sin which adheres to the human heart, and it orients personal change with the help of grace. For Christians solidarity is inspired by the

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<sup>67</sup> SV VII, 443.

<sup>68</sup> VIDAL, MARCIANO, “Justicia y solidaridad en la ética social actual,” in AA.VV., *La justicia social*, Madrid, Ed. PS, 1993, 269-286.

loving unity of the Trinity. In this way, solidarity creates communion. Moreover from this Trinitarian origin of solidarity, in accordance with his work for holiness, John Paul II points to the saints as an admirable example of solidarity. He explicitly mentions two figures: one who worked in Latin America centuries ago and the other born in his native land in our times: “Many saints canonized by the church give admirable witness of this solidarity and they serve as examples in the difficult circumstances of our times. Among them I wish to recall St. Peter Claver, with his service to the slaves in Cartagena of the Indies, and St. Maximilian Kolbe who gave his life for an unknown prisoner in the concentration camp of Auschwitz-Oswiecim” (SRS 40). Thus we see that solidarity is the connecting thread of the three basic categories of the social moral: charity, justice and the common good.

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# Peace and the Progress of People

by Giuseppe Turati, C.M.

From the beginning the theme of Peace has always been present in the thought of the social doctrine of the church. However it has assumed particular importance, when John XXIII has dedicated to it a specific encyclical *Pacem in Terris* which recently (in 2003) commemorated its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Such consideration is at the base of the choice to propose in this article a reading of the theme in question that beginning from this encyclical, has been successively amplified through consecutive proclamation of the pontifical magisterium that in various ways has shaped as resumption and development of the teaching originally contained in the Johanine encyclical.

All succeeding pontiffs were interested in the theme of peace and the progress of the people, framing it time and again in a fuller prospective, although already John XXIII had considered it in a global outlook. Maybe it is convenient to remember that *Pacem in Terris* was born in an historical context of profound international crises: the conflicts in Algeria and in Congo in 1962, the annexation of New Guinea to Indonesia, the struggle in Laos, the new massacre in Algeria, the second crises in Congo, the conflict between the Soviet Union and the allied forces for Berlin, the sparking high tension between the United States and the Soviet Union over the question of Cuba putting World Peace in danger.

## **The *Pacem in Terris***

Already Pius XII has made the object of his personal concern the theme of peace in his radio message stressing the strict relationship that interlinks peace and social order. However, it was John XXIII who put together in a systematic way his predecessor's idea in the encyclical *Pacem in Terris*.

From the moment of its appearance (11 April 1963), the Johanine encyclical has raised huge interest because of the importance of the question treated. It can be said that it must be considered as the

evangelical proclamation of the conditions of peace.<sup>1</sup> In this encyclical it is evident that Peace is nothing if it is not the global development of every person and every people. It is not the absence of war or the military balance between opposite arrays, but a choral work that involves the entire human family in the realization of a social order based on four cornerstones: truth, justice, solidarity and freedom.

a) From the point of view of truth the encyclical affirms, “all political communities are equal by natural dignity being the same body of which the members are human being themselves.” If “political communities could differ among themselves at the level of culture and civilization or economic development” it does not justify “the fact that one does value unjustly their superiority over others”; instead it constitutes “a motive since they feel more occupied in the work for common luminosity” (PT 33).

b) From the point of view of justice in an international environment, every political community has the responsibility to recognize and respect the rights of other communities. This implies that, “as in the relationship between single human beings to one another, it is not appropriate to pursue one’s interest to the damage of others. The same way in the relationship between political communities to its own, it is not proper to develop oneself compromising and oppressing others” (PT 34).

c) From the point of view of solidarity, internationally it is necessary that political communities would move on a persuasive wave that particular common good “understood and promoted as a component of the common good of the entire human family” (PT 36). This is one of the major point of the newness of the encyclical, since it presupposes the existence of the universal common good. In this context according to the encyclical then, it would deal with particular problems: those of the minority; balance among populations, earth and capital; political exiles and disarmament.

d) From the point of view of freedom, in the end no stronger community has the right to exercise an oppressive action on others or devour species who are weaker or in need of help. In this regard apart from an exceptional case of “humanitarian ingest” (on this John Paul II continuously insists in clamorous situational occasions of human rights violated) it is necessary to empower the other nations, make them sustainable, more self-sufficient, more auto-

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. COLOMBO C., *La dottrina del bene comune*, in AA.VV., *Commento all'enciclica "Pacem in Terris"*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 1963, p. 48.

mous through cooperation. One must not in any way put in temptation a type of help which is paternalistic and irresponsible. Nevertheless all communities must offer “to contribute because everyone must develop the sense of responsibility, the spirit of initiative, the duty to be first in the leading role in realizing one’s own way in all fields” (PT 40).

The theme of universal community was not at all new in the tradition of the social thinking of the church. Already the old scholastic put into theory the existence of a natural community between people and a correlative natural Christian right.

Leo XIII and Pius XI, although sensible to the problems of international order, seem to have accepted without much perplexity, the pluralistic system of the national states.

The first Pontiff who recommenced in a significant way the idea of institutions of the global political communities was Pius XII. But it is above all with John XXIII who, in this question, achieved a peak that would not be overtaken by successive Pontiffs.

Among the facts that initiate peoples to global political unification, *Pacem in Terris* places particular emphasis on the following: growing interdependence and types of economical levels between political communities; the consequence and clear insufficiency of this to resolve alone the global problems that become always more complex; the normative of inadequacy; and the political regulation and jurisdiction of international relations.

### ***Gaudium et Spes***

In chapter five of the second section of the *Gaudium et Spes* the question of the social world is taken up and well explained: the entire human society “has reached in a moment of decisive finality in its progress of its maturation” (GS 77). Its destiny is tied strictly with the realization of world peace: the progress of people depends on the promotion between human society and peace. In its own time peace depends on the construction of a true “people’s community.”

The global political community urged by *Gaudium et Spes* is to come out of one’s limited confinement and get involved in an activity of a greater level that is essential to one’s growth and one’s future. Such greater activity is an involvement for peace in the world. Obviously peace is not intended as “the simple absence of war” or as “a stable balance of conflicting force” and yet it is “a work of Justice” (Is 32:7). Daring it is “the future order of enterprise in the human society from its founder and that must be actualized by humans who aspire ardently for more perfect justice” (GS 78, 1).

However peace is not only the work of justice, moreover it is also the “work of Love” that surpasses understanding; again, in itself it is the work of justice. *Gaudium et Spes* explains that “peace is also the fruit of love, which goes beyond what simple justice can guarantee” (GS 78, 2).

Such peace, understood as the work of justice and again more as a work of love, has not only its own meaning but also its source in the “peace of Christ radiates from the Father” (GS 78, 2). Such peace is a human good as well as a divine good.

Among the political ways that the states should follow with the aim of constructing world peace, *Gaudium et Spes* signals:

- a courageous and strong entitlement of the rights of the people that bans mass destruction or ethnic minorities;
- more decisive tasks and convictions to the preference of international conventions;
- war only in legitimate cases, after all peaceful means have been exhausted.

Among the ways political communities must however absolutely avoid, *Gaudium et Spes* puts the followings:

- the way to all-out war (GS 80);
- unrestrained arms race (GS 91).

Moreover “building peace requires first of all beginning with injustice, it must avoid the causes of disagreement among people that instigate war” (GS 83). Most of these causes come from a very disproportionate economy and lagging behind with that which would bring the necessary remedy. It is necessary therefore, that national communities must give an order that responds to the need of universal common good, “taking into consideration particularly the numerous regions that still today find themselves in conditions of intolerable misery” (GS 84).

Peace in the world depends, therefore, on a new global order that gives full shape to universal solidarity; in the final analysis the solution to the problem depends of the development of the poorer countries.

According to *Gaudium et Spes* it is not about helping in any way. It is necessary to pass from the perspective of assistance that does not split the scheme of action and the relationship of the old and the new colonialism, to the perspective of solidarity, which has as its precise aim to liberate from need and dependency, raising in a particular way the resources of the people that aspire to emancipation and to integral development.

According to *Gaudium et Spes*, such work of solidarity needs to favor the self-development of the people which implies mutuality between poor countries or those on the way to development and those that are putting at service their human richness, technique, science and economy.

“The developing nations above all tend to seek as the object for progress to express and secure the fullest human expansion of their citizens. It is to be remembered that progress primarily find its origin and its dynamism in the work and ingenuity of the population itself, therefore they must rely not only on external help, but first of all on the full utilization of their own resource, and in this way on the development of their own culture and the tradition” (GS 86, 2).

As in the rich countries it must also proceed to “internal revisions, spiritual and material” (GS 86, 7), indispensable for authentic organization and effective cooperation.

Finally *Gaudium et Spes* seems to propose a radical reform of the global economic order agreeing in the first place to the values of solidarity and social justice without degrading the values of profit, efficient production, scientific development and technique, beyond the economic growth.

### ***Populorum Progressio***

The encyclical *Populorum Progressio* was published 26 March 1967. This is the fruit of Vatican Council II, the thinking and the action of Paul VI, considering his numerous journeys in Latin America (1960), in Africa (1962) and in India (1964).

The key writing of this encyclical will be found in its conclusive beat “development and the new name of peace” (PP 87). This affirmation makes clearly understandable how the encyclical is in line with the teaching of John XXIII regarding the theme of peace.

As in *Pacem in Terris*, also in *Populorum Progressio* the background is worldwide, global: “Today the most important fact which everyone must take into consideration,” affirms the encyclical in n. 3, “is the social question that has taken global dimension.” Referring to the previous document of Paul VI, on which it insists profoundly, it is the quality of the development help. Beginning from the qualitative angle of development, the indication and suggestions of the *Populorum Progressio* can be understood. In other words the development desired by the encyclical has some precise characteristic.

The first is a development that is concerned with *the moral, the humanistic and the universal*. The development that is at the center of

global social questions is not only the question of economic, but of development that concerns justice, solidarity, single individuals and the entire world community. It is a human growth by humanity. Coherently with such vision of the social question, Paul VI instead of speaking to political states and societies, prefers to speak to people, poor and rich, in this underscoring that the integral development of people depends on the collaboration and cooperation of all individuals, rich and poor.

In order to be more precise on the quality of development Paul VI, a pontiff sensible to the cultural dimensions of problems as it appears clearly also from the apostolic letter *Octogesima Adveniens* (1997 1), makes explicit reference to the wholeness of humanity (cf. PP 42), thus humanity is open harmonically and hierarchically to the totality of divine values, human and cosmic, in a horizontal eternity and historicity.

The concept of *wholeness* development, which is considered according to the characteristic of the development desired by *Populorum Progressio*, brings two strictly joined aspects; the whole development of man and the development of every man. In the first case it addresses the understanding that the economic growth of man as a people is not the central human problem. True human development brings primarily ethical and spiritual values over economic values. According to Paul VI such values are friendship, love, prayer, contemplation, culture, the spirit of poverty, faith (cf. PP 20-21).

With regard to the development of every man, the encyclical emphasizes that it should not be thought of as one's own growth without being interested about the growth of others, in as much as "in the plan of God, every man is called to develop because every life is a vocation. From the time of birth a human being possesses certain aptitudes and abilities in germinal form, and these qualities are to be cultivated so that they may bear fruit. Developing these traits through formal education and personal effort permits everyone to be directed towards the destiny proposed to him by his creator" (PP 15).

Besides, according to this encyclical, what was said about the individual applies also to every person: each person is first responsible for his own growth, having recognized his proper dependence on other people and the influences positive and negative of the environment on him.

The third characteristic is a development of solidarity and community. There cannot be a full development of oneself or of all people if there is no solidarity with others as the encyclical strongly affirms: "The integral development of man cannot take place without

the solid development of humanity” (PP 43). Such development is therefore a moral obligation for all, individuals and peoples.

The fourth characteristic is a wholeness development, the development of the whole man and of every man, every people, open to the values of the spirit and to God. Apart from God they will be directed against each other.

Practically, for *Populorum Progressio* the realization of human development, total, solid and whole goes from less human to more human. “Less human: material poverty of those who lack the bare necessities of life; moral poverty of those crushed under the weight of their own self-love. More human: being unfettered from misery towards the possession of what is necessary, victory over social fragility, enhancement of knowledge and cultural acquisition. More human further, is the increasing consideration of the rights and dignity of others, being oriented towards the spirit of poverty, cooperation for common good, the desire for peace” (PP 21).

In this regard after having proposed some lines about the internal life of people in view of their global development, *Populorum Progressio* in its second part deals with and offers some practical orientations about the engagement of people at international and transnational levels. It is necessary to note the fundamental morals of the action centered and programmed for all people, that the encyclical proposes for the realization of the development of all of humanity: these are solidarity, social justice and universal charity.

Paul VI is convinced that charity, if it is authentic, goes after those who are in need, bringing about the emergence of the betterment of self, regarding moral resources, potentiality and capacity. This enables people to be available and efficient in the service of one’s country and the entire world. Charity from the ethical and professional point of view, animates technical assistance, commercial relations, the welcome of foreign workers, international collaboration and peace among people.

Finally, for Paul VI universal charity, sustained by solidarity and fraternal love, is the moral strength and project of peoples’ community that requires a corresponding translation into the plan of politics. Solidarity and universal charity are not in antithesis to progress and social development, rather they are going to be thought of and programmed as indispensable conditions of them and with the conviction that without them every progress and every development would be inadequate.

### ***Sollicitudo Rei Socialis***

During the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of *Populorum Progressio* John Paul II released *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987). For this encyclical the global social question has become first of all the question of social justice, equal distribution of the means of sustenance among peoples of the earth.

The new face of the social question is then connected according to the *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* with other important aspects. The social question is also a question of *interdependence*: sociological, economical, political and above all moral. Interdependence exists (not only dependence) among personal decisions and the government of rich population, among these attitudes and the misery and the underdevelopment of entire population (cf. SRS 9). In other words the underdevelopment of very poor countries does not become only the internal cause but even, the encyclical does not fail to reveal grave omissions from the part of developing nations themselves who hold political and economic power (cf. SRS 16) but also the egoism of rich countries (cf. SRS 23).

Thus, for *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* if the social question is a question of justice, it is also a question of solidarity, the responsibility and reciprocal relationship among very rich countries and very poor countries. The persistence and often the widening gap between rich countries and poor countries (cf. SRS 14), the strict interdependence that ties them (cf. SRS 17), calls the duty to reciprocal solidarity as the duty not only of individuals but it is also collective and universal (cf. SRS 32).

*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* points to the need for world solidarity that comes to declare solidarity as “the way to peace and unity for development.” And it adds “peace in the world is not conceivable unless the responsible parties recognize that *interdependence* demands in itself abandonment of political blocs, the sacrifice of every form of economic, military or political imperialism and reciprocal transformation of distrust into collaborative.” “Peace,” concludes *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, “is the fruit of justice — *opus iustitiae pax*; of course it is more so of solidarity: *opus solidaritatis pax*” (SRS 39). If already many times in *Populorum Progressio* Paul VI has appealed to solidarity, with the *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* of John Paul II it become a proponent. In this regard *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* does not keep silent about the lack of justice, solidarity and cooperation in different systems and in international, economic, financial, monetary and political structures (cf. SRS 43).

In the context of a solidarity crisis at the world level, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* attempts to underline the possibility of *new global*

*development* and *new solidarity*. In this view solidarity is first of all defined in relation to universal common good, in the framework of social questions at a global and planetary level. In particular, solidarity is not to be confused with charitable aid or with a given superfluous benefit, but may also demand giving out of one's necessities (cf. SRS 31). In any case it is not to be understood only as equal distribution of national income but as a firm determination and engagement for common good, a must for the good of all and each individual because in truth we are all responsible for all (cf. SRS 38).

In this regard John Paul writes "the obligation to be engaged for the development of people is not only the duty of an individual or still less an individualistic one, as if it were possible to implement it with isolated efforts of everyone. This is an obligation by all and by everyone, by the society and by nations, particularly by the Catholic church and by other churches and ecclesial communities" (SRS 32).

At the international level solidarity must be explained as the practical translation of the principle that goods of creation are destined for all, "overcoming every form of imperialism and proposals to conserve one's proper hegemony, nations very strong and very gifted must feel morally responsible for others, until a true international system is built, that relies on fundamentals of equality for all people and on the necessary respect of their legitimate difference. Countries economically weak or remaining at subsistence level, with the help of other people and international communities, must be placed in a position to themselves make a contribution to the common good with their treasures of humanity and culture which otherwise would be lost forever" (SRS 39).

In the *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, always in global perspective, John Paul II affirms also the preferential option for the poor as a point of reference for the praxis of the church and the faithful, but also as a demand of wisdom and authenticity for national and international politics. And thus, at almost hundred years *Rerum Novarum*, the social doctrine of the church, proposed again attention to the very poor as a distinctive sign of the position of human civilization. The poor have changed, they are no longer as in the time of Leo XIII. Now there are poor who are produced and reproduced by post-industrial societies. They are not organized (as at the end of XIX C) therefore they are not strong and powerful. For this reason, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* maintains, the old ideas are not going to be forgotten, but are going to be realized in a new form, in new situations in which poverty instead of disappearing, will be produced under other guises.

### *Centesimus Annus*

From a complex view, the central theme of *Centesimus Annus* seems to be, as in *Populorum Progressio* and *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, the development of people but seen from another angle. In particular the development of people is considered from the following points of view: eastern countries, countries left behind and developing countries, the universal destination of goods, unequal distribution of goods among countries and within rich and poor countries, free market, free capitalism, entrepreneurship, the ideology of consumerism, ecological questions, democracy as the state right and common life, the state crises of wealth, the culture of the nations and the international community.

In line with his predecessors John Paul II underlines that, to resolve the problem of the poorer countries, as well as in those that are richer in which old and new poverty are manifested, the logic of equivalent exchange which drives free markets is not enough. The logic of gratitude and generosity must be integrated with the logic of solidarity and social justice.

The theme of peace has not been dealt with expressly. Yet it is a transversal theme, present as a background in all the chapters, as when in the first part of the encyclical, quoting *Rerum Novarum* of Leo XII in which its hundredth year of publication was commemorated, John Paul II reminds us that “peace is built on the foundation of justice” and the essential content of the Leonian encyclical was “to proclaim the fundamental conditions for justice in the social and economic situation of the time” (CA 5).

In the same way in the second part of the encyclical, dedicated to an historical reflection of a hundred years that separated *Rerum Novarum* from *Centesimus Annus*, confirms that “true peace will never be the result of military victory, but it implies overcoming the cause of war and the authentic reconciliation between people. For many years, however, there has been in Europe and in the world a situation of no war rather than authentic peace” (CA 18).

To the question of peace John Paul II emphasizes, in the third chapter of *Centesimus Annus*, dedicated to a writing of a period of change followed by the events of the 1989, such events have placed in full evidence “the reality of the interdependence of people, nonetheless the fact that human labor by its nature is meant to unite people, not to divide them. Peace and prosperity in fact are goods that belong to all human kind. It is not possible to enjoy them correctly and permanently if they are achieved and maintained at the cost of other people and nations, by violating their rights or excluding them from the sources of well-being” (CA 27). However,

according to the *Centesimus Annus* “it is right that the difficulties that existed in formerly communist countries should be aided by solid effort of other nations” it is because “the help of other countries, above all European countries which have were part of that history and which bear responsibility for it, represents a debt in justice. But it relates also to the interest and the general good of Europe as a whole, since Europe cannot live in peace, if various conflicts which have arisen as a consequence of the past, will return more acutely because of a situation of economic disorder, spiritual dissatisfaction and desperation” (CA 28).

In the fourth chapter as well, dedicated to the principles of private property and universal destination of goods, there is an emphasize on the theme of peace. It is found in the final part, in which it says private property by itself is legitimate, and yet becomes illegitimate if it serves to hamper the work of others, in as much as it is the right of all and “a society in which this right is systematically denied, in which economic policies do not allow workers to reach satisfactory levels of employment, cannot be justified from an ethical point of view nor can that society attain social peace” (CA 43). In this passage John Paul II makes reference to one of his encyclical of ten years before expressively dedicated to the theme of labor: *Laborem Exercens* of 1981 (in particular to n. 18).

The fifth chapter of the encyclical is dedicated to the theme of the role of the state and the culture of the nations. The theme of peace is reviewed in a cultural perspective in which the church plays an important role since “the first and most important work is done in the *heart of a man*, and the way in which he is involved in building his future depends on the understanding he has of himself and his own destiny. It is on this level that the *specific and decisive contribution of the church in favor of true culture* is to be found. The Church promotes the aspects of human behavior that favor the true culture of peace as opposed to models in which the individual is lost in the crowd, and which do not recognize the role of his initiative and freedom and place his greatness in the art of conflict and war” (CA 51).

The theme of peace returns also at the last chapter of the encyclical. Here John Paul II suggests again a question of method rather than of content: remembering the fact that John XXIII had directed his encyclical on peace “to all people of good will,” John Paul II maintains that such a perspective must construct a framework between those who confront the mandate to construct peace. In particular he affirms that “religions today and tomorrow will have a preeminent role in the preservation of peace and in the construction of a society worthy of man” (CA 60).

### ***The World Day of Peace***

The developmental writing of the documents of the social doctrine of the church on the theme of peace brought us to trace that which we can define as the master road, the magisterium the church proposes to people of good will to really contribute to peace and to the development of people.

One fundamental step of this walk is certainly n. 78 of *Gaudium et Spes*, which offers elements of a true and proper theology of peace: it is defined as “the work of justice,” that is, the fruit of an enterprise from God to society, that men are called to recognize and promote; it is also the “gift of the risen Christ” of which the earthly peace is the icon.

It deals with a concept expressed by the council fathers guarding the teaching of the preceding pontiffs. In particular, in *Pacem in Terris* of John XXIII, peace is strictly connected with an established order from God and will be constructed in interpersonal relationship as in those between political communities, on the pillars of truth, justice, love and freedom.

Another significant step is the strict relationship that Paul VI in *Populorum Progressio* instituted between the theme of peace and that of development, until it achieves the affirmation that “development is the new name of peace” (cf. 76-87).

John Paul II, resuming and developing the teaching of his predecessors, brought into light the indissoluble connection between peace and solidarity, that is presented as “solidarity is the way to peace and at the same time to development” (cf. SRS 39).

If this is the main road, it comes extensively enriched and articulated in the annual messages of the world day of peace, which was initiated by Paul VI in 1968. It deals with the messages that from time to time strengthen the duty and responsibility of different persons (government, men and women laborers, economic professionals, mass media, parents, etc.) in the building of peace.

In these, we can first of all see what peace is not: it is not pacifism or naïvetè (cf. GMP 1968); it is not only truce or simple armistice, external order founded on violence or a transitory equilibrium of competitive forces (cf. GMP 1973); it is not an equilibrium between divergent material interests (cf. GMP 1982). Much more telling is positively stating rather what peace is: the primary good (cf. GMP 1968) ideal humanity and universal desire of all people (cf. GMP 1974; 1987), a fundamental demand rooted in the heart of man (cf. GMP 2000), conditions and synthesis of human co-habitation (cf. GMP 1973), perfect expression of civilization (cf. GMP 1977), the supreme finality of ethics and moral necessity (cf. GMP 1974).

Particularly it is a gift of God offered to humans (cf. GMP 1978); since it comes from God it is Light that guarantees life “the fruit of justice” and helps all people to realize it. And yet it is also a gift entrusted to all people to be placed at the summit of their lives, their hopes and their dreams.

About peace, as it emerges from pontifical messages of January 1<sup>st</sup> of every year, one finds some common characteristics. Peace is necessary (cf. GMP 1971; 1974): “It polarizes the human aspiration, the efforts, the hope. It has a reasonable end; and as such it is at the base and it is the goal of our activities, whether it is individual or collective” (GMP 1972). It is a must: it is a duty in the present time, it is a universal duty and an unbreakable duty (cf. GMP 1069; 1973; 1974; 1977). Peace needs to be desired, it needs to be loved, it needs to be productive. It is a moral result, springing from a free and generous spirit (cf. GMP 1969).

The magisterium of the church underlines also the precariousness and dynamism of peace. In fact it is “still passive, but dynamic, active and progressive in accordance with justice in whose demands of equal rights of all people resides new and better expressions of peace” (GMP 1973); it is a continuous victory, a good to be realized with renewed and unremitting effort (cf. GMP 1981); it is never neither complete nor sure and needs sustenance and conditions that may render it always more stable and durable (cf. GMP 1977). The religious nature of peace is to be underlined: the aspiration for peace is present in all religions, so much that “a religious life if authentically lived can produce the fruit of peace and fraternity, because it is in the nature of religion to promote a firm bond with divinity and to favor an ever more solid relationship among men” (GMP 1992).

Among the fundamentals of peace, emphasis is placed by the magisterium on the innate dignity of the person, from which springs inviolable rights and respective duties (cf. GMP 1974; 1988). The dignity of a person is accompanied, like other fundamentals of peace, with respect for the conscience of every person (cf. GMP 1991) and justice intended as true wisdom and the sense of a sincere person (cf. GMP 1972). Again more radically, the foundation of peace will be found in the truth, which “is the driving power of peace because it reveals and brings about the unity of man with God, with himself and with others” (cf. GMP 1980).

The annual pontifical messages of the world day of peace insist above all in describing the *conditions* of peace. Among these there is an adequate educational work: it is necessary to educate oneself about peace because it begins in the heart and needs first to know it, to know it again, to desire it and to love it, to be able to explain it in

real life (cf. GMP 1970). One important condition for peace is also to work and maneuver for justice (cf. GMP 1972), “justice walks with peace and stays with it in dynamic and constant relationship...: When it is threatened, both waver, when justice is offended, peace is also put at risk” (cf. GMP 1998). At this level one understands the importance of human rights in their universality: here lies the secret of true peace (cf. GMP 1999), because “where there is no respect, defense, the promotion of human rights... there cannot be true peace (cf. GMP 1969). This also causes the workers to defeat poverty, which instead of being an offense to human dignity, becomes a threat to peace” (cf. GMP 1993).

In this same direction, it is necessary to see solidarity and development as keys for peace: a solidarity that demands the promotion of equal dignity for all and everyone. This causes a rethinking about economy and a reconsideration of models that inspire the choice of development, giving ample space to a new culture of solidarity (cf. GMP 2000) and an engagement in the globalization of solidarity (cf. GMP 1998; 1999).

However to work for justice is not still enough: it is necessary also to bind among people justice and forgiveness, in the conviction that “the capacity of forgiveness stays at the base of every project of a future society that is more just and solid” (cf. GMP 2002); “true peace moreover is the fruit of justice... but since human justice is always fragile and imperfect limited by personal and group egoism, it must then be exercised, and in a certain sense completed, with forgiveness that cures the wound and establish profoundly human relations that were disturbed” and that “forgiveness does not in any way oppose justice but ‘rather aims at the fullness of justice that moves to the tranquility of order’” (ibidem).

Another important condition of peace is respect for freedom: true freedom is jointly the root and the fruit of peace; respect for the freedom of people and nations is so important for peace that without it peace escapes man (cf. GMP 1981).

Defense of life is another of the conditions that build up peace. The recognition of the primacy of life opens the way for authentic peace, in the awareness that life is the apex of peace and any crime against life, beginning with that against unborn life, is an attempt against peace (GMP 1977; 1978; 2001). One must not leave out cultivating dialogue that “assumes the search for all that is true, good and just for every person, for every group and every society... it is a search for what is and which remains common to people, even within tensions, opposition and conflict... it is the search for good with peaceful methods; it is a persistent determination to use all possible methods of negotiations, mediations, arbitration to act in

such a way that the factors which bring people together will be victorious over the factors of division and hate” (GMP 1983).

The building up of peace requires also respect of minorities through the development of a culture that is based on diversity and respect for others, with the conviction that peace “demands a constructive development of what distinguishes us as individuals and peoples, and what constitutes our identity” and “demands from all social groups, whether constituted as State or not, readiness to contribute to the building up of a peaceful world” (GMP 1989).

Among the conditions of peace, also is the responsibility to take care of all that is created, education in ecological responsibility and facing adequately the environmental question, intended as a moral question in the awareness that “world peace is threatened... also from a lack of due respect for nature, a disorderly use of its resources and from deteriorating progress of the quality of life” (GMP 1990).

Besides, at the foundation of the engagement for peace, there is the rediscovery of the unique vocation of all humanity to be a single family “in which the dignity and the rights of individuals, whatever their status, race or religion, are accepted as prior and superior to any kind of difference or distinction” (GMP 2000). One must not fail to assure the children a future of peace by helping them to grow in an environment of authentic peace, fighting all that is making use of them or not respecting them, creating conditions that they may receive as their heritage from the adults a world more united and solid (GMP 1966). One at the end must not fail to give space to prayer for peace: prayer in fact “instills courage and gives support to anyone who loves and wants to promote peace” and “while open to meet with highest, it avails also a meeting with our neighbor, helping to establish it, without any discrimination, with respect, understanding, esteem and love” (GMP 1992) as such “remains at the heart of an effort to build up a peace in harmony, in justice and in freedom” (GMP 2002).

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### Abbreviations

- PT *Pacem in Terris* (1963)
- GS *Gaudium et Spes* (1965)
- PP *Populorum Progressio* (1967)
- SRS *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987)
- CA *Centesimus Annus* (1991)
- GMP *Giornata mondiale della pace* (followed by the year to which it refers)

Translation: TEKLE-MARIAM ABEBE, C.M.

# STUDY

## *350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Delivery of the Common Rules*

### Drawing Up the Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission

by Bernard Jean Koch, C.M.

#### **When and how were the Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission drawn up; by Monsieur Vincent alone or with his confreres?**

If one confines oneself to the statements of St. Vincent, such as his Introduction to the 1658 edition and in the Conference of 17 May 1658, at the handing over of these Rules to the Community (COSTE, SV XII, 5-10), they were long desired and expected, and yet, he had not thought of it: "This came together by itself, little by little, one after the other" (COSTE, SV XII, 9). He added, however, "it has been a good thirty years or so since God gave a beginning to the Company and since that time, one has lived by these Rules which we are going to give now."

So, what about the composition, the writing, of the Common Rules? Is it really so late, or does it not seem earlier? And then, is it by Monsieur Vincent alone?

Study of what has come down to us of the early texts is going to show us primarily that Vincent spoke the simple truth: they had always applied them essentially, even if the details were added gradually, with the increase in the number of confreres, the activities of the houses, and as the human aspects and the theological foundations were developed further. From the beginning there was

an organization of community life, in consultation certainly with his companions, as he always did afterwards.

We will also see that this study confirms what other documents show of Vincent: one of his characteristics is that of being emotional and impassioned, but he is also very rational and an organizer, quick and patient at the same time, a gradualist. He knows 'to see' and to put in order, little by little perfecting the organization, according to its experience. He has simultaneously the principles of farming and a great concern for the land, for experience, for adaptability to realities and needs. In the beginning, he happened to be in a hurry, to go too fast, which got him into trouble and into court, as in 1611 and in the years that followed, on account of the Abbey of Saint-Léonard-de-Chaumes, near La Rochelle. But he knew how to learn lessons from these failures, to take something positive from these misfortunes or mistakes. We find echoes of them in his correspondence and in his Conferences. He did not invent charity, he knew how to organize it. As soon as he begins or is in contact with a work, he introduces organization and supervises it in consultation, as with the Confraternity of Charity in Chatillon in 1617. We have a magnificent example of this in 1621 in Mâcon, where the Association of Charity had already been in existence since 1610, and which the needy were exploiting. In fifteen days he managed to improve the organization and introduce supervision, home visitation and a Mass every Sunday adapted to the poor. (Unfortunately, one can only obtain these 12 documents, of which 9 were unknown until now, by e-mail. Coste only has three of them.)

We are going to see numerous stages in the drawing up of the Common Rules. Most of the documents prior to publication in 1658 have disappeared, only five remain from the beginning: an *Order of Day*, a *Rule of the Congregation of the Mission*, *Notices* from the annual retreats of 1632 and 1635 and a summary of *Our Little Way of Life* in a letter of 14 July 1639 to Mother Jeanne de Chantal. Then we have the manuscript of 1653 of the *Rules of the Congregation of the Mission* following several *Rules*, found in Sarzana in 1957 and published in 1991, with some fairly important differences compared to the 1658 text, for example the exemption from the recitation of the Office without chant. The sentence "exceptions to this would be houses where we are bound to Gregorian chant because of obligations accepted, or students preparing to receive orders, or seminaries for diocesan students and other suchlike commitments" from chapter ten, paragraph five of the 1658 text is not in the Sarzana Codex. (The English language version of this quotation is from *Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation of the Mission*, Rome 1984 and Philadelphia 1989, p. 140.)

The other stages are known from other documents, statements of Father Vincent and letters to confreres recounting where they are but without the texts themselves

In following the chronology of the documents which are still with us, we will witness the **evolution of the Common Rules**, the gradual development of various points and the clarification of their writing, even if the contents of many texts are no longer accessible to us, the documents having disappeared. This work will be fruitful in order to see that the Common Rules of 1658 are not a meteor fallen from the sky, but the fulfilment of thirty two years of life, from 1626, the collaboration of the first four missionaries.

Father Vincent had already certainly proposed an organization of life and work to his small number of occasional associates from 1618. After the Congregation was established at the end of 1626, we will notice that there were early texts which, if not official, were at least public, by word of mouth and certainly in writing in some documents prior to 1632, fragments of which we find in the *Conferences* after 1632, and a half finished draft from 1642, which has not come down to us.

Moreover, it is necessary to know that **these texts** are not his work alone, **they were worked and reworked by several people, then by the Assemblies General and the Commissions**, just as had been the case at Châtillon in 1617 and as it was with the Daughters of Charity.

Here is the list, as complete as possible, of the stages, with a very brief outline of their content.

**1617** – 24 November:

***The Rule of the Confraternity of Charity at Chatillon.*** Three virtues are to be found there already: humility, simplicity, charity, and some features of a *RULE OF LIFE* (*Vincent De Paul, Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 13b, pp. 8-22, New York, New City Press, 2003).

This was closely followed by other Rules, adapted to different places and circumstances and therefore, some are very different and others similar enough.

From **1618**:

There were the basics certainly, even before the bringing together of the missionaries as a Congregation, because Vincent, while not wishing to presume on providence, did not like improvisation either and was worried about organization. We can conclude from

examining the *Rules* and his various *Confraternities of Charity* that as he proposed this to their members, he certainly proposed it to his first colleagues, very briefly, as later with all his works.

**1625** – 17 April:

***Contract of Foundation of the Congregation of the Mission.*** The fundamental doctrines are written down: **Incarnation, life and death of Jesus Christ, love of the Blessed Mother** (*Vincent De Paul, Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 13a, p. 214, New York, New City Press, 2003), as well as a few *Rules* for life in common, missions and time for rest, with a Rule and under a Superior, **‘These said ecclesiastics will live in common under obedience to M. De Paul... under the name of Company, Congregation, Confraternity of the Fathers or Priests of the Mission.** — That those who will be admitted subsequently to the said work will be obliged to have the intention of serving God in it in the above mentioned manner and **to observe the rule that will be drawn up among them concerning it’** (the English language version of this quotation is based on the translation of the Foundation Contract of the Congregation which appears in *Vincent De Paul, Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 13a, p. 216, New York, New City Press, 2003).

A foundational document, it shows that from this moment Father Vincent is the Superior and that there will be a Rule. We can infer from this that, beforehand, Vincent also held the role of organizer and leader among his colleagues on a more or less temporary basis.

**1626** – 4 September:

***Act of Association of the First Missioners,*** Vincent De Paul, François du Coudray, Antoine Portail, Jean de la Salle, ‘we [Vincent de Paul] in virtue of the above, **after having seen proof, for a considerable period of time,** of the virtue and ability of François du Coudray, priest..., of Maître Antoine Portail, priest..., and of Maître Jean de la Salle, also a priest... we have chosen..., and associate to ourselves and to the aforesaid work, **to live together as a Congregation, Company or Confraternity,** and to devote ourselves to the salvation of the poor country people, in conformity with the foundation and in accord with the request that du Coudray, Portail and la Salle have made to us, **promising to observe the foundation and the special regulations that will be drawn up in accord with it, and to obey us and our successors in the office of Superior,** as being subject to our

direction, leadership and jurisdiction...’ (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 13a, p. 222 ff.).

This is a foundational document also, the *Contract of Foundation* and this *Act of Association* shows that from this moment Father Vincent is the Superior, that there was a period of probation, a sort of novitiate, and that there was going to be a Rule.

**1628, or 1629** – 9 September:

Father Vincent and a few confreres make their vows, in private, which they renew in the following two or three years, then a few other confreres make them; later they make it a rule. (COSTE, SV V, 445-456 and note 1). The vows **will never appear in the Common Rules**.

**1631** – Date not specified:

Father Vincent works to have the Congregation approved by the Pope, and **a letter** to François du Coudray, in Rome, for him to ask the Pope to approve the Congregation, shows him to be concerned to ‘live in a congregation and observe five things,’ being at the same time dependent on the bishops to be sent on mission (*Vincent De Paul, Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 1, pp. 112-113, New York, New City Press, 1985).

Between **1627** and **1633**:

First preserved outlines of an order of day and spirit: a **Schedule of the Day**, then a **Rule of the Congregation of the Mission**, in a copy found by Fr John Rybolt in 2006 documents that came from a Benedictine house.

**1632** – month and day not given:

During the annual retreat, Father Vincent made a series of announcements which are fragments of a *Rule of Life* and which presuppose an established practice. Several sentences or ideas remain in the final *Rules* (COSTE, SV XI, 100-102).

**1633** – 12 January:

**Bull of Erection of the Congregation of the Mission**. (The text says 1632, but it is a Roman document, where the year only began on March 1). **The theological foundations** are completed; HOLY TRINITY, INCARNATION, VIRGIN MARY (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 13a, p. 298), and they refer to **the ends of the institute, the people** who compose it and **their responsibilities**, an outline of the first chapter of the *Rules* published in 1658,

with some wording which will be taken up again in these *Rules* (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 13a, pp. 298-299). Moreover, the Pope gives his authority to the Archbishop of Paris for complete approval (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 13a, p. 302).

**Around 1634:**

'More than twenty-five years before his death,' says Abelly (I, 252) Father Vincent writes to a confrere, after having been dangerously ill, that his only regret, if he was to die, would be the fact that we have not yet drawn up our *Rules* (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 1, pp. 272-273).

**1635:**

During the annual retreat, a new series of *announcements*, which, for the most part are found in the final version of the Rules (COSTE, SV XI, 103-104).

**1636:**

We still have a *Rule for the Chaplains to the Army*. We find there six virtues: charity, fervour (which he uses in conjunction with 'zeal'), mortification, obedience, patience, modesty (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 13a, p. 308). Humility, simplicity and meekness are missing to make up the five virtues peculiar to the missionary.

**1638 – 29 October:**

**Chapter**, and **Conference**, 17 December. **Chapter:** the fact of holding these exercises, and their contents, show that there already was a *Rule of Life*, which contains some features. This will be attested to by a letter that follows six months after (COSTE, SV XI, 105-112).

**1639 – 14 July:**

A revealing text: he writes to Mother de Chantal, 'what constitutes our humble way of life,' and later, '[we]... try to live in a religious manner, even though we are not religious.' On Fridays, '**a conference on our rules and... the virtues**' (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 1, pp. 552-557).

**1640 – 14 November:**

To Louis Lebreton, in Rome: he writes that he is **working**, '**on our little Rules**' and on the question of the vows (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 2, p. 155).

He will recall this work on 11 August 1651, in the approval of the *Rules* by the Assembly (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 13a, p. 396).

**1641** – 19 October:

**The Archbishop of Paris**, Jean-François de Gondi, **approves the vows** (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 13a, pp. 315-317, cf. Vol. 5, pp. 318 and 463). They were **never** inserted **in the Common Rules**.

**1642** – 19 January:

**Chapter**, Father Vincent recalls that, ‘we must have great feeling to make us faithful to the **daily reading of a chapter of the New Testament** and, from the beginning, to effect action, etc.’ (COSTE, SV XI, 112-113).

– 19 February:

**Conference**, where he says it is necessary, ‘to be in constant mortification, the missionary in particular.’ It was, therefore, already resolved (COSTE, SV XI, 113-114).

– 29 February:

Father Vincent and several confreres **make vows together** at Saint Lazare (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 5, p. 318 and Note 9).

– 18 March:

**Repetition of Prayer**, on obedience and humility. This shows the practice of Repetition of Prayer, and confirms the presence of the virtues (COSTE, SV XI, 114).

– 21 March:

**Conference on restraint and silence at table**, a new example of instructions already in force (COSTE, SV XI, 115).

– 27 June:

**Conference on the union between the houses of the Company**, another element already anticipated, and which shows us **one of the reasons why Father Vincent valued the Rules**. Experience showed him that, on the one hand, quite a lot of colleagues had forsaken the Mission and, occasionally, were still leaving it, and on the other hand, from one house to another people criticized easily, — otherwise he would not have insisted on unity so much that day, nor said that he was going to consider communications by letter, so as to encourage it, because sharing news helps unity, asking only that they be shown to the Superior (COSTE, SV XI, 120-124).

– 20 July:

**Conference on Silence, in words and in actions** (COSTE, SV XI, 124-125).

– 13-17 October:

Beginning of the **FIRST GENERAL ASSEMBLY. The work on the Rules is ready and Father Vincent presents ‘the draft of the Rules’** so that it may be discussed. This draft has disappeared, it seems (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 13a, p. 325).

– 17 October:

Given the great number of comments on these drafts, the work is handed over to a Commission of four confreres (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 13a, p. 326).

– 24 October:

Father Vincent writes to Bernard Codoing in Rome and makes him a member of the Assembly: ‘We reviewed the Rules we had drawn up... I shall send you all this so that you may give us your opinion of it. We did not introduce anything new, or very little, except to give some Assistants to the General...’ (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 2, pp. 343-344).

To say, ‘we did not introduce anything new, or very little...’ shows that this version of the **Rules** only codifies what was already in practice. The text has not come down to us. It must not have been very different from the final text, in spite of the numerous minor comments of this commission until 1651.

**The official Rules** are on their way; from now on it will be useless to cite the Conferences here.

**1643** – 30 January:

Father Vincent sets to work on a **review of the Rules**, as he writes to Bernard Codoing, Superior in Rome, and he will send them to him afterwards, for approval undoubtedly (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 2, p. 396).

**1644** – 29 July:

Pope Urban VIII dies. It seems that this will facilitate the process.

– 12 August:

Father Vincent uses ‘this time of change’ to ask Bernard Codoing, in Rome, to bring ‘some pressure to bear... **for the confirmation of our Rules**, with a revocation of the prerogative which [was] given in them to the Archbishop of Paris’ [Jean-François de Gondy] (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 2, p. 523).

– 11 November:

He is still trying to **have them approved in Paris**, and asks Jean Dehorgny, who replaced Bernard Codoing in Rome, to see what he can do there (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 2, p. 540).

**1646** – Around May:

*Advice* to two missionaries leaving for Algiers (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 13a, p. 344).

– 22 July:

Father Vincent **writes to Antoine Portail**, approving the ‘**three little remarks**’ that he noted, ‘regarding **the authority of local Superiors**’ (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 2, p. 668).

On the same day, without referring to the work on the rules, he discusses the regulation of visits with Fr. Jean Bourdet (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 2, pp. 670-673).

– 12 August:

**Two things** conveyed to Antoine Portail, who is making a canonical visitation to Richelieu: **1.** to tell him again, concerning our *Rules*, ‘what you told me should be changed... since I could not give it the requisite attention at the time you informed me about it, and now I would find it difficult to make the change myself’ (we clearly sense his respect for the opinions of a member of the revising commission). **2.** ‘**The Coadjutor** (Jean-François-Paul de Gondi, the nephew of Archbishop Jean-François de Gondi) **is going to work on it. He now has the authority to approve our Rules**, being the Archbishop’s Vicar during his absence.’ We become aware of the interplay of different personalities, even in ecclesiastical affairs: if the uncle refuses, the nephew will say yes; but the uncle will remain Archbishop until his death in 1654! (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 3, p. 11).

– 6 October:

To Antoine Portail again, who at this time is making a canonical visitation to La Rose: **I think we shall have no difficulty changing** what Father Dehorgny (another member of the commission) and you judge appropriate to change **in the functions...** I will continue to pressure the Coadjutor, who is very slow getting things done’ (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 3, pp. 83-84).

**1647** – 20 September:

To Antoine Portail, who is making canonical visitations in Italy: that he be satisfied with six days to **review our Rules** with Fathers Dehorgny and Alméras, and return to France (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 3, p. 238).

**1648** – 14 February:

It is interesting to note also that profession of faith in rejecting haste of which Father Vincent writes to Antoine Portail, concerning the regulation of the hospital for the galley slaves, in Marseilles, 'that a good maxim for those whom God uses to establish holy and new works is to defer as long as possible making the regulations. Experience teaches that what is feasible at the beginning is sometimes harmful as things go on, or subject to troublesome inconveniences' (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 3, p. 272). We appreciate his wisdom, linked to his concern for experience, for verification on the ground.

– 23 October:

To René Alméras, in Rome: 'As for the *Rules*, Monsieur, I think **you must begin to get them approved...**' (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 3, p. 373).

**1651** – 21 July - 9 August:

**THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY Revises the RULE.** It was agreed that only two or three would re-examine the *Rules*, but that all would sign (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 13a, pp. 370-371 & 394-395).

– 11 August:

Signing of the **ACT OF APPROBATION OF THE Common Rules** by the Assembly. This declares that they are suited to our way of life and the end of the Congregation, and **were in practice for around twenty-five years**, that is to say since 1626, from the beginning! And Vincent will come back to this on 17 May 1658 — after thirty-three years or so (COSTE, SV XII, 5-6).

**The Approbation of the Rules, in fact, requires the approval of the Archbishop** (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 13a, pp. 395-397).

So, it is clear that **the Company possesses its own Rules**, and practically a final text. Unfortunately, the only text that has survived officially is that of 1642 but this is perhaps the same version as the Sarzana Codex of 1653.

**The hardest part remains to be done:** to obtain the approval of the Archbishop, and then of Rome.

**1652** – 21 June:

Relations with Archbishop Jean-François de Gondi, uncle of Jean-François-Paul de Gondi, the future Archbishop and Cardinal de Retz, must have cooled, because Father Vincent writes to Lambert aux Couteaux, in Warsaw, **that he did not dare to ask him for a testimonial letter for the confreres** (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 4, p. 398).

**1653** – 23 August:

In spite of this, the Archbishop of Paris approves the Vows of the Congregation once again, confirming the approval of 1641 (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 13a, p. 315). We no longer have this document, only the reference Father Vincent makes to it in a study on the vows, between 1653 and 1655 (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 13a, p. 403), and in a long letter of 19 February 1655 (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 5, p. 317). He makes it clear there that the power of the Archbishop has the authority of the Pope, since the *Bull* erecting the company in 1633, renewed in 1641 and 1653 (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 13a, p. 302).

**The Same Day – 23 August:** the Archbishop's secretary authenticates **a copy of the Common Rules**, the *Rules of the Vows* and other *particular Rules*. Those **Common Rules** were probably the same text as the **Codex, a manuscript from 1653**, found at **Sarzana** in 1957 by M. Angelo Coppo and published by Father John Rybolt in *Vincentiana* (1991, 4-5).

**1654:**

The Rules are finally approved by the Archbishop. We no longer have this document; Father Coste was, therefore, unable to publish it. St. Vincent refers to it in his letter to Etienne Blatiron on 19 February 1655 (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 5, p. 321). Was the delay in the approval due to the Archbishop's opposition to one or other article? Fr. Pierre Coste thought so (*Monsieur Vincent II*, 10).

– 21 March:

**The Archbishop dies.** His nephew, Jean-François-Paul, imprisoned at Vincennes because he took part in the Fronde, **succeeds him**, by a proxy, who takes possession one hour afterwards, thwarting the machinations of the Court (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 5, p. 115 & Note 4).

**1654-1655: FIRST EDITION OF THE COMMON RULES.**

**1655** – 12 March:

Father Vincent writes to Charles Ozenne, in Warsaw: ‘There are some printing errors in our *Rules*, so we will have to have them reprinted. Then, and not before, I will send you a copy; **we have not yet distributed any.**’ And Father Vincent added four lines that were deleted (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 5, p. 334 & Note 7). A **complete revision** is going to be necessary, therefore.

**1656** – 22 April:

**To Donat Crowley**, Superior at Le Mans, concerning the admission of a postulant: ‘As for the *Rules*, however, they are not in a state to be shown to others; we are working on them because something has come up obliging us to revise them. As soon as they are in the proper form, you will be one of the first to whom we will send them’ (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 5, p. 600). Was the ‘something’ the death of the Archbishop, allowing the drawing up of one point or other as required, as Father Coste supposed? (*Monsieur Vincent II*, 10). Or was it the printing errors discovered in March?

**1657** – 22 June:

The process to obtain the approval of the Holy Father continues in Rome, and Father Vincent writes to Edme Jolly, Superior in Rome, clarifying the two powers of attorney he received for that purpose, mentioning to ‘*acquiesce*’ to the changes the Holy Father chooses to make in our *Rules*’ (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 6, p. 349).

– 6 July:

Father Vincent sends Father Jolly, ‘**a few new observations we made on them, put in order by M. Portail**’ (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 6, p. 366).

– 20 July:

The exchange of letters on the subject continues (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 6, pp. 385-387).

– 7 September:

To Edme Jolly again: ‘As for the approval of the changes to be made in our *Rules*... God, however, has provided an opportunity allowing us to have recourse to the master himself (the Archbishop of Paris, Jean-François-Paul de Gondi, Cardinal de Retz?); we will try to avail ourselves of it’ (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 6, p. 459).

It seems it was not only a question of simple printing errors, but that there were issues to discuss with the authorities....

– 5 October:

Still to Edme Jolly, in Rome: **‘Thank you for the observations you sent me on our Rules....** We are going to put those same **Rules** in good order so they can be sent as soon as possible to the commissioner’ (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 6, p. 459).

– 12 October:

A new letter to Edme Jolly tells us that copies of the earlier Rules still existed because he approves of having given ‘only the old Rules to those Bishops who requested them’ in order to set up a seminary for the foreign missions (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 6, p. 541). But what were these earlier *Rules*? Those of 1642? Or the 1654-1655 edition? The text has not come down to us.

– 2 November:

**Everything has collapsed.** Father Vincent writes to Father Jolly: ‘I say nothing to you about the business of our *Rules*; Father Portail’s illness has caused us to put everything on hold’ (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 6, p. 594).

– 14 November:

**Have things sorted themselves out?** Father Vincent writes to Louis Dupont, the Superior in Tréguier: ‘I will have the Rules of the Mission sent to you.’ Unless this is not about the Common Rules but about the Rules of the Offices of the Mission? (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 6, p. 615).

**There is lack of documents from this point,** letters as well as official papers. If the Rules were approved, we have neither text nor document, nor any letters that speak of it; one should know that the greater part of the letters of Saint Vincent disappeared in the sacking of Saint Lazare on 13 July 1789.

In fact everything must have sorted itself out, **the Rules** were undoubtedly approved by the Archbishop, because **the printing of the final text could proceed.**

## 1658 – in May – **Publication of the Final Text of the Common Rules**

THE DEDICATORY LETTER, in the preface in the book of the *Common Rules*, and in COSTE, SV VII, 148-151, **‘Here at last... are the Common Rules** or *Constitutions* of our Congregation’ (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 7, p. 163).

– 17 May:

**Conference during which Father Vincent presents the Rules, then distributes them** (COSTE, SV XII, 1-14, especially 5-10) making it clear that **they had been in practice for thirty-three years** (COSTE, SV XII, 5-6).

Then: **Publication in French** — first mention on 2 October (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 7, p. 296).

End of May: and at least until November — copies are sent to the houses (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 7, pp. 179, 180, 182, 271, 289, 291, **296**, 323, 331, 373). Father Vincent insists that they are not passed to anyone outside the Community (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 7, p. 180).

– 6 December:

Father Vincent begins the series of **Conferences on the explanation of the Rules**, article by article (COSTE, SV XII, 73). The poor state of his legs and of his health will oblige him to interrupt them a year later; the last will be on 19 December 1659 (COSTE, SV XII, 424).

**1659** – 7 March:

At the Conference, on **Chapter II, article 3**, Father Vincent pointed out **a mistake by the printer** (COSTE, SV XII, 151).

**No correction was made in the French editions, not even in 1984, in the edition inserted in the *Constitutions and Statutes*.**

– 4 April:

Father Vincent continues the process of seeking the approval of the Pope; he writes to Edme Jolly, Superior in Rome: 'We are going to send our *Rules* to the Apostolic Commissary through an address we have for the approval of agreements' (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 7, p. 497). We do not know if such an approval was given.

– 15 July:

Father Vincent **requests the Archbishop**, Cardinal de Retz, Jean-François-Paul de Gondi, then in exile somewhere unknown, **to once again approve the Rules**. He adds, 'we have been obliged to alter some, [both] because of errors that slipped into the written form and because we had made regulations about certain things which experience has shown us to be difficult in practice. Be that as it may, Monseigneur, we have made no change in the essence of the *Rules* nor in any important detail. I assure Your Eminence of this in the sight of God, before whom I must appear to give an account of the actions of my poor, wretched life, since

I am now in my seventy-ninth year' (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 8, pp. 33-34).

This confirms that there was not only an issue with printing mistakes.

This text also confirms that he was not born in 1576 but in 1581, since at 78, he is in his 79<sup>th</sup> year.

We do not know if this letter got to its addressee.

## CONCLUSION

This long examination of texts may seem boring. Pierre Coste knew how to present them more attractively in his *M. Vincent, le grand saint du Grand Siècle* (II, pp. 7-11). But thanks to this we see better, perhaps, to trace **the long term** work that was the development of a way of life, then a guiding text.

It is striking to see also that **it is not the work of only one man**, a lawmaker in the chamber, but the **concerted work of a whole community, that wants to show what shapes its life**, its missionary life filled with God, with Jesus Christ.

In the end, it is good to **be aware of all the difficulties they had to overcome**, and how much the delay was not only the fruit of a calm patience, but of the acceptance of obstacles that arose one after the other and of the effort to overcome them. In fact, Vincent would have liked very much to publish the *Rules* after 1642, but he accepted the long delay that circumstances and human resistance imposed upon him, and he knew how to interpret it in faith.

Every chapter of the *Common Rules* of the Congregation of the Mission contains some expression of the theological and scriptural foundations of the spiritual life of the missionaries, some practices being applicable in every era and culture, and other practices more tied to one era and culture. Sometimes these are present in the paragraphs expressing the first two aspects, and are therefore to be adapted.

Remember the foundations, that is to say, all of chapter II, chapter X, 1-12 and 20-21, then the applications, chapter III, 1-7, all of chapter V, 1-9, VI, VII with nuances, but noting the tone of respect and prudence, chapter IX, 1-6, 9-10, 16, chapter XI, 1-6, 8-12, all of chapter XII, also full of practical wisdom. The fundamental points are II, 1-3 and X, 1-4. The other paragraphs come under the third aspect, purely practical and open to modification.

Many practical details no longer reflect the ways of our society (that Superiors open letters... that one go out with a companion...),

and besides these safeguards were not necessarily entirely effective. But most of the articles in the early chapters retain their full value, and if the new Constitutions are inserted as an appendix to these *Common Rules*, it is because Vincentians are still nourished by them, re-reading them often (say every three months) not as a legal text either, but as a **GREAT SPIRITUAL TEXT**, for the same reasons as the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius or every other spiritual treatise **with the remarks that Saint Vincent made in them**, as far as chapter V, 3.

It is good, however, in interpreting them correctly, to grasp the meaning of some words that no longer have the same connotation at all today, like *simplicity* and especially *indifference* (chapter II, 10), which now means a lack of interest, disdain, but which still had its original sense of loving all, being interested in everything that arises, 'without distinction.'

To meditate on them, to go deeper into them, especially their fundamental points of doctrine will make it clear how detrimental it would be to allow this text, which gave life to so many zealous priests and brothers for three centuries, lapse from memory, into indifference, this text which communicates the synthesis of Saint Vincent's spirituality.

What Father Vincent wrote to Louis Rivet on 3 June, or 20 October 1658, is what he still says today: in observing them, 'all of us will be sanctified in this, especially since they contain what Our Lord did and what he wants us to do' (*Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Vol. 7, pp. 182 & 323). These two passages go hand in hand, the text of p. 182 is only an extract of p. 323.

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