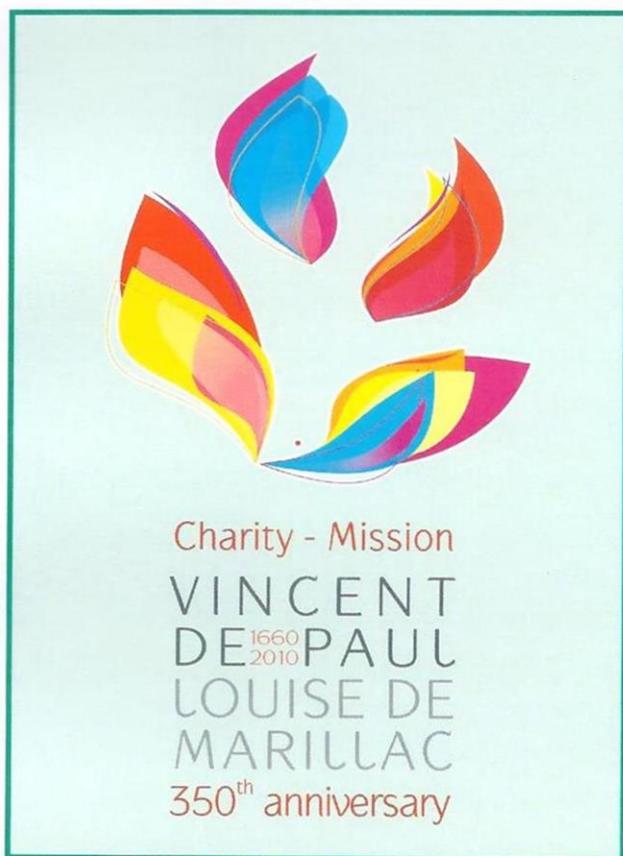


VINCENTIANA

53th Year - N. 3

May-June 2009



Paul of Tarsus – Vincent de Paul

CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION
GENERAL CURIA

GENERAL CURIA

JUBILEE YEAR

Rome, 13 May 2009

To the Vincentian Family

Dear brothers and sisters,

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

As we have heard proclaimed throughout this Easter season, we are a resurrection people and Alleluia is our song!

I write to you today to announce officially the beginning of our Jubilee Year, a year in which we will celebrate as Vincentian Family the anniversaries of the death and resurrection of our founders Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac. We do so under the theme of "Charity and Mission." Mission is the focus that we want to give to this year of celebration that begins September 27, 2009 and lasts until September 27, 2010. Our mission, to evangelize and serve the poor, is motivated as always by God's love which we translate into hands-on charity, direct contact with and love of the poor.

We are celebrating our past, giving thanks to God for the wonderful examples of love that he has given us through Saint Vincent and Saint Louise. As we talk about mission in this Jubilee Year and reflect deeply upon its interrelationship with charity, we do so in the way that Vincent and Louise did, with others. We want to focus on the partnership that existed among Vincent and Louise and others who realized the mission. Besides celebrating the death and resurrection of Vincent and Louise, we also celebrate the death and resurrection of a close companion, the first companion of Saint Vincent de Paul, Mr. Portail; he too died the same year, 1660.

They were all involved in a mission of love. They were bonded by love: a deep love of God and a deep love of the poor. They carried out their mission with a passion which was so deep that it continues to be felt and lived in the Vincentian Family throughout the world,

certainly in ways far beyond what Vincent, Louise or even Mr. Portail would have imagined. To give one example of how that mission continued, there is yet another anniversary that we will be celebrating this year: the 150th anniversary of the death of Saint Justin de Jacobis, a great missionary to what is now Eritrea and Ethiopia.

The concept of partnership can better be translated as companionship. That is the sense that we hope to convey to all the members of our Vincentian Family as we collaborate one with another in our evangelization and service of the poor. It seems that companionship is precisely what Vincent and Louise and others experienced as they carried out their mission. And this companionship goes beyond simply a working relationship, it is a life relationship that involves a common mission to serve the poor.

Recently, in a meeting of the Vincentian Family in Germany, their annual MEGVIS meeting, we had an interesting presentation on the analysis of the reality of Germany. We asked ourselves the question, as the Vincentian Family, What are we doing in order to meet this reality? I think that is the question that we need to ask of ourselves regarding our mission. We want our mission today to be ever new and ever creative in order to respond to the needs of the poor wherever they may be; and we want to do it in this sense of companionship, one with another.

We are called, as Saint Paul would say, to be “all things to all people,” because the reality we meet, in many places of the world today, are people estranged from the traditional concepts of Church, people who are unaware of God actively present in their life in and through the sacraments. Somehow, through our mission we have to be present to them. As Jesus said, he has come not to save the healed, but to save the sinner, those estranged. He went after the one lone sheep who had wandered off from the ninety-nine. These lone sheep are the ones we, as members of the Vincentian Family are called to reach out to, to be present to, not to wait for them to come to us, but to move out of ourselves and go to them. That is the concept of mission motivated by true charity today.

In order to honor Saint Vincent in this 350th anniversary year, I think it is important that we learn more about his companions, more about Saint Louise, Mr. Portail and others who have shared in this common heritage. That is precisely what we hope to accomplish as we begin our Jubilee Year, to deepen our knowledge above all of Saint Louise as a mutual companion of Vincent in charity and mission toward those who are poor.

I would like to share with you a number of different activities that have been planned at the international level. Several committees have

organized activities to help us to celebrate well and to present and give witness to our heritage before the world in which we live today. The **Heritage Commission** will send out themes each month to the world-wide Vincentian Family to be reflected on to help us deepen our spirituality. (See Attachment 1) The **Projects Committee** has decided on a project that we as the heads of the Vincentian Family have approved; a project that will be a pilot project serving the poor in Haiti, the poorest country of the Western Hemisphere; a project that is based on micro financing; a project that we hope will help to involve participation of all the members of the Vincentian Family in a concrete way. This is a project by which we can connect with the reality of the poor in Haiti, get to know that reality in and through persons who are poor, and be able to support them in a real concrete way, not only with our financial aid, but also with our words of support and solidarity. (See Attachment 2)

The **Celebration Committee** has prepared two celebrations for us. One will take place on the eve of the anniversary of the death of Saint Louise de Marillac in Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. André Cardinal Vingt-Trois, Archbishop of Paris, in a letter of 24 April 2009 wrote: "I will welcome you (the Vincentian Family) with joy to the Cathedral of Notre Dame for the 6:30 pm Mass on 14 March 2010 in honor of Saint Louise de Marillac." The following day on the feast of Saint Louise we will celebrate the Eucharist at the rue du Bac. And on September 25 we will celebrate together with our brothers and sisters of the Vincentian Family in the Basilica of Saint Peter in Rome the feast of Saint Vincent de Paul. More information on both of these celebrations is forthcoming. (See Attachments 3) The **Secretariat Committee** has prepared a small pictorial publication concerning the life of Vincent and Louise and some examples of how the charism is lived out today.

These various activities of the different Committees are being guided by the **Executive Committee** which responds directly to the leaders of the branches of the Vincentian Family. The financial aspect is worked out by the **Finance Committee**. (Further details of these activities can be found on Famvin.org, entry of 3 April, in the summary of the most recent meeting of the heads of the Vincentian Family held in Madrid in January.)

We hope to stimulate the creativity of the members of the Vincentian Family throughout the world through these activities at the international level. These activities help us to think globally, and encourage us to act locally. For example, we have encouraged the Provinces of Italy, Eritrea and Ethiopia to celebrate at the local levels the 150th anniversary of the great missionary Justin de Jacobis.

Similar things can be done throughout the world-wide Vincentian Family. We would like to know about these activities, that is why we have created a window on the famvin web page where you can announce the activities that will take place at the local level, helping us all to celebrate, meditate and deepen our own walk with Vincent and Louise in this time of Jubilee.

As has been the theme for our celebration for the feast of Saint Vincent de Paul for the last two years, with this 350th anniversary we want to continue the subject of systemic change, a subject that in some sense has received much attention and some reaction on the part of some because of its political ramifications with other ideologies, which is not our intention. Our interest is to use this contemporary sociological expression as a concrete way of helping us to be agents of transformation through that gift that God has given us that characterizes who we are: that is agents of charity. Our hope is to promote a charity that is not a “handout” but a “hand up.” Together with the poor and from their reality we can work and evangelize in a way that will make this world a better place to live.

We encourage all of you to continue to deepen your understanding of this very simple concept that at times we make too complicated, a concept that is being deepened in different workshops throughout the world. Thus far we have had a workshop in Mexico for Vincentian leaders, which will be followed by workshops in Brazil in June, in Cameroon for all of Africa-Madagascar in July, and in Bangkok in Thailand for all of Asia-Oceania next year. In years to come we will be developing these workshops in Europe and in the United States, workshops to help Vincentian leaders learn the methodology of systemic change and to put it into practice together with the poor whom they are serving around the world.

I conclude now with a new prayer for the Jubilee Year, a year of charity and mission. I hope that the same spirit that filled the hearts of Vincent, Louise and their companions might fill ours as well, as we continue to give witness and serve our lords and masters, those who are poor.

Lord God Almighty, Father of the poor, you give us the grace to celebrate this year the 350th anniversary of the death of St. Vincent and St. Louise. We thank you for this immense grace. Through their intercession grant that we allow ourselves to be transformed more fully by the Spirit you gave them. May the Spirit of Charity so fill our hearts and minds that our love for our brothers and sisters, who are marginalized and rejected by society, be gentle, attentive, compassionate, pro-active and inventive unto infinity.

Make us rediscover the audacity of Vincent and Louise, the diligence and sweetness of an ever-renewed love of the poor that may help them change their lives in earnest.

Help us make our faith strong and humble in a world that seems so far away from you yet that thirsts so much for you. Make us become a sign of hope for many, as were Vincent and Louise, companions in life.

Grant that we do not back down in the face of difficulties but be ready to dirty our hands in favor of the poor, our masters. Help us learn from them to become your true sons and daughters, worthy heirs of the charism you have entrusted to Vincent and Louise for the good of the Church and of all humanity,

May this jubilee year be for our Vincentian Family a year of grace and conversion, and for those we love a year of many blessings. Amen.

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, flowing style.

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.

Superior General

Attachment 1**Heritage Commission**

The Heritage Commission has chosen to reach each individual member of the Vincentian Family, in preference to sponsoring an international symposium. There will be twelve short reflections (one for each month of the jubilee year) that will be available through the internet, accompanied by guidelines and suggestions for use. This process will rely heavily on local initiative and creativity.

Our goal. We hope to reach each member of the Vincentian Family worldwide. This is a grassroots vision. We hope that members of the Vincentian Family will organize themselves once a month during the Jubilee Year to deepen the Charism we share, to know each other better and to build bonds of friendship and collaboration. It is our fondest hope that the people to whom we are sent to serve and the co-workers with whom we work side by side will be an integral part of our celebrations. Our hope, in doing this locally, is that the world might know by means of thousands of small (or even large) expressions and events that Saint Vincent and Saint Louise have taught us to love our neighbor.

The means. The twelve short reflections will set the theme for each month of the Jubilee Year. The purpose is to deepen our appreciation and love for our vocation and to celebrate the charism with the people we serve and the people with whom we serve. We anticipate this will happen through the sharing of those who come together, because the charism is carried not on paper but in the lives of the members of the Vincentian Family. The reflections are aimed at sharing understanding, experience, hopes, and, action.

Our action can be not only on behalf of poor people but with poor people, so that they and we can sense we are members of one family, a family drawn together by God's love. We can think of sharing with them around the same table, having reception for them (*une verre d'amitié*), welcoming them to share their experience of Vincent and Louise with us, or, if we are in schools, inviting the faculty, staff and students to enter into our reflection and action, and the same is true if we are formators.

The Twelve Themes are:

1. Our Reason for Celebrating Saint Vincent and Saint Louise Today: Rediscovering Their Dynamism and Being Filled with Their Spirit

2. The Role of Interiority and Devotion in the Vincentian Family
3. The Spirit of Saint Vincent
4. The Spirit of Saint Louise
5. Who is Jesus for Saint Vincent?
6. Who is Jesus for Saint Louise?
7. Service to Poor People
8. Evangelization of Poor People
9. The Different Forms of Poverty
10. Celebrating this Anniversary with Poor People
11. In What Ways the Charism of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise Is Lived Differently in the Various Branches of the Vincentian Family
12. The Collaboration of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise in the Service of Poor People

The process will involve the production and distribution of the twelve reflections through Famvin in the official languages. We ask the Vincentian Family in each language area to see to the translation of the reflections in their own area, if this is desired. Each country or language group may re-publish them in a simple form or a more sophisticated form as time and talent permit.

Attachment 2**Pilot Project**

In view of the celebration of the 350th anniversary of the deaths of St. Louise and St. Vincent in 2010, the international leaders of the Vincentian Family named a Projects Committee to develop a specific initiative in favor of the poorest of the poor that would involve all the branches of the Family. They asked that this initiative also be in continuity with the Family's focus on systemic change.

At the beginning of 2009, the Projects Committee suggested several options to the leaders of the Family. From among these options, the leaders selected a pilot project in microfinance based in Haiti. In that context, the Committee is exploring microfinance as an effective response to the global challenge of extreme poverty. Microfinance, combined with educational programs and social services, has proved to be an effective instrument in transforming the lives of many who are experiencing poverty. The Committee will devise means for promoting maximum Family involvement from both Haiti and abroad and for giving the project a specific Vincentian thrust. It is anticipated that such a pilot project could serve as a model that might be followed in other places.

The Projects Committee met in Paris in early April, 2009, in order to proceed with concrete planning. At that meeting, it was decided that, as a first step, it is essential to visit Haiti in order to enter into a dialogue with the councils of the various branches of the Family to understand the expectations of the Family, and to learn about the needs of the poorest of Haiti's poor. The Committee believes that, before formulating a project, it is vital to explore the context of the country, to identify possible partnerships, and to involve the poor in the process.

A small subgroup comprised of Fr. Robert Maloney, C.M., Professor Laura Hartman (DePaul University) and Yasmine Cajuste (JMV) will visit Haiti in August, 2009, in order to gather information and, as a first priority, to meet with members of the Vincentian Family.

Subsequent to that visit, the Committee will propose means by which the worldwide family will be able to participate in this initiative. Further information will be provided as details about the project are concretized.

The Committee is enthusiastic about the opportunities presented by this further commitment to working together as a Family during the celebration of the 350th anniversary of the deaths of St. Vincent and St. Louise. In our discussions, we focused intentionally on

inclusion, subsidiarity and solidarity as our principles for decision-making. We look forward to working with our Vincentian Family members in Haiti to serve the needs of those living under intolerable conditions.

Attachment 3**Celebration Committees**

The date of the celebration in Rome at the Basilica of St. Peter is set for Saturday 25 September 2010 at 5:00 pm, to accommodate the best participation of the pilgrims. Cardinal Franc Rodé will preside at the concelebrated Eucharist: the Holy Father will send a letter to all the Vincentian Family on the occasion of the 350th anniversary of the deaths of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise, and (perhaps) will greet those present at the end of the Eucharist.

At the celebration, special places will be reserved for the sick and those who help the handicapped. At the Offertory there will be a special sign to express the Vincentian charism (symbolic gifts). We have obtained a Plenary indulgence for those who will participate (physically and spiritually) at the celebration in Paris (Sunday March 14, 2010 at Notre Dame) and in Rome (Saturday September 25, 2010). As a note, there is already each year a Plenary Indulgence for March 15 and September 27.

FEATURE



Saint Paul



Saint Vincent

Presentation

by Julio Suescun Olcoz, C.M.

When this issue of *VINCENTIANA* reaches the readers, the Pauline Year will have ended already, one that was proclaimed by His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for the period from 29 June 2008 to 29 June 2009, on the occasion of the bimillennium of the Apostle's birth. Yet it is always opportune to reflect on Paul and Vincent, two saints whom we missionaries of the CM consider as masters and promoters of our own missionary vocation. Without intending to make comparisons, this issue purports to view from the Vincentian

spirit the great figure of the Apostle as follower of Christ evangelizer of the poor.

VINCENTIANA has set up the present issue thus: the director asked the collaborators to reflect on these two figures, but they were given no other instruction. Even as some titles were offered as possible themes, the collaborators were given on purpose the freedom to focus on the theme as they wish. Receiving repetitions on the same theme was a risk but this did not matter. These would simply be considered as distinct readings on these two figures, made by persons who are animated by the same Vincentian spirit.

Of the eight suggested we received five responses, each with its own focus. The titles and subtitles chosen by the authors themselves give us an idea of the similarities as well as the differences between the articles, all of them being readings on the same theme and from the same starting point: the Vincentian spirit being lived by each author. A commentary on 2 Cor. 5:14a would seem unrelated to the focus of VINCENTIANA, but precisely this idea comes from one Daughter of Charity who knows that this text forms the basis of the Company's motto, one she undoubtedly has made the core of her spirituality. Placed before these two personalities who contemplate the love of Christ crucified and are moved by him towards the mission, one understands what the Company's motto really means: "The love of Christ fills us, possesses us, because we have become new creatures, radically changed by Christ's death." "It is the love of Christ that makes us fools for God."

The readers will surely thank the authors for the help they offer in this Pauline-Vincentian reflection, precisely towards the end of this Pauline Year.

Translation: MANUEL GINETE, C.M.

St. Vincent at the School of St. Paul

by Yves Danjou, C.M.

“This was the first sermon of the mission and God gave success to it on the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul; God does not do such things without design on such a day.” This was how St. Vincent explained the beginning of the Congregation of the Mission founded under the aegis of St. Paul.

The Event at Folleville

The event, which was reported at length by Abelly,¹ is very well known. At the end of the year 1616, St. Vincent accompanied Madame de Gondi into one of her territories, at Folleville, south of Amiens. He had already had occasion to be called to the bedside of a dying man who desired to make a general confession. The latter later spoke to Madame de Gondi: “Ah Madame, said he, I would have been damned if I had not been able to make a general confession, because of several grave sins which I had not dared to confess.” Madame de Gondi was bowled over by this and she turned to St. Vincent: “Ah Monsieur, what is this? What have we just heard? It is thus doubtless with the greater number of these poor people. Ah, if this man who passed for a good man had been in such a state of damnation, what would be the situation of the others who live worse lives? Ah! Monsieur Vincent, what souls would be lost! What remedy is there for this?”

St. Vincent is thus invited to preach in the church of Folleville in order to exhort the inhabitants to make a general confession. This was on 25th January, 1617, the feast of the conversion of St. Paul, which is stated twice by St. Vincent. The result surpassed anything which he might have foreseen. The response was such that St. Vincent, although he had been helped by another priest, would not have been able to respond to the demand to such a degree that Madame de Gondi called on the Jesuits of Amiens. Faced with the

¹ LOUIS ABELLY, *La Vie du Venerable Serviteur de Dieu*, Paris, 1664, t. I, ch. 8, pp. 33-34.

success of such an initiative, the same undertaking was planned in the other villages which belonged to the territories of Madame de Gondî.

At first glance one can note in this event a simple fact from the life of St. Vincent. Confession was at that time the privileged means of encouraging the faithful to the practice of religion and to devotion. Attendance at mass was a social act but confession required a personal commitment. This sacrament was one of the best means of opposing Protestant ideas. That explains the importance given in the 17th Century to devotion to Mary Magdalene, the penitent woman par excellence, to whom St. Vincent refers to several times and whom he calls "The Beloved Lover" (X, 547).² The problem was that, in the countryside, certain priests being poorly instructed themselves were incapable of hearing confessions validly and of usefully aiding penitents.

The Origin of the Congregation of the Mission

Initially, the event at Folleville did not overturn the life of Vincent. He was at a period of his existence where he was still searching out his future. Having come to Paris to make his fortune there, he was more and more aware of the demands of the priesthood which he had received in 1600. Chaplain to Queen Margot, he had occasion to be in contact with the spiritual renewal which was taking place in the capital. He had links of friendship with Pierre de Bérulle which opened him to the spiritual dimension of the priest, but he did not wish to become part of the oratory which de Bérulle was in the process of founding. Thanks to de Bérulle's influence, he became, in 1612, the parish priest at Clichy in the Paris suburbs. He maintained that he found great joy there, yet some months afterwards, in September 1613, he had been named tutor in the family of the de Gondî. He gave evidence of pastoral dynamism as is shown in 1617 by the event at Folleville but he was not easy with this. He took refuge therefore not far from Lyon, at Chatillon-les-Dombes, to which he had been named curate. He was full of apostolic zeal since he had founded the Ladies of Charity, but some months later he found himself back in Paris with the de Gondî.

All these events which followed one another in an unforeseen and rapid fashion which might even be called incomprehensible, makes one think of St. Paul. This latter after his conversion went into

² The numbers in parentheses refer to PIERRE COSTE, *Saint Vincent de Paul; Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Paris, 1920-1925, 14 Volumes.

Arabia, came back to Damascus, then went to Jerusalem in order to come back finally to the town of his birth at Tarsus (Gal 1:17-21). It was there that Barnabas came to look for him in order to join him into the church at Antioch and to help him to discover his missionary vocation (Acts 11:25-26). For St. Vincent, this call came from Madame de Gondi. St. Vincent recognised it: he had not thought of it himself. Abelly affirms that at the moment of preaching at Folleville "From that moment (and during eight years afterwards), he did not think in any way that this little grain which had been sown would grow and multiply and still less that it would serve as the basis for the establishment of a new company in the church which was to happen later."

St. Vincent did not hide himself when he speaks of the origin of the Congregation of the Mission: "Gentlemen and my brothers, no one had ever thought of that, no one knew what missions were, we did not think of this and we did not know what it was and it is in this that one recognises that it is a work of God" (XI, 169). He said the same thing again on the day when he distributed the common rules on the 17th May, 1658.

The Importance of the 25th January

However, St. Vincent did not soon forget this 25th January of 1617. The memory of the feast of the conversion of St. Paul came back to him later as a sign from God to help him to understand at one and the same time his own personal journey and the development of the congregation. His letters written on one 25th January mention the day of the conversion of St. Paul even though this was not one of the most important feasts of the church (VII, 58 and 59).

We could therefore think that Abelly while he explains it as the desire of Madame de Gondi, to make regular journeys preaching in the villages which belonged to her does not find any echo among the religious communities contacted in spite of the 16,000 livres which she had offered to put at their disposition. The Jesuits excused themselves and the Oratorians refused to take it on. It was thus St. Vincent who was going to be charged with responding to the desires of Madame de Gondi. It was by this decision which was going to take form as time unfolded, that he was going to discover his true vocation, that of giving himself to missionary preaching following the example of St. Paul.

Abelly explains to us in his own style by reporting this episode at Folleville: "The missionaries of his congregation celebrate, with particular devotion, the feast of the conversion of this holy apostle,

in memory of what this new Paul, their father and founder, happily began on this day; his first mission which has been followed by so many others which have caused the conversion of such a great number of souls and contributed so much to the expansion of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ.”

Abelly speaks of Vincent as a “new Paul.” He himself would never have accepted such a comparison. It would seem that he paid particular attention to avoiding such a facile play on words between his family name and the name of St. Paul. On the day of the first distribution of the common rules, 17th May, 1658, in explaining what had happened at Folleville, he makes no allusion whatsoever to the conversion of St. Paul although three years previously he had demanded that this feast would be honoured as the day of the foundation of the congregation (XI, 169). It is remarkable that in the Common Rules which were set down by St. Vincent himself, the word “apostle” is utilized in preference to that of St. Paul whenever a citation is made on the subject (8 times in 11).

To Put on Jesus Christ

The Common Rules however mark well the attention that St. Vincent gave to the writings of St. Paul. We do not forget the particular respect which he had for the New Testament which he considered as “the rule of Christian perfection” and of which a chapter was to be read each day “on one’s knees and bareheaded” (Ch. X, 8). It is thus normal that St. Vincent cites St. Paul on numerous occasions, sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly.³ Right at the very start of the rules he gives what is the first reference to his spirituality: “In order that this congregation might, by means of the grace of God, achieve the end which it has proposed, it must do its utmost to put on the spirit of Jesus Christ.” It is clear that St. Vincent is referring to Romans 13-14: “Clothe yourself in the Lord Jesus Christ” declares St. Paul.

This theme so dear to St. Vincent has often been studied and lifted up for examination.⁴ He comes back to it often citing abundantly

³ M. Vansteenkiste has dealt with this in *Bulletin des Lazaristes de France*, October 1996, pp. 202-221. See also B. KOCH, “Monsieur Vincent’s References to Holy Scripture in the Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission,” in *Cahiers Saint Vincent*, Paris, December 2008, pp. 9-31.

⁴ For the sake of brevity, we cite only the last article to deal with this subject in a fully developed way; ERMINIO ANTONELLO, “Clothing Oneself in the Spirit of Jesus Christ in the Thought of St. Vincent,” in *Vincentiana*, May-June 2008, pp. 172-188.

from St. Paul. We have an example in his conference on 2nd May 1659 which explains the common rules with regard to the 8th Article of the evangelical maxim regarding mortification. His insistence is such that he is obliged to give references in Latin. He recalls firstly the prayers that the priest is required to say at the moment of putting on the liturgical vestments before celebration of the mass: “Another means of renouncing ourselves is *spoliare veterem hominem et induere novum*, that is to say to take off the old man and to dress oneself in the new” (cf. Eph 4:22-24, Col 3:9-10). A little later he continues: “St. Paul says that by baptism we thus put on Jesus Christ: you who are baptised in Jesus Christ, you have put on Jesus Christ.” “*Qui cumque in Christo baptiziti estis, Christum induistis*” (Gal 3:27). What do we do when we establish within us mortification, patience, humility etc.? We establish Jesus Christ there; and those who work at all the Christian virtues can say as St. Paul does “*Vivo ego, non jam ego, vivit vero, in me Christus*” (Gal 2:20): it is no longer I who live, it is Jesus Christ who lives in me. I lived, *vivo ego*; it is no longer I who live *vivit vero in me Christus* (XII, 224-225).

This assimilation to Christ is not a simple spiritual attitude. It is a call to a missionary life in the image of that which Christ lived during his public life. St. Vincent explains it thus to his missionaries: “The rule says that, in order to achieve this (the end which the congregation proposes for itself) as well as to attain perfection, it must put on the spirit of Jesus Christ. Oh my Saviour! Oh Gentleman! This is a huge undertaking, to put on the spirit of Jesus Christ! This means that for us to work at our perfection and to assist the people usefully... we must work at imitating the perfection of Jesus Christ and attempt to follow it” (XII, 107). The end of this conference where the references to St. Paul are not lacking is even more explicit: “All the baptised have put on the spirit of Jesus Christ but all do not do the works. Each must therefore attempt to conform himself to our Lord, to distance himself from the ways of the world, to link himself in affection and in practice to the example of the Son of God, who became human as we are, in order that we might not only be saved, but saviours, as he is; this means by co-operating with him in the salvation of souls” (XII, 113).

Missionary Following Christ

By the imitation of Christ which is at the same time personal sanctification and living preaching, St. Vincent wished to be missionary. “To announce the Gospel in preaching Jesus Christ,” declares St. Paul in his letter to the Romans (16:25). We understand from this that he regarded the apostolic action of St. Paul as an

example to follow and a model to imitate. He saw in the pastoral experience which he had undergone at Folleville a direct relationship with the spiritual transformation of St. Paul. He says this in the account which he gives of the event: "This was the first sermon of the mission and the success which God gave to it on that day of the conversion of St. Paul; which God did not do without design on such a day."⁵

This is why St. Vincent often takes as a model St. Paul. He had moreover a temperament that was at one and the same time passionate and sensitive, generous and demanding, sure of itself and prudent. One could ask oneself if he did not find in himself what he saw in the person of St. Paul: "Was he not the most quick and the most angry person that one could have met? He was entirely fire" (IX, 272). Abelly affirms that Monsieur Vincent "was a bilious character with a lively spirit, and was as a consequence of this strongly prone to anger" and that he had to make an effort "to suppress the tendencies of his nature."⁶ St. Vincent was aware of this since he describes himself thus to a confrere who desired to stay longer in bed: "But someone calls to awake me. Monsieur Vincent who always cries out, comes to get me, he will cry after me (what an angry person!) 'Monsieur what are you doing there? Everybody is at prayer; there is only you who are still in bed. What are you doing there monsieur? You must get up'" (XI, 238).

St. Vincent very quickly developed a sense of the demands of evangelization. For him following the example of St. Paul, to imitate Christ is to follow him in his missionary involvement. He comes back to this often. When he explains in his conference of the 6th December 1658, the ends of the congregation, he does not cease to repeat this. "Yes our Lord asks us that we evangelize the poor: this is what he did and what he wishes to continue to do through us" (XII, 79). An objection is presented to him because the parish priests often made it. "That is true but there is not to be found in the Church of God any company which has as its share the poor and which gives itself completely to the poor without ever preaching in the large towns... the great motive that we have for this, is the grandeur of the thing; to make God known to the poor, to announce Jesus Christ to them, to tell them that the Kingdom of Heaven is nearby and that it is for the poor" (XII, 80).

By these words, St. Vincent expresses his missionary ideal; to announce Jesus Christ throughout the world. Certainly, he speaks in

⁵ L. ABELLY, *op. cit.*, t. I, ch. 8, p. 34.

⁶ *Ibid*, t. III, ch. 12, pp. 177-178.

the first place of the poor people of the countryside. However he understands the word “poor” on two levels. The poor is firstly the one who is in material difficulty but it is also the one who is deprived of spiritual assistance. Corporal and spiritual, the two go together. From his first foundation, which we know to be the Conference of the Ladies of Charity, he said it clearly in the rule which he gave to them at Chatillion: “In order that the end of this institute might not only be to assist the poor corporally, but also spiritually, the said servants of the poor... will do all with great zeal to co-operate for the salvation of souls and to lead them as if by the hand to God” (XII, 429).

A Broadened View

This is the reason for which St. Vincent orientated very quickly his thoughts and activity towards the missions outside of France. In the same way that St. Paul asked Christians to be “as sources of light in the world” (Phil 2:15), he asserts strongly: “Our vocation is to go, not only into a parish, not only into a bishopric, but throughout the world; and to do what? To embrace the hearts of men, to do that which the Son of God did, he who came to set fire to the world in order to enflame it with his love. What have we to desire, if not that that fire burns and consumes all?” (XII, 262). According to him, apostolic action is the same everywhere. “It is true, he wrote to the superior at Genoa, that those who do good in foreign countries with regard to the poor and the captives, that they are pleased to do the same things here among the poor and the afflicted” (III, 337).

For St. Vincent there could be no limit to the announcing of the Gospel. He declares in 1643: “To work for the salvation of the poor people of the fields, that is the principal aim of our vocation, and all the rest is only an accessory to that...” but gradually his vision broadened: “Are we not happy, my brothers, to express the vocation of Jesus Christ in its simplest form? For what could express that better than the manner of life that Jesus Christ lived on earth, if not missionaries? I do not say simply us, but the Missioners of the Oratory, of Christian Doctrine, the Capuchins Missioners, and the Jesuits Missioners. Oh my brothers, these are great missioners, of whom we are simply the shadows. See how they travel even to the Indies, to Japan, to Canada, to achieve the work that Jesus Christ began on earth and which he has never ceased since the moment of his call... let us imagine that he says to us: ‘Go out missioners, go out; what, are you still here and there are poor souls who still wait for you!’” (XI, 133-134).

We find in these words all the missionary force of St. Paul. "To announce the Gospel is not a title of glory for me; it is a necessity which is laid upon me. Yes what an evil for me if I do not announce the Gospel!" (1 Cor 9:16). St. Vincent, when he gave the Letter of Mission to Charles Nacquard, called to found the mission in Madagascar, said to him: "The charity of St. Paul has great need of you" (III, 279). On the other hand, St. Louise de Marillac, under the influence of St. Vincent, had the desire to live in the same manner, the generosity called upon by the love of God. From the beginning of the year 1643, she often finished her letters with a phrase of St. Paul's: "The Charity of Christ urges us on" (2 Cor 5:14) which she completed with the word "crucified" in reference to 1 Cor 1:23. St. Louise is thinking firstly of the degree of misery to be responded to but she is also attracted by the work of doing this beyond the frontiers of France. Several sisters were proposed for the mission in Madagascar (VI, 251).

A Reflected Evangelisation

This announcing of the Gospel is not done without reflection. It is well known that St. Paul, in order to announce the good news, undertook to go to the great administrative and commercial centres of the Roman Empire, like Ephesus, Thessalonica or Corinth. St. Vincent, without speaking of any true geo-political view, was very sensitive himself to the expansion which the great towns could offer to him. Rome was his first foundation after Paris, although canonical recognition was not granted until 1641 (XII, 282-283). He underlined in these terms the importance of the town of Marseille: "It is on the way and mid-way to Rome; it is a seaport where one may embark for Italy and the Levant and therefore it is very useful for the company" (XII, 149).

It is remarkable however that most often he installed his missionaries at the hearts of towns even though they were deputed to give missions amongst the poor people of the country, and he ceased to forbid them to preach or to confess in the towns where they lived. It was thus from the beginning as he explained in one of his letters dated 12th September 1631: "We live a life almost as solitary in Paris as the Carthusians when we are not preaching or catechising or confessing in the towns for almost no one has anything to do with us nor us with anyone else" (1,122). We must recognise that a town presented economic advantages and facilitated more contact than other places would.

At the same time St. Vincent refuses to put himself in agreement with other congregations called to a place for an apostolic work.

He had thought to send one of his missionaries to Sale, a Moroccan port not far from Rabat but he withdrew his proposition when he learned that other religious had the intention of going there. He explains this to Nicolas Bagni, the Nuncio in France: "The gentlemen of propaganda know that when it finds other workers who wish to go to places where we have been called, we withdraw in order not to break with charity or to give in to the sentiment which we must have that others will do better there than us" (IV, 331).

On this point he concurs with St. Paul who affirms to the Christians in Rome that he had "the honour of limiting his apostolate to the regions where no one had yet invoked the name of Christ in order not to build on foundations laid by another" (Rom 15:20). One could think that that is the reason why "the spirit of Jesus does not permit them" to enter into rich Bithynia (Acts 16:8). This is what urged St. Paul to go to Macedonia and then to Greece. It comes from a true adventure, for the Jewish communities were very few there. They were moreover unknown to him when he found himself at ease in Asia Minor on account of all the contacts which he had had in Tarsus his hometown and when events obliged him to go to Syria.

The Audacity of St. Vincent

St. Vincent had the same audacity. One is quite surprised by his desire to go ahead in beginning his little company, even though it only included some dozen people, in undertaking apostolic actions which were risky or adventurous. From 1634 he spoke of sending missionaries to Constantinople, the centre of the Ottoman Empire (I, 253). That did not happen. He quickly proposed, in 1643, to take charge of the mission in Arabia (III, 336). As that did not come to fruition, he turned to North Africa where the first missionaries arrived in 1645. In 1647 he sent two teams of missionaries to Ireland even as the English troops began their actions of persecuting Catholics. The situation was such that St. Vincent believed that two of his confrères had lost their lives there (IV, 290).

In 1642, it was the adventure in Madagascar which began with various attempts but which did not deter the determination of St. Vincent. When he spoke of it, his words are exalting: "Well! Gentlemen and my brothers, would it be possible that we might be so weak of heart and so effeminate as to abandon this vine of the Lord where his Divine Majesty has called us simply on account of the fact that four or five or six have died there!... It would be some company of the mission because there have been five or six deaths that it abandoned the work of God; a weak company attached

to flesh and blood! Oh no!... I do not doubt that nature would not shake a little at first; but the spirit which holds ground beneath it says: I desire this; God has given me this desire; this alone would render me incapable of abandoning this resolution” (XI, 422). This discourse, like many others, has Pauline accents. “This is what I affirm brothers, writes St. Paul: flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God.... Be firm, unshakeable, make constant progress in the works of God, knowing that your suffering is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor 15:50 & 58).

The insistence of St. Vincent in urging his confrères to keep confidence and to continue with energy in missionary works undertaken allows us to see that reticence was not lacking in the company. Certain confreres were shaken by the audacity of the founder. There was no lack of exits from the company. St. Vincent however did not accept those who hesitated, who doubted or even refused to commit themselves fully, following the example of St. Paul who reproached Mark for his defection at the moment when they were close to Asia Minor (Acts 13:13) which later causes a certain tension with Barnabas (Acts 15:38-39).

Faithfulness to the mission

This explains why St. Vincent, especially at the end of his life, emphasizes the strength to remain faithful to the end in the apostolic commitment. He knows that loyalty is difficult to maintain. The defection of Judas, despite the grace he had received in accompanying Jesus in his public life, often returns to his mind. He spoke of this more than twenty times. He knows that only the end crowns the work. “Remember always,” he wrote to Etienne Blatiron, “that in the spiritual life there are many beginnings; what is important is the progress and the end” (II, 129). This recommendation makes us think of St. Paul who says: “Brothers, I for my part do not consider myself to have taken possession. Just one thing: forgetting what lies behind but straining forward to what lies ahead, I continue my pursuit toward the goal, the prize of God’s upward calling, in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:12-14).

St. Vincent fears that after him the zeal of his missionaries will weaken. “What! one of the cowardly missionaries will say, why so many missions.... All this is to undertake too many things. It is necessary to abandon this. Really, when Mr. Vincent is dead there will be many changes. We will have to close all of these works because we will not be able to look after them. And who is the cause of all this evil? A coward, missionaries lax and full of love of their

own convenience and rest” (XI, 193-194). He said this in 1655. Three years later he returns with reference to the farewell speech of St. Paul to the elders of Ephesus (Acts 20:29). *Post discessinam mean*, said St. Paul, *lupi venient raptors*. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come among you, and they will not spare the flock (XII, 91).

Generosity in all situations

To stigmatize the tepidity of some missionaries, St. Vincent uses very strong words taken from the country people. He treats them as carcasses of missionaries (XII, 91), unscrupulous people (XII, 92), vermin (XI, 164) and even sissies (XI, 375). He says the word carcass several times, especially for those who want to “take their pleasures, living capriciously”: which St. Vincent explains by referring to the statement of St. Paul, “There is no evil in the world that does not come from this evil passion of possessing wealth.” Greed, avarice, love of wealth is the source of all sorts of evil. Greed, *radix omnium malorum* (1 Tim 6:10). Who is subject to this lust has in itself the principle, the origin and source of all evil, *radix omnium malorum*. There is nothing which a man is not capable of when driven by this desire. It has in itself that which is capable of doing evil things. There is no crime so great, so strange, so horrible that a man whose commitment is to these interests cannot easily be found guilty. *Radix, radix omnium malorum*. This is the seed and the root of everything; *radix*, no point in looking for another cause; this is it” (XI, 241-242).

On another occasion, having referred to the text in which St. Paul says; “I treat my body harshly and subject it to...” (1 Cor 9:27) he criticizes those who seek their own ease and seek for a place convenient to them; “What is this, my brothers? What can we say to these people, if not that these are people overly self-concerned, girlish spirits and people who do not want to suffer in any way?” (XII, 30).

St. Vincent was not without reason when he made zeal for souls one of the five foundational virtues of the missionaries: simplicity, humility, meekness, mortification and zeal for souls. They are “like the faculties of the spirit of the Congregation of the Mission” according to the Common Rules (ch. II, 14) which state “We must consider them as the five beautiful little stones of David with which we can, so well, even at the first hit, strike the infernal Goliath, that we might vanquish him entirely, in the name of the Lord of Hosts, and bring the Philistines, that is to say, sinners, into the service of God; always providing that we can set aside the arms of Saul and that we use the approach of the same David, that is to say, if,

following the example of St. Paul, we are going to announce the Gospel, not with persuasive words and relying on human wisdom, but with the teaching which the Spirit reveals and with the virtue of God" (ch. XII, 12).

This text shows that St. Vincent is very close to the spirit of St. Paul but differs from him in his expression. Marked by his country education, he compares the virtues of the missionary to the five small stones used by David to attack Goliath. Paul, on the other hand, who was raised in an urban environment and formed at the games of the stadium, prefers a comparison with the equipment of the soldier which is comprised of five elements; the girdle of virtue, the sword of justice, the buckler of faith, the helmet of salvation and the breast plate of the Spirit (Eph 6:14-17).

Missionary Zeal

"Zeal is that which is purest in the love of God" (XII, 308), declares St. Vincent who could not forget the apostolic urgings of St. Paul for whom love is the fulfilment of the law (Rom 13:8). It is from this that he defines the spirit of his little company with regard to other congregations; "All seek to love God but they love him in differing ways; Carthusians by solitude, Capuchins by poverty, others by singing his praises, and we others, my brothers, if we love him, we must show it by bringing people to love God and the neighbour; to love the neighbour for God's sake and God for the neighbour's." He concludes from this that apostolic zeal is the determining factor in the holiness of the missionary; "It is true, therefore, that I am sent not only to love God but to make him loved. It is not enough for me to love God if my neighbour does not love him" (XII, 262).

Zeal demands, therefore, that one give oneself to the task and to the means of achieving it. St. Vincent loves to recall the importance of hard work, following the example of St. Paul who declared; "Each will receive payment according to the work he has done" (1 Cor 3:8). He says this to one of his missionaries, "I swear that laziness is often a stumbling block and that missionaries must avoid it more even than people in the world since they (the missionaries) are made for work" (VII, 488-489).

Several times he admires St. Paul for the work he undertook; "St. Paul, this great apostle, this most holy man, this vessel of election, earned his living by the work of his hands; in the midst of his great works, his great responsibilities, his continuous preaching, he took the time, either by day or night, to earn his way and ask nothing of anyone" (IX, 492-493). Drawing on this example, he

commends the Daughters of Charity for being a burden on no one (IX, 494). He himself had always desired that missions would be given without charge, which did not deter him from seeking from all quarters the money necessary for this. He explained himself in these words; "St. Paul did so and never took anything from the place in which he worked; but he took from other churches in order to work in the new ones, when the work of his hands did not earn enough or when preaching or conversions deterred him from earning his way by the work of his hands. *Spolians Ecclesias Macedoniae ut non essent vobis oneri*, he said to the Corinthians, when he said that his glory in preaching the Gospel was to take nothing for doing so" (I, 137).

A shared Zeal

Missionary zeal is the lot of all Christians. St. Paul has often been reproached for his restrictive commendations with regard to women; they must keep silence in the assemblies (1 Cor 14:34), remain submissive to men (Eph 5:22). That is explained by the historical context of his epoch. In fact, Paul rejoices in the support he received from women. At the end of the letter to the Romans, he greets, without any distinction between them, the men and women who have been, he says, "his" collaborators in Jesus Christ (Rom 16:3). He especially commends Phoebe "our sister, deaconess of the Church of Cenchræa" (Rom 16:1)

St. Vincent did not forget this. Among women he found the perfect collaborators at a time when it was thought that they had better occupy themselves in piety than in apostolic commitment. It was no mere chance that his first foundation is that of the Conference of the Ladies of Charity. He makes reference to this in the way he addresses them; "It is eight hundred years or so since women had any public work in the Church; though once they were called deaconesses... but, by the time of Charlemagne, by the secret designs of Providence, this usage ceased and your sex was deprived of all work, such that, since then, it has had none; and now we see that this same Providence entrusts it today to some among you" (XIII, 809-810).

St. Vincent takes the liberty of saying (XIII, 764) to the Ladies of Charity that their "devotion" frees them from the strictures of St. Paul in the first letter to the Corinthians. The reason that he gives, a little later, is, in its way, a summary of his life; "Nobody can be lost in the exercise of Charity" (XIII, 815).

It is from this perspective that St. Vincent states again to us his deep conviction, which is that of St. Paul; "Let us hold as certain that

we will not be true Christians except to the degree that we are ready to love all and even to give our life for the love and the glory of Jesus Christ, resolving for ourselves, with the Holy Apostle, to choose torments and even death rather than be separated from the charity of this Divine Saviour.”⁷

Amiens-Folleville, 25 January 2009

Translation: EUGENE CURRAN, C.M.

⁷ This study is limited to the missionary activity of St. Vincent in relation to that of St. Paul. There still remains much to be undertaken with regard to the influence of the latter on the specifically spiritual thought of St. Vincent.

St. Paul the Apostle in the Life of St. Vincent de Paul

by Antonino Orcajo Orcajo, C.M.

Introduction

The celebration of the Pauline Year gives us the opportunity of discovering this great Apostle of Christ in the person, life and teachings of the Founder of the Congregation of the Mission and Daughters of Charity. This article will allow us to study his doctrinal and apostolic influences in the life of St. Vincent. Such a study of this particular nature is contained, in one way or another, within the general theme of "St. Vincent de Paul and Sacred Scripture," but not as well developed as we desired.¹ The commentaries written by various authors to tackle the topic are valuable for our study, but they are not sufficient when a focused vision and a more specialized treatment are needed.

Overall, St. Paul has played a determining role in the preaching and life of St. Vincent, whose testimonial richness can only be examined with the help of the Sacred Scriptures and Pauline theology, and to a lesser extent, help of other authors who drank from the same fountains, though according to their own appropriate capacity and talents. St. Vincent was not a Scripture scholar, but the

¹ Among others, these have studied the relationship between St. Vincent and Sacred Scripture: F. GARNIER, *Textes Bibliques cités d'après Saint Vincent de Paul*, Vincentiana 23 (1979), p. 214-219; J. GONTHEIR, *Saint Vincent de Paul et l'Écriture Sainte*, Cahiers Saint Vincent, Bulletin des Lazaristes de France 70 (1979), p. 1-22; A. DODIN, *Monsieur Vincent et la Bible*, Initiation à Saint Vincent de Paul, CERF, Paris 1993, p. 83-113; M. VANSTEENKISTE, *M. Vincent et la Bible*, Bulletin Société de Borda 388 (1982), p. 1-7; W. DICHARRY, *Saint Vincent and Sacred Scripture*, Vincentiana 1 (1990), p. 143-154; B. KOCH, *Le rapport de M. Vincent à l'Écriture Sainte dans les Règles Communes C.M.*, 3 session de l'École française, Annecy 1993, p. 1-17; J.P. RENOARD, *La parola di Dio in san Vincenzo*, Annali 99 (1992), p. 141-154; *Au temps de St. Vincent de Paul... et aujourd'hui*, Cahiers 20, 34; D. GARCIA - M. ABAITUA, *Referencias Biblicas*, Vicente de Paul, Obras completas, Edicion CEME, Salamanca 1974, SVP XI/4, p. 877-884; J.L. FERNANDEZ HERMOSO DE MENDOZA, *Escritura (Sagrada)*, Diccionario de Espiritualidad Vicenciana, CEME, Salamanca 1995, p. 201-204.

Scriptures, especially St. Paul, enabled him to expound his convictions and confirm his faith and missionary experience. From St. Paul, St. Vincent learned that the Scriptures can be well used for teaching, for refuting error, for correction and for educating along the path of justice (2 Tm 3:16).

The sudden encounter of Saul of Tarsus with Jesus on the road to Damascus, when he was persecuting Christians, reveals a ray of light in order to explain the mystery of the conversion of Vincent de Paul when he was thinking primarily of amassing wealth and assuring himself of a secure retirement (1609-1617). The comparison between the conversion of St. Paul and that of St. Vincent has no more than a distant similarity which allows us to state one more time that God calls whom he wants, when he wants, how he wants, in order for a specific mission to be accomplished. The great difference between the two conversions is that the conversion of the youthful Vincent was not extraordinary in comparison to that of Saul's, inundated by abundant light when he was persecuting Christians (cf. Acts 9:3-5).

St. Vincent encounters in St. Paul a great follower of Christ, the witness par excellence of the Gospel, and a messenger jealous of the word of God. Paul's missionary witness and his teaching serve not only as a doctrinal fountain for Vincent, but also as a stimulus, a stirring up for his preaching and for his zeal, a guide for reaching Jesus Christ and clothing oneself in the Holy Spirit.

Vincent knew the Pauline writings well, even though he did not read Paul in the original Greek. He read the Bible in the Latin Vulgate edition of St. Jerome. Furthermore, on occasion, he made a mistake in his citations, as when he would attribute to one author what really was written by another sacred author.² He offered commentaries on the Scriptures in his familiar and homespun style, without the pedantry of human wisdom and professorial explanations. His commentaries were not directed to Biblical or Pauline scholars, but to Christians of good will who wanted guidance about their vocation or mission, without concern for academic methods or exegetical precision.

In his 250 explicit citations, some repeated and many more implicitly referring to St. Paul, distributed throughout his many conferences and other writings, Vincent de Paul shows his love and devotion for those who are chosen and sent by God to preach the

² This is the case in the conference on February 21, 1659 about searching for the reign of God which is attributed to St. Paul writing to the Corinthians, but actually the citation is found in St. John, author of the Book of Revelation 14:13: *Opera illorum sequuntur illos* (cf. SVP XI, 433).

Good News to the nations. In the *Common Rules* 115 citations are taken from the New Testament, explicitly or implicitly, and 35 are taken from St. Paul.³ The number itself is not great, but it is significant because of the impact that the writings of St. Paul and meditation on his doctrine and life had on Vincent de Paul.

It is true that he interprets and adapts the doctrine, not only within a religious context, but also changing it into dynamic principles about the spiritual and apostolic life. The Letters to the Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, and Philippians are the main ones that he quotes and in particular the Letter to the Romans and First Letter to the Corinthians. When offering a conference to the missionaries, he quotes from St. Paul in his explanation about availability, sometimes called holy indifference:

Oh great St. Paul! Since your conversion you have had the infused grace of indifference. What abundant grace was bestowed upon you so quickly in this vessel of being chosen! So marvelous a moment that changed you from a persecutor to an apostle! How great was the light that produced in him, detached from the law, his fortune, his feelings, an ability to say suddenly: "Lord, what do you want me to do?" It is hard to imagine everything he suffered in his person, for his honor and in his ministry. That heart of St. Paul so generous and so resigned that saw persecution in many places, was whipped, stoned, imprisoned at times, scorned, exiled and finally martyred. It is amazing how much he suffered, simply amazing.⁴

Likewise, he offers other praises when he has the occasion to think about the wisdom and the commitment of this "apostle by vocation" (Rm 1:1). Before the comments on May 16, 1659, many times he had proposed to the Congregation that St. Paul was the model apostle or missionary, that is to say, one who is sent, because "what is a missionary? One wants to say sent, sent by God."⁵ One knows a missionary by his availability to come and go where he is needed in order to preach the Good News to the people.

Concerning the issue of doctrinal questions, nothing stands out because these concerns had little impact in the teaching of St. Vincent. In this article we are focused on the spiritual and pastoral explanations of St. Vincent, offered to his followers. This article is

³ Outside of the Bible, the *Common Rules* do not have citations except for one from St. Zeno: "Curiosity makes a person guilty, not learned" (cf. RC XII, 8).

⁴ SVP XI, 533-534.

⁵ SVP XI, 342.

divided into two main sections with other subdivisions as needed: 1) St. Paul and the Origin of the Congregation of the Mission; and 2) St. Paul and the Christocentric spirituality of St. Vincent.

1) St. Paul and the Origin of the Congregation of the Mission

The predilection of St. Vincent for St. Paul is explained because in St. Paul he finds the major teachings that bring Vincent to Christ and illuminates his own proper missionary vocation and that of his religious communities. In an extract of an undated conference, St. Vincent commented on the good results from a mission preached in Folleville on January 25, 1617, the feast of the Conversion of St. Paul:

That was the first sermon of the mission and the success that God gave to it, the day of the Conversion of St. Paul. God made this happen within his design on such a day.⁶

Since that date, the Apostle of Christ is always on the mind and in the heart of St. Vincent, even though he does not always mention his name. After Jesus of Nazareth, sent by the Father to preach the Good News of salvation, the next most important reminder for Vincent was the Conversion of St. Paul. Each year this feast day brought to his mind the design of God for him and the Congregation of the Mission. This missionary community emerged to preach to the poor, in the style of Paul, who was committed to the total mission that was confided to him to come to know God and Jesus Christ his Son. Only a man of faith, such as St. Vincent, would be able to relate that mission in Folleville with the origin of the Congregation of the Mission and speak directly about the design of God in all of this.

Although Paul of Tarsus was the last of the apostles to be called by Jesus, he stood out among everyone because of his self-denial, his work and doctrine. St. Vincent learns all about Paul day after day. He matures in his explanations to the faithful with the purpose that they arrive at a knowledge of the truth, and they adjust their life to the model sent from heaven, Jesus Christ, subject to the fragility of human nature except in sin, to reach the total salvation of humanity — that is the proper plan of God for St. Vincent and the members of the Congregation. With effort and apostolic zeal, they have sacrificed everything to try to achieve it, and they are called by the Gospel of Christ, from which Paul has received the revelation. From this comes the idea that the missionaries ought to be committed to

⁶ SVP XI, 700.

evangelization and reach out so that all people attain salvation, made possible by Jesus Christ. It is acknowledged that the terms evangelization and salvation have their own proper meaning, but practically speaking for the Vincentian Community, these terms are inseparable: the first goes along with the second.

Evangelization and salvation

Of all the titles that St. Vincent dedicates to the Son of God, made flesh in human nature, the one he emphasizes is “Evangelizer of the poor,” along with “Savior.” Where did he get this idea? Without a doubt, from the evangelist, St. Luke, companion of St. Paul, on their apostolic visits and who did not cease to teach the Gentiles for whom our Lord had achieved the salvation of the world and reconciliation with the Father. This title, “Savior,” filled St. Vincent with so much enthusiasm that he could never be quiet about it in his conferences. It flows spontaneously and naturally from him as a form of exclamation or as a brief prayer. In the middle or at the end of his conferences, he used it like an arrow on fire that leads to the beloved person of Jesus:

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the only true Redeemer, who completed perfectly that which is signified by that beautiful name of Jesus, the name of Savior. He came from heaven to earth to exercise that office and made it the object of his life and death, exercising continually that characteristic of Savior. While he lived on earth, he directed all his thoughts to the salvation of humanity and he continues with those same sentiments where he now encounters the will of the Father.⁷

Certainly, the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity belong to everyone and also exclusively to God because of their very work. Because of this reality, they have continued the saving mission of the Son, sent into the world with the same zeal undertaken by the apostles and in particular by St. Paul. Returning to the significance of a missionary, St. Vincent logically concludes the following: “Whoever says missionary, says apostle, says savior; we have been called to save souls.”⁸ Once again, the one sent, the missionary, the apostle and the savior all have the same goal: to free humanity from all slavery that impedes total salvation. St. Vincent explains the reason of the divine plan for the Congregation in this

⁷ SVP XI, 762.

⁸ SVP XI, 217.

way: “The Son of God was made man like us, so that not only would we be saved, but also be a savior like him, that means cooperating with him in the salvation of all.”⁹ We are then instruments of salvation, chosen by God, in the person of Jesus Christ, just like St. Paul was chosen, to bring to the people eternal salvation and liberation from all worldly distress.

There is also another historical reason that explains the vocation and mission of Vincent de Paul and his congregations as saviors, that is, the selection of the seal that was used at the very beginning of the Congregation, *IHS*, Jesus Savior of all. This one was used before adopting definitively the one we now use, *Jesus Christ Evangelizer of the Poor*, so as not to confuse ours with the one the Jesuits use and above all to signify the mission proper to his Congregation in the Church.

According to St. Vincent, within the same design of God, the Congregation is to dedicate itself to the evangelization and salvation of all people by the practice of charity. Just as the love of God and love of one’s neighbor are part of the same commandment, the missionaries are to remember that their obligation is to evangelize without ceasing in words and deeds for the love of Christ and humanity, following the example of St. Paul because “love cannot remain idle, for it moves us to salvation and compassion for others.”¹⁰ However, it grows even more deeply into the love-charity of Christ when it evokes the effusion of the Holy Spirit in our hearts (Rm 5:5). Referring more to the actual living out of fraternal charity, he says: “The Congregation of the Mission will endure as long as charity reigns in it.”¹¹

Most certainly St. Vincent could be using the words of St. Paul: “The charity of Christ urges us” (2 Cor 5:14), but in reality the recorder of the conferences does not mention the details of how it appears in the Pauline writings. Nevertheless, if there is something that characterizes the word and heart of St. Vincent, it is the teaching contained in the original text, understood as: the charity of Christ concentrates us on him and drives us to give testimony about him who died for us; he died and rose because of the love he has for us and continues to have. Such is the ordinary meaning of urgent from the Vulgate that was translated from the original Greek text. By means of charity, St. Vincent lived this out by his expressions in

⁹ SVP XI, 415.

¹⁰ SVP XI, 555.

¹¹ SVP XI, 768. The same affirmation is made when talking about prayer as an “imprignable fortification” (cf. SVP XI, 778).

prayer and evangelization, not without the same urgency that corresponds to the love by which Christ has shown us in his death and resurrection.

Once again, he admires the Apostle for his compassionate charity and mercy. "Oh, St. Paul, how perceptive you are on this point! Oh Savior, who filled this apostle with your spirit and your love. Help us to say like him: Do I not feel sick when someone among is us sick?"¹² The dual discovery that he made about the religious ignorance that seized the people and the illnesses that many people suffered without relief and support lead him in 1617 to the foundation of the Congregation of the Mission and to the Confraternity of Charity, in Folleville and in Châtillon-les-Dombes, respectively.

It was in 1617 that the young priest, enlightened by faith, began to discover Jesus Christ in the Gospels and in the person of the poor, without the possibility of separating them, because Christ himself identified with them (cf. Mt 10:31-40).¹³ With the light of the Pauline doctrine and more particularly, a review of the formation of the Mystical Body, whose Head and Savior is Christ, he organizes his compassion and mercy into works of charity and in generous help for urgent situations, as St. Paul did (cf. 2 Cor 8-9), especially in support of the poor in Jerusalem. The example of Jesus Christ who being rich became poor so as to make us rich is sufficient for us to be in solidarity with those who suffer or lack the necessities of life.¹⁴ In the justice and holiness of God within the unity of the Body of Christ, there is a basis for the exhortation for Christian solidarity and for not remaining unresponsive to the suffering of others:

*All of humanity makes up the Mystical Body; we are all members, one to another (1 Cor 12:27). Never is it heard that one member, not even in animals, is immune to the suffering of the other members; that one part of the human becomes bruised, wounded, or violated and the others do not feel it. That's impossible! All the members are so united and joined together that the evil of one is the evil of others. With this reasoning, Christians who are members of the same body have to suffer together. How can one be Christian and see the afflictions of a brother and not cry with him and not feel with him! That one has no charity; he is only a Christian in name; he is lacking in humanity; he is worse than an animal.*¹⁵

¹² SVP XI, 560.

¹³ SVP IX, 302, 916, 1194; XI, 404.

¹⁴ SVP XI, 139, 792.

¹⁵ SVP XI, 560-561.

Evangelization and Work

Along with compassionate charity and mercy, there is our daily work, which is a convincing proof of our love of God and one's neighbor and source of our personal sanctification. God never ceases to work, inside and outside of ourselves. Sent into the world, his Son worked with his hands in the shop and preached, using the word and acts of charity, reaching out to sinners and the sick in spirit and body. What about St. Paul? The example of St. Paul, an untiring worker, does not fail us on this point of vital importance. Work flows in obedience from the first command of God to human beings. Furthermore, St. Paul responds to this by not being a burden but a help to society:

*This man filled with God, a chosen vessel, earned his livelihood with the work of his hands; in the middle of all his great tasks, his serious occupation, his continual preaching, he worked day and night, so as to be able to support himself, without asking anyone. In one of his letters he says: "Do you know that I did not demand anything and that the bread that I eat was earned by these hands so as to sustain my body" (cf. 2 Th 3:8). Who could not be filled with awe by this example?*¹⁶

2. St. Paul and Christocentric Vincentian Spirituality

In talking about his faith and experience about God and humanity, St. Vincent did not intend another concept about assuring us in the pursuit of Jesus and in the need to clothe ourselves in the Holy Spirit. He learned from St. Paul, his best teacher in this area and from whom he literally took his teachings. Is there a better person to whom Jesus Christ can hand over his mission than St. Paul who follows the Lord and continues his saving mission? Who is better than St. Paul to embrace the height and depth and width of the love of Christ? (cf. Ep 3:18-19). Who is better than St. Paul to show us the transformation by the Spirit of Christ, overcoming his weaknesses of the flesh that fight with the Spirit? (cf. Rm 7:14-25).

There have been various Christian and spiritual approaches that St. Vincent derived from his use of the doctrine and epistles of St. Paul in order to respond to his own proper vocation and that of his communities, sustained by the Spirit of God. We are dishonest if we think that only St. Paul helped him clarify his vocation, without taking into account the rest of the Scriptures that he used frequently.

¹⁶ SVP IX, 447.

However, it is certain that St. Paul stands out as his best teacher. Jesus Christ is the center of those questions of faith and experience that St. Paul passed on to us; such as: "For me, life is Christ and death would bring me profit" (Ph 1:21), or also: "I live, but not I; it is Christ who lives in me" (Ga 2:20). Furthermore, there are other references that make it even more transparent that the life of Paul and Vincent are overwhelmed by the same spirit of Jesus Christ: a preferred theme of our Founder.

St. Vincent makes other Pauline confirmations in similar terms: "Nothing pleases me except in Jesus Christ."¹⁷ "Jesus Christ is the rule of the mission."¹⁸ Hence, Jesus Christ and his saving mission make up that which is called Vincentian spirituality, the affective with the effective. In reality, those who explore the faith and charity of St. Vincent in the light of the teachings of St. Paul find twin souls, both overwhelmed by the same love of Jesus Christ.

Fundamental Spirituality in the Mysticism of Baptism

The reality here consists in the dying with Christ so as to rise with him to new life (Rm 6:4). Something so fundamental elevates the spirituality that St. Vincent presents and that by which he exhorts us to live with a radicalness and priority to whatever task we are called. Following St. Paul, he explains that we ought to die to ourselves in the old person, that is, sin, so as to live in the new creation, the new person, recreated in Christ Jesus (2 Cor 5:17; Ep 2:15; and Col 3:5-12), with all that goes along with abandoning the works of the flesh and the producing of the fruits of the Spirit (Ga 5:19-24).

Briefly, someone might be supposing that this occurs from an instantaneous act because of an immersion in water. The answer is no, for it is understood that many denials and difficulties persist all our lives. However, they become lighter when the Christian makes his life the life of Christ in order to serve others in a spirit of faith and charity. The act of baptism imprints an indelible character, and, although following Christ in our life is difficult, it is important to note that "the grace we have received in baptism gives us an appetite for virtue. The spirit of our Lord places in us the same inclination toward virtue that nature places in us toward vice."¹⁹

¹⁷ L. ABELLY, *La vida del venerable siervo de Dios Vicente de Paúl*, CEME, Salamanca 1004, p. 95-96.

¹⁸ SVP XI, 429.

¹⁹ SVP XI, 484.

St. Vincent condensed the spiritual themes about the mysticism of baptism, developed by St. Paul, in the advice he gave to his first collaborator, the faithful Antoine Portail, relatively early on May 1, 1635, when he was involved in many apostolic works:

*Remember, Father, we live in Jesus Christ, by dying to Jesus Christ, and that we have died in Jesus Christ for the life of Jesus Christ, and that our life must be hidden in Jesus and full of Jesus Christ, and in order to die for Jesus Christ, we must live with Jesus Christ.*²⁰

It was inevitable that when St. Vincent presented Jesus Christ as the center of our Christian and missionary life, he was not only referring to the Spirit of Jesus Christ but also following the Pauline doctrine: in baptism we put on the spirit of Jesus Christ: "All baptized in Christ, you have clothed yourselves in Christ" (Ga 3:27).²¹ It is also certain, he advises, that if "all the baptized are clothed in the spirit of Jesus Christ, not all realize the works that are owed. For that reason, everyone has to resemble our Lord, moving away from the maxims of the world, to follow with one's affection and with one's practice the examples of the Son of God" incarnated.²²

Vincent de Paul refined and reinforced his argument about the basic spirituality in baptism when he speaks openly and with assurance about the vocation of the Daughters of Charity: "If you are faithful in the practice of living like Daughters of Charity, you will be good Christians. Do not say so often that you would want to become a good religious. How can you become good religious without becoming first good Christians?"²³ From where comes the journey to return to the baptismal fountain? Where are the Christian roots planted that are required for the complete development of one's religious and missionary vocation?

In connection with what has been said, Vincent exhorts us to live the holiness that God calls us to and which he has chosen for us before the beginning of the world (cf. Ef 1:4). Although he could not avoid the influence of the work of Benedict of Canfield²⁴ who maintained that sanctity is the fulfillment of the will of God, Vincent concluded above all that in the divine plan we are called to holiness by the irreproachable practice of love, having been chosen before-

²⁰ SVP I, 320.

²¹ SVP XI, 522.

²² SVP XI, 414-415.

²³ SVP IX, 132.

²⁴ Cf. BENEDET OF CANFIELD, *La Règle de Perfection*, the edition of Jean Orcibal, Paris 1982.

hand to be his adopted children, through Jesus Christ (cf. Ep 1:4-5). From this there is the development of perfection by means of charity with the commitment to the salvation of humanity: "If our perfection is found in charity, which is logical, there is no greater charity than devoting ourselves to saving souls and to consume ourselves in the same manner as Jesus Christ."²⁵

This idea is even more obvious when he explains the name, Daughter of Charity, to the Daughters: "To be Daughters of Charity is to be daughters of God, daughters who belong completely to God, because he who is in charity is in God, and God in him."²⁶ Consequently, although Vincent does not say it explicitly, holiness consists in living out one's adoption as son/daughter by means of the love of God, whose effusion in our hearts is owed to the Spirit, present since baptism (cf. Rm 5:5).

Clothed in the Spirit of Jesus Christ

This is another topic in which we hear St. Paul at every step in the words of St. Vincent de Paul. This Pauline formula expresses and means the configuration of Christ as evangelizer and savior of the world (cf. Rm 13:14; Ep 4:24; Ga 3:27; Col 3:10-12; 1 Th 5:8). At play here is the presence and docility of the Holy Spirit that accompanies Jesus Christ when he is praying and preaching the Good News of Salvation. This means that to center one's life in Jesus Christ is to center one's life in the Holy Spirit, because "he who does not have the spirit of Jesus does not belong" (Rm 8:9). To St. Vincent is owed the enthusiasm for the image and expression: "Clothed in the spirit of Jesus," because he made it his own in his synopsis on the theology of the Holy Spirit:

When one says: The spirit of our Lord is in such a person or in such works, how does one understand this? Is it because the same Holy Spirit has flowed over them? Yes, the Holy Spirit, regarding each person, spills over the just ones and lives personally in them. When one says the Holy Spirit acts in a person, that means that this Spirit, living in the person, gives him the same inclination and dispositions that Jesus Christ had on earth, and he does good works; however, I am not saying with the same perfection, but according to the measure of the gifts of this divine Spirit."²⁷

²⁵ SVP VII, 292-293.

²⁶ SVP IX, 33.

²⁷ SVP XI, 411.

At the beginning of the *Common Rules* St. Vincent wanted to use that expression: "If the Congregation, with the help of God's grace, is to achieve what it sees as its purpose, a genuine effort to put on the spirit of Christ will be needed. How to do this is learned mainly from what is taught in the Gospels..." (CR I: 3). In the introduction to the *Common Rules* St. Vincent offers us this reflection: "Think of them, not as the product of human ingenuity, but as a gift from the Holy Spirit. Everything good comes from him, and we are not qualified of ourselves to claim anything as our own achievement.... My idea was that men who are called to continue Christ's mission, which is mainly preaching the good news to the poor, should see things from his point of view and want what he wanted. They should have the same spirit that he had, and follow in his footsteps" (*Introduction to the Common Rules*).

*What is the spirit of our Lord? It is a spirit of perfect charity, full of marvelous esteem for the divine and an infinite desire to honor this spirit with dignity, an understanding of the great wonders of the Father, to admire them and to praise them constantly.... And the love of Jesus Christ. What is it? Oh, what love! My Savior, so great was the love that you had for your Father! Might it be possible perhaps to have an even greater love when he was emptied by the Father? Because St. Paul, speaking about the birth of the Son of God on earth, mentions him being emptied (Ph 2:7-8). Might it be possible to show an even greater love when dying for the love of the form which he had made? I have here a description of the spirit of our Lord, with which we have clothed ourselves. The same thing that the eternal Son scorned about the earth, the goods, the pleasures, and the honors, in order to do the will of the Father; we also will enter into his spirit, scorning all as he did."*²⁸

The reader is now able to see the big picture of the doctrine of St. Paul from the previous descriptions. On another occasion St. Vincent emphasized the following comments to the youthful Antoine Durand, named superior of the Seminary at Agde, that "you empty yourself of yourself, so as to clothe yourself in Jesus Christ.... Our Lord imprints on us a character and gives us, so to speak, the vitality of his Spirit and his grace, being united with him like the shoots of a vine with the vine; we do the same that Jesus did on earth, that is, we accomplish divine works and we engender the same as did St. Paul, so filled with the spirit, as new children of our Lord (1 Cor 4:15)."²⁹

²⁸ SVP XI, 411-412.

²⁹ SVP XI, 237.

Here the secret is contained for all his prodigious activity in favor of the poor and needy.

Although he prefers to use the expression, “to clothe oneself in the spirit of Jesus Christ,” it is combined with and complements other equivalent statements. Induere from the Latin Vulgate of St. Jerome, when it is translated from the original Greek text, means for St. Vincent to be clothed in the sentiments and affections of Christ. Even more abundantly, one fills oneself with the sentiments of Christ, so that one is required to empty oneself beforehand of what is contrary to the Gospel: desire for riches, pleasures, honors, vainglory, jealousy, laziness, etc. Also, other expressions of similar meaning can be added: “To enter into the spirit of Jesus Christ so as to enter into his actions;” “to participate in the spirit of Jesus Christ,” and to “allow oneself to penetrate the spirit.” Each one of these expressions implies a different modality, enriched by the other similar expressions. Such words and expressions are employed in order to explain the spirit by which we are opened to the actions of the Spirit of Jesus Christ which can be accomplished, in his name, before the community.

From what has been said, we can conclude that the word spirit, used by St. Vincent, contains a variety of meanings... the same that occurs in the letters of St. Paul. At times, he refers to the sureness of the Holy Spirit and at other times to distinct forms of being and acting, to a life force, a manner, a disposition, etc. One thing is certain that being clothed in the Spirit of Jesus Christ (Rm 13:14) is a question of life or death for the missionary and constitutes his distinction. This is the great “task” to which one must dedicate himself; in other words, “the company would be a body without a soul.”³⁰

The proof of this particular manner of advising the missionaries how to live out or clothe themselves with the five virtues constitutes the spirit of the Congregation of the Mission: simplicity, humility, meekness, mortification, apostolic zeal and the need for prayer. A simple reference to this concrete theme of the five virtues confirms, one more time, a dependence on the Apostle of the people, for he had no doubts about stripping himself of everything that would impede him in his progress of following Christ (Ph 3:12).

If we get involved in the details, the spirit of simplicity of St. Paul stands out when he says he is only trying to please God and not human beings (Ga 1:10), but St. Vincent does not have the same luck. He was not certain, for example, when he is interpreting his teaching to the Romans: it is well to know but with soberness (Rm 12:3).

³⁰ SVP XI, 400.

However, he understood the verb sapere, like many of his time, to mean science. “One needs to study, he says, but with soberness.”³¹ In reality, “to know with soberness” from the Latin Vulgate edition is not referring to human science nor studying, but rather a non-exaggerated respect of oneself, something which certainly St. Vincent did not rule out but certainly did not highlight.

Where one finds most dependence upon Paul is in the conference concerning Vincentian simplicity, “Method in Preaching,” in which the authority of St. Paul is invoked, because “his word and his preaching have nothing persuasive of human wisdom but only a demonstration of the Spirit” (I Cor 2:4). Furthermore, the Apostle writes to the Corinthians that he does not pretend to know or understand anything when he was among them, only about Jesus Christ crucified (I Cor 2:2). He gave advice to his disciple, Timothy: “Take great care about what you do and what you teach” (ITm 4:16).³² This advice ought to serve as an orientation to missionaries called to be “light of the world and salt of the earth” (Mt 5:13-14).

He was exactly on the mark when he explained the humility of the Son of God, noting the meaning of the words: he emptied himself from the Latin word exinanivit and he humbled himself from the Latin word humiliavit, terms which refer to the Greek used by St. Paul with so much transcendence in theology and spirituality (Ph 2:7) in the Greek and Latin Churches. For St. Vincent, in this plan for the Son of God, enfleshed in human form, to become one like us, Jesus was obedient because of the love he has for his Father and for humanity, whom he saw as deprived by reason of sin, from eternal glory.³³ Emptied out, humility, obedience and love coexist in Christ and it should also be that way in the lives of the missionaries.

Concerning the virtue of meekness, it does not appear directly in the Pauline writings but rather in the Gospel (Mt 11:29) and the works of Francis de Sales, a contemporary and friend of Vincent. Nevertheless, the advice that St. Paul gave to the faithful in general and to Timothy, in particular, is an indication of what is the theme of Vincentian meekness.

Regarding the spirit of mortification, we have already made some comments in the section on the mysticism of baptism. Nevertheless, it is convenient to elucidate one more time the goal that St. Vincent had in interpreting St. Paul on the virtue of mortification, which

³¹ SVP XI, 462.

³² SVP XI, 172, 179.

³³ SVP XI, 411-412.

today is ignored by many Christians and denigrated by others and which is a participation in the death and resurrection of Christ (cf. Rm 6). It is also important to take note of corporal mortification when the Apostle punished his own body; since he has been an announcer himself, he does not want to be disqualified (cf. I Cor 9:27).³⁴

Finally, zeal in St. Paul highlights that he was a prisoner for the sake of our Lord and as Vincent defines, under the inspiration of Francis de Sales,³⁵ as a “pure desire to do all that is pleasing to God and useful to one’s neighbor... zeal is the most pure virtue in the love of God,”³⁶ and confirms the previous teachings. In the commentary about this virtue, we have St. Vincent presenting this reflection when he wrote to Father Peter Escart: “It is certainly true that zeal is the soul of the virtues, but it is also true that one ought to be zealous according to wisdom, as St. Paul says (Rm 10:2); that is to say, according to practical wisdom; in the young people who lack this ordinary wisdom, their zeal becomes excessive, especially in those who have a certain natural roughness.”³⁷

St. Vincent is talking about what wisdom? If it is that which gives us an experience of God and of humanity, that is good. But the wisdom to which he is referring here, St. Paul does not need to see in apostolic zeal but with a knowledge of the justice of God and of justification by faith in Jesus Christ, for the Jews, brothers who have not arrived. In any case, St. Vincent does not wander far from the meaning that St. Paul gives to his words.

If we move from apostolic virtues to prayer, the experience of St. Paul shines forth with special splendor. Inspired by Paul, Vincent says with assurance: “Give me a man of prayer and he will be capable of everything;” it is possible to say with the holy Apostle: “I can do everything in Him who sustains and comforts me” (Ph 4:13).³⁸ This citation is a wake up call to the missionaries so that in the midst of difficulties and rough situations we never abandon him, so long as we confide in his efficacious power and in the action of the spirit, and it gives us joy that we are children of God (Rm 8:16).

³⁴ SVP XI, 237, 345.

³⁵ St. Francis de Sales has written about devotion: “Between charity and devotion there is no major difference between the call and the fire; charity being a spiritual flame, when it is on fire, it is called devotion” (cf. *Introduction to the Devout Life*, P. 1, c. 1).

³⁶ SVP XI, 590.

³⁷ SVP II, 62.

³⁸ SVP XI, 778.

In light of the teachings of St. Vincent, the Daughters of Charity would be able to exchange in a public setting their prayer experiences, for they would not last long in their vocation nor be true Daughters of Charity without prayer, “it is from prayer that they draw their strength to support themselves in their service of God and neighbor.”³⁹

Basically consistent with St. Paul, St. Vincent mentions that “the Spirit comes to help in our weakness. Because we do not know how to ask for what is good” (Rm 8:16) and “from Him all good comes, without whom we are not capable of having even our own proper thought” (2 Cor 3:5).⁴⁰ Every day he was checking on his communities of missionaries and Daughters of Charity to see how God was being revealed above all to the simple ones lacking in human wisdom.⁴¹

I have given here a short summary about the doctrine of St. Paul, commented on and lived out by St. Vincent. If the reader would try another outline and method in order to measure the Pauline influence on the Founder of the Congregation of the Mission and Daughters of Charity, he would always encounter Vincent in his faith and experience, inexplicable to a great extent without the words and guidance of St. Paul, an exceptional witness to the life of Christ who died and rose for us.

Translation: JAMES G. WARD, C.M.

³⁹ SVP IX, 375.

⁴⁰ Cf. SVP XI, 328.

⁴¹ Cf. SVP IX, 386-387.

St. Paul and St. Vincent

Pillars and Foundations

by Italo Zedde, C.M.

This article is not intended to present a detailed analysis much less a scientific one of the theme chosen, because only one argument will be enough to fill in the available space. It can give only a little reflection in this Pauline anniversary of two thousand years of his birth side by side with the reflections on St. Vincent. These teaching even though familiar to each member of the Congregation, can as well be useful to all the Vincentian family. I thought to begin with the theme "Gospel" because we see that it is basic in St. Paul and St. Vincent who specifically wanted to dedicate the Congregation of the Mission to the announcement and the preaching of the gospel, not as a communication of theological, cultural, biblical or historical doctrine, but as an experience, a witnessing of faith and charity, and so together as the fruit of the Holy Spirit. We can then talk of charity in a theological and supernatural sense as an expression of the paschal mystery, but avoiding reducing such a mystery to just an altruistic generosity. The consequence is that the poor are being considered according to the light of the Word of God and of St. Vincent who saw Christ in the poor and the poor in Christ.

THE GOSPEL

There is no doubt that for the specialists the central theme in the preaching of Paul is the gospel. The famous phrase of Rudolf Bultman, according to whom the historic importance of Paul is the fact that he was a theologian, goes hand in hand with that of Voltaire who defined St. Vincent as "*un gran bienfaiteur de l'humanité.*" St. Paul for some might be just a preacher theologian and St. Vincent a simple benefactor of humanity. This happens when we eliminate the gospel in the Pauline sense.

Since St. Paul has never presented a systematic vision of his gospel, this does not mean that what he has written would be easy to organize. The many times he used the term "gospel" are not sufficient

to express the whole embrace of salvation. In spite of this, his affirmations on the gospel taken singularly are an unending fountain of doctrine.

Many authors have tried to present a possible nucleus of all that Paul intended by the gospel. In reality each scheme is useful to articulate the variations of an immeasurable mystery. A possible outline of the gospel of St. Paul presented by different writers is as follows: *Ab aeterno* God has chosen man to participate in the divine life, death and resurrection of His incarnate son. After His willing acceptance of death for sinners, He was exalted by the resurrection and was made the head and the saviour of all of humanity. Paul became a minister of this "gospel" through divine revelation and boasts of preaching this gospel on every occasion, after he has verified it with the leaders of the church. This announcement demands that the person accepts and enters into this mystery through baptism and an orientation of life according to the Holy Spirit, struggling against the flesh to live as a new creature. Such a situation is imperfect; it will be perfect and complete only at the moment He comes and especially with the final resurrection of the body. For each of these statements there are abundant texts. We give just a few references.

"Therefore we should always give thanks to God for you, beloved brothers in the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning of time for salvation, through the sanctifying works of the Holy Spirit and the belief in the truth. To this end he has called you to this through our gospel to possess the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thes. 2:13-14). There are the celebrated hymns of Col. 1:15-20; Eph. 1:1-14 and Rom. 5-8. This design of the Father reveals all His wisdom and love for humanity. All these designs or mysteries were accomplished by his son Jesus Christ. On the one hand it is the father that sends His Son to save mankind from sin. (Gal. 4:4; Rom. 8:3; 2 Cor. 5:18; Rom. 3:25). On the other Paul affirms the central role of Christ in "offering himself" (Gal. 1:4; 1 Tim. 2:6; Tit. 2:14) even offering himself out of love for us (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:25). Paul develops this essential line through a vocabulary he borrowed in part from the Old Testament; for he talks about redemption, liberation, salvation expiation of sins, satisfaction, price paid. He also talks about reconciliation, peace, love, Christ's sacrifice (*thysia* Eph. 5:2) and holocaust. All these are included in the apostolic formula "Christ died for our sins" (1 Cor. 15:3). To sum it up, "we await the blessed hope and the glory of our almighty God and saviour Jesus Christ who has given himself for us as a ransom for our iniquities and forming us as a holy people that belong to Him, zealous in good works" (Tit. 2:13-14).

The gospel as a theme becomes therefore the nucleus of the preaching of St. Paul expressed in all its riches. He realizes perfectly his being a servant and an apostle as a vocation dedicated totally to Christ, "chosen by him to preach the gospel of God" (Rom. 1:11). "According to the gospel of the glory of the blessed God, that was entrusted to me" (1 Tim. 1:11). It is extraordinary to read that, "preaching the gospel of his Son" (Rom. 1:9) puts into action the worship of God, therefore preaching, announcement, liturgical worship, all these make part of the mystery of His Son. "So faith comes from what is preached, and what is preached comes from the Word of Jesus Christ" (Rm. 10:16).

As much as this gospel of a Crucified God could seem a "foolishness" according to the thinking of man who is not yet converted (1 Corth. 1:2), he is not ashamed, because in reality it is taken as salvation. If one wants actually to believe this, it becomes a divine force that reveals and communicates the goodness and the salvation of God received naturally through a faith that is always growing, because as the scripture says, "the upright man will live by faith" (Rm. 1:17).

In this St. Paul is perfectly conscious of practicing a sacred and a divine office in the preaching of the gospel and he boasts of this and his duty of "being a minister of Jesus Christ among the pagans to make them acceptable as an offering made holy by the Holy Spirit" (Rm. 15:16). "Not that I do boast of the preaching of the gospel; since it is a duty which has been laid on me, I should be punished if I did not preach it" (1 Cor. 9:16). In fact, "Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel and not to preach it in the terms of wisdom of human eloquence in which the crucifixion of Christ is emptied of its meaning" (1 Corth. 1:17). Here the discourse should be well analyzed but it is obvious that St. Paul intends that his appointed duty referred to the preaching of the gospel. This explains how Paul is totally oriented in this divine activity: "To do all for the sake of the gospel" (1 Corth. 9:23), so that "the gospel I preach is not a human message" (Gal. 1:11) and I do this freely without any interest: "I preached the gospel of God to you without any fee for it" (2 Cor. 11:7).

For this reason the gospel should not be modified or remodelled: "There are some that put in division among you and they want to distort the gospel of Christ" (Gal. 1:7). Also in talking to Peter about issues of food, circumcision, and the Law of Moses, Paul struggles for a different idea but based on the "truth": "To him however he did not submit, even for an instant, so that the truth of the gospel remains the same among you" (Gal. 2:5). "Or when I saw that they

were not respecting the true meaning of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of everyone..." (Gal. 2:14). It sounds strange that some, including Cephas, were not living according to the truth of the gospel. Some little human errors for us should not be allowed to destroy the brightness of the gospel, for Paul in spite of everything recognizes the diversity of tones in the same gospel: "To me was entrusted the gospel to the non-Jews just as to Peter was entrusted that to the Jews" (Gal. 2:7). The divine passive voice referring to God deals with a diversity that come from above.

The gospel is above all an instrument of salvation. It is "the power of God for the salvation of all" (Rom. 1:16). Here the term *power* signifies the energy of the divine grace that emanates from God through the gospel that is being expressed often as the Holy Spirit. It becomes the word of the truth: "In him you too, after you heard the message of the truth, the gospel, of your salvation and have believed it; and you too have been stamped with the seal the Holy Spirit promised to you" (Eph. 1:13). The consequence is a gospel that looks for persons with a zeal to diffuse it because it diffuses peace into the heart of each person in the church and in the whole world: "Wearing for shoes on your feet eagerness to spread the gospel of peace" (Eph. 6:15). It could be said that each step should bring the announcement of the gospel of peace.

With all this the gospel always remains a mystery. "... pray for me to be given an opportunity to open my mouth and speak without fear to make known the mystery of the gospel" (Eph. 6:19-20). The liberty of the word implies a liberty of means of expression, liberty from hindrances, from conditioning, from contrary impositions, but above all the liberty that comes from within: meaning freedom in truth, in charity, in obedience and above all else a freedom of faith that dissolves servility and old and new cultural mentalities, things that risk emptying the divine power of the foolishness of the gospel. That is why Paul says that it takes courage to preach and bear witness to the gospel, using a famous noun (*parrhesia*) and a derivative verb that does not just indicate a courage that is presumptuous, arrogant or mealy-mouthed, but a courage of the weak and humble that becomes strong by the power of God: "For it is when I am weak that I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:10). For this he could say to Timothy: "Never be ashamed of witnessing to the Lord, or ashamed of me for being his prisoner, but with me bear hardship for the sake of the gospel, relying on the power of God" (2 Tim. 1:18).

Unfortunately, there are ways to make the melody of the gospel off-key, falsifying it. "It was God who decided that we were fit to be entrusted with the gospel, and when we are speaking, we are not

trying to please men but God, who can read our inmost thoughts” (1 Thes. 2:4), “It is true that some of them are doing it just out of rivalry and competition, but the rest preach Christ with the right intention, out of nothing but love, as they know that this is my invariable way of defending the gospel. The others who proclaim Christ for jealous or selfish motives, do not mind if they make my chains heavier to bear” (Phil. 1:15-17). By now the Christian community recognizes these scandals, having seen inappropriate intentions in the transmission of the splendor of truth, and it is possible to speak of Christ with literary appropriate terms but with a harmony of incorrect tonality, and is harmful to preach it for glory, for a humble spirit of selfishness, for a noble and common interest, in short for a wrong intention. It is contrary to “*simplicity*,” the style that St. Vincent wants from his preachers. St. Paul however, remained fixed “knowing that there were places for the defense of the gospel” “For we brought the gospel to you not only as words, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with utter conviction” (1 Thes. 1:5).

It is not difficult to see in the texts above a good part of the concepts of St. Vincent de Paul, expressed with other terms. As a matter of fact, he uses the gospel, referring to it above all as a global doctrine of the four Evangelists and their writings. For this reason he has always before him the image of our Lord whose examples he has tried to follow in visiting prisoners and sick, “... I was a prisoner, I was hungry...” (I, 94; Matt. 25:3-46).

What Paul expresses on his semitic language, St. Vincent says with an ecclesiastical language of his time. But it always has to do with the same dynamism that springs forth from the gospel: “We are entirely under the obedience of the Bishops for going in every part of their diocese, where they think it best to preach, to teach the catechism, to hear the general confessions of the poor people, to teach all mental prayer, practical and necessary theology, the ceremonies for which they have taken orders...” (I, 309). At the end Paul gives us a splendid definition of missionaries as “servants of the gospel” (I, 563).

All his spiritual doctrine comes from the gospel (III, 176; 182-183). He himself says he lives according to the “prescriptions of the gospel” (I, 151). From this we can understand how for him the gospel, Jesus Christ and the Word of God are equivalent terms. For him living according to the prescriptions of the gospel means living according to the example of Jesus Christ and vice versa. All his letters, conferences and rules are just an explication of this equivalence according to a famous phrase: “Christ is our rule. He is the rule of

the mission, it is He that speaks. Our duty is to listen to his words, consecrate ourselves to Him and put them in practice" (XII, 130). Following his example is following "the holy will of God." This is necessary above all when it comes to renouncing oneself and carrying the cross "everyday." "Think about these words my dear sisters: every day" (III, 176).

Following Paul, St. Vincent feels a pressing duty "to go to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth," preventing the risk of extinguishing the faith in Europe which is already evangelized: "What must we do to save the bride of Christ from self-destruction?" (cf. III, 182-183). He was strongly struck by the way in which the missionaries work for the preaching of the gospel: "Father, I was consoled in seeing that you have worked continuously in acquiring virtues, the love that you have for them is clear from the fact that you feel pain for those who do not apply themselves. Seeing that you apply these frequently in the ministry of the Gospel to draw persons to Christ, I cannot but admire your person" (III, 610). Most of the time the gospel becomes an occasion to carry out to the letter the words of Christ: "Today we have carried out to the letter what Christ has said in the gospel, to love and bless our enemies" (IV, 143).

It is already something great to give yourselves totally to God becoming his sons in a best manner possible and we should be content with this title of "servants of the Gospel" (V, 594); likewise even when, due to our abjection, we could be despised "it is at that moment we begin to be true disciples of Our Lord, according to what the gospel says: "How happy are the poor in spirit, theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 5:3). Talking about the Common Rules the first thing noted by St. Vincent was that they are in conformity with the gospel and derive from it (IX, 314). They are nothing other than a reflection of it. His conferences for the most part begin with the gospel texts talking about the virtues of Jesus Christ, and Vincent draws applications to the spirit of vocation. Even the method of preaching should be according to the gospel and the example of Jesus Christ (X 284-285). In executing the commands of the gospel we should not be preoccupied for tomorrow; but that does not mean that we should neglect our means of assistance "otherwise we should not even sow the seed" (XI, 351).

However, it deals above all else with being available to "go everywhere to spread the Holy Gospel" (XI, 412). It is not enough to preach naturally, it is necessary to ask God to shower his grace on each and every member of the company to act always with humility and simplicity, "and to preach with trembling the truth of the gospel as Our Lord Jesus Christ himself has taught it" (XII, 25). On the

other hand, the purpose of the Congregation is that of preaching the gospel to the poor, especially those of the countryside (XII, 74), given that Our Lord came to earth to announce the Good News especially to the humble and to the abandoned poor (cf. Lk. 4:18), because “this is our objective” (XII, 3-4). Vincent is famous for asking, “if you could ask the Son of God, why did you come?” He would have answered: “To evangelize the poor... to do the thing foretold and foreshowed by the prophets, [that is,] making the Gospel effective” (XII, 84). Often in St. Vincent the gospel and Christ are identified. He talks about the Holy Spirit and the maxims of the gospel as those of Christ and the other way round. On the contrary, the maxims of the world are those that oppose Christ and the gospel (XII, 107-108; 120). The evangelical counsels are the counsels of Jesus Christ Himself. Behold the rules of the Congregation are nothing other than a summary of the gospel: “The little company has made her rules as the summary of the gospel adapted to the uses that are more appropriate to us to unite ourselves with Jesus Christ and to respond to His designs” (XII, 154). In particular the evangelical maxims are called “*ambrosia*” honey-dew of heaven, which feeds us to live as Christ has lived, reflect the doctrine and the person of Christ Himself (XII, 182). Naturally, it is not enough to copy materially the gospel “it is not all doing good, it needs to be done well, according to the examples of Our Lord... that renders everything good,” and also, “It is not all fasting, observing the rules, being preoccupied of God. It needs to be done in His spirit, that is with the same perfection with which He did things” (XII, 178-179). Among many other things to be said, let us conclude by saying that it is necessary to “repair and to form the proper reasoning in a way conformed as much as possible to the gospel” (XII, 214). This theme was expounded in great detail because of its great importance. We can understand why St. Vincent very frequently uses the verb “to evangelize.” One time, with a marvellous intuition, he defined Christ as “the evangelist of the poor” (XI, 32), seeing Him almost as an inspired author and the poor as a sacred text over which the divine word gently blows. Even if he had never used the term “evangelist of the poor,” Vincent, with a true Pauline spirit, more than a hundred times invoked Christ as a “Saviour.”

THE HOLY SPIRIT

Even though other topics would also be very important (will of God, evangelical maxims, the five virtues), let us deal with this theme because without the Holy Spirit the gospel becomes an ideology, charity becomes a social life style, and above all without the

Holy Spirit it cannot meet either Jesus Christ, or the Church much less the poor.

First of all, Paul sees the Holy Spirit as a gift lavished on us by the risen Christ (cf. Eph. 4:7), but also He who performs¹ it in his mission of the obedient Son, as the Saviour and Redeemer. To be in possession of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost indicates a bridging between the Old Testament and the New Testament. He becomes also the illuminator of the mystery itself: "When the Spirit of truth comes he will lead you to the complete truth, since he will not be speaking as from himself but will say only what he has learned and he will tell you of the things to come. He will glorify me, since all he tells you will be taken from what is mine" (Jn. 16:14-15; Act. 2:33).

Before becoming the gift of Christ, the Spirit defines him to the whole church in his new identity of the Risen from the dead. This was already said in the ancient Judeo-Christian profession of faith reported by Paul in Rom. 1:3-4: "Born from the line of David according to the flesh, became Son of God in power according to the Spirit of sanctification through the resurrection from the dead."

The Holy Spirit expresses the new salvific dimension of the Son who as the final Adam becomes the "life-giving Spirit" (cf. Jn. 7:38-39) that indicates the capability of the Son to express his salvific function, showering abundantly on the children of Adam the Spirit he has acquired and is distributing. The texts where Paul expresses this (2 Tit. 2:8 and above all Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:9; Phil. 1:19) are echoed (as in Act 16:7; 1 Pet. 1:11), and make use of absolutely original terms talking about the "Spirit of the Son" or "the Spirit of Jesus Christ," which indicates that the same Spirit has a revealing bond with the ministry of the dead and risen Son.

The Holy Spirit, described in His relationship with God and Jesus Christ forms also their contact with redeemed man. He is essentially "sent" (Gal. 1:6; 1 Pet. 1:12), "shed for us" (cf. At. 2:17,33; Rom. 5:5; 1 Corth. 12:13; Tit. 3:6), "given to" (cf. Jn. 19:30; 2 Corth. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:17; 1 Th. 4:8, 1 Jn. 3:24; 4:13), "lavished upon" (cf. Gal. 3:5; Phil. 1:19), and he then comes to be "received" (cf. Jn. 7:39; Rom. 8:15; 1 Cor. 2:12; 2 Cor. 11:4; Gal. 3:2-14), and from which we can "be filled in" (Eph. 5:18). The result is that the divine now "lives in us" (Rom. 8:9-11; 1 Cor. 3:16) or "indwells" (Rom. 8:11; 2 Tim. 1:14) in a Christian as something that one has (cf. Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 7:40; 2 Cor. 4:13), according to the language that is typically

¹ The verb "perform" is not a mistake, it is a recent very significant term used also by Benedict XVI and indicates to transform, to make suitable, to give the internal capability, to conclude according to the purpose or intent.

Pauline. Paul in fact is the author who above all others has developed the theme of the Holy Spirit. Besides, for Paul the Holy Spirit is a gift of God that redefines the baptized: "Fount of regeneration, re-birth and renewal in the Holy Spirit." Naturally the text that is more explicit is Gal. 4:6 (that has a parallel in Rom. 8:15): "The proof that you are sons is that God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit that cries, Abba, Father!" Note that he who cries is not the Son but the Spirit.

From these affirmations derive the consequences for the Christian life that are well known. The whole Christian existence therefore is a life according to the Spirit. "In fact everyone moved by the spirit is a son of God" (Rom. 8:14); "therefore if we live by the spirit, let us also walk according to the Spirit" (Gal. 5:25).

With all these affirmations Paul affirmed that the Spirit is by nature dynamic. His language on "walking by" and "letting be lead by" expresses exactly the proper dynamism of the Spirit in a disciple. This new way of relating with the Spirit (Rom. 7:6) stands out in the battle against the contrary principalities, called the "flesh." It is known that this concept identifies in a very semitic way the entire man (body and spirit), but as such alienated from God and opposed to him (cf. Rom. 9:8; 1 Cor. 1:26; 2 Cor. 1:12; 10:4; 11:17 ff.). The text of Gal. 5:16-25 and Rom. 8:5-7 emphasizes these two contrary principles in extremely appropriate terms highlighting above all the negative aspects, even the smallest ones.

Paul says that "... the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:2). Paul calls "law" the new dynamism of the Spirit, drawing the terminology from the "law" of the ancient tradition. This is the *new law*. We are no longer dealing with the principalities and forces imposed from external factors, but a kind of dynamism that works interiorly, to which one aspires or is attracted, in other words, to charity (2 Cor. 5:14-15). In fact St. Thomas added: "*Spiritus Sanctus, dum facit in nobis caritatem, quae est plenitudo legis, est Testamentum Novum*" (2 Cor. 3:6).

The doctrine of St. Vincent on the Holy Spirit is likewise as fundamental as it is for Paul. He took some starting points from the Pauline vision on the contrast between the spirit and the flesh even if expressed in different languages. St. Vincent concentrates his attention not so much on the doctrinal, theological or catechetical aspect that could be taken for granted, but on the teaching of the Scriptures, which calls continually for living according to the Spirit and not according to the flesh, which he expanded on in the discourse of the human spirit against the Spirit of Christ.

What St. Vincent wrote to Mr. Portail reflects the thoughts of Paul: "You remember that we live in Jesus Christ for the death of Jesus Christ, and that we should die in Jesus Christ by the life of Jesus Christ, and that our life should be hidden in Christ and full of Christ and that to die as Christ, we should live as Christ. Once we recognize this, let us give ourselves to scorn, shame, disgrace, and let us disapprove of the honors that others give to us, good reputation and applause. Nothing that we do should be directed towards this end" (I, 295). Today we find much exaggeration and strangeness that after such a rigorous and profound theological and biblical premise, St. Vincent lost himself in the thought that seems a poor and old-fashioned asceticism. On the contrary, he was talking about the human spirit as opposed to Christ, doctrine that form a background of his spirituality in many themes: charity, humility, simplicity, detachment, will and providence of God, imitation of Christ, clothing himself with his Spirit. Here we find an echo of the resounding gong of which Paul writes in 1 Cor. 13:1.

In a letter to G. Cornaire Vincent shows how very important it is to be willing to confront ourselves continuously with the painful situations of Our Lord in order to catch His Spirit and virtues, just as the contrary inclination comes from the spirit of man centered in himself (IV, 32). And he concludes with a fundamental affirmation: "We talk about triumphing over our enemies: over the flesh that is opposed to the spirit," with a clear reference to the Pauline texts. From this comes the frequent call to clothe ourselves with the Spirit of Christ (VII, 419; XI, 343-344; XII, 107-108 ff.).

Some thoughts were of a rare beauty: "I beg you therefore to enliven yourself with His Spirit, which signifies humility, mildness, tolerance, patience, vigilance, prudence and charity. You will find in Him all the virtues, and if you allow this, He will exercise them in you and through you. Live with this trust and you will stay in peace" (VIII, 231). And again: "I think of you for the difficulties that you find and for the solution that you yourself suggested, but I still beg you to have patience and remember that disgust and discouragement are products of our poor human nature that we carry with us wherever we go. We need to abandon ourselves to the Spirit of Our Lord to bear with ourselves and to win over our timidity, laziness and other weaknesses. I pray this Holy Spirit, the sanctifier, to animate you with His strength and fill you with His blessings" (VIII, 293).

To St. Louise, in a masterly fashion, he teaches that "at times we desire many good things with a desire that seems to be according to God, but instead it is not.... God above all else wants you to be His, and after He shall grant that you serve on even greater number of

persons. And also if you were only all His, would this not be enough for your heart? Honor therefore, the tranquillity and the peace of Jesus Christ. In this way you shall put yourselves in the state of service. The kingdom of God is peace in the Holy Spirit. He shall reign in you if your heart will be in peace" (I, 113-114). When St. Vincent writes that, "the kingdom of God is peace in the Holy Spirit" he refers to the text of Gal. 5:21-22 and that of Rom. 14:17: "... the kingdom of God does not mean eating or drinking this or that, it means righteousness and peace and joy brought by the Holy Spirit." The contents of only these two texts (even though there are many others cited) demonstrate how St. Vincent accepted in the depth of his heart the gospel and the teachings of Paul. Much more than the veil of celestial humility allows us to see.

To the enterprising missionary, Achilles Levezeux, tempted to seek human defensive strategies, he wrote: "This could be a very poor motive and very far from the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to which in all our actions we should have the aim only to please God" (IV, 487). He says that the company "without this spirit is a body without a soul" (XII, 95). To this he adds: "The rule teaches that it is important that we be clothed with the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (XII, 107) and this to be able to carry out all our missionary tasks, be it in looking for sanctity, be it for assisting in a useful way the people or the church. He concluded: "Behold the great task: being clothed with the Spirit of Christ!" (ibid.).

The Spirit of Christ in the company is found above all else in the five virtues that are like "the power of the soul of all the Company" (XII, 312). The Common Rules give a list of vices and defects that are greatly opposed to the evangelical maxims (RC. II, 15). The first of these vices is "prudence of the flesh" of Pauline memory.

CHARITY

It is evident that Paul speaks abundantly and of many aspects of charity. He usually, however, speaks of the works and acts of charity, without giving them a complete definition and details because catechesis comes with preaching, where the mystery of love of Christ is being presented in an exhaustive way. Paul therefore in his own letters does not have many of these passages even if he abounds in reference to the love of Christ and to the practice of charity. His teaching however, is particularly illuminating for the thoughts of St. Vincent.

A passage that presents the true nature of love according to the example and the teaching of Christ is given in this well-known

passage of Rom. 5:5: "... the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" with the following verses 6-11. These verses taken in their immediate and also broader context and of which Augustine has left an excellent comment, reveal that the love, "agape," of Christ is essentially a mystery of faith, a gift of the Spirit and not a rational or social persuasive expression of the interior or exterior needs of man. When we talk about charity, first of all we mean that we were loved by Christ in the moment in which we were still enemies of God, against God, wilful sinners. It is very rare, said Paul, that one could arrive at the point of giving his life or rather dying for a good person (like M. Kolbe) but certainly, (added St. Augustine) it is totally absurd and incomprehensible that one dies for his enemy. Instead, (continues Paul) Christ demonstrates His love for us because He died for us exactly when we were still enemies against him and sinners. These lines contain almost all the Pauline christology and doctrine of salvation.

To talk of charity in Paul we usually make reference to 1 Cor. 13 and not as much to Rom. 5:6-11. St. Vincent however, never cites the first three verses of 1 Cor. 13, where Paul says: "If I give away all that I possess, (implies giving to the poor)... but am without love, it will do me no good whatever." He cited only three times 1 Cor. 13:4: "Love is always patient and kind" (XII, 268 where Coste noted that indicating 1 Cor. 13:14 is an obvious typographical error; V, 2; XV, 28 in a letter to Chantal). Vice versa, we expect that he should have quoted Matthew 25:31-46 (the final judgement). Instead he has only two brief references for conference outlines: XIII, 788; Mt. 25:41; XIII, 788; Mt. 25:34. The famous pericope nevertheless is inserted in the Common Rule of the Congregation of the Mission where it is written that when a Vincentian visits a sick person, he needs to look at him not simply as a sick person but "as Jesus Christ Himself, of which he is assured that it is to Him that he renders this service" (CR VI, 2; Mt. 25:40).

We will find a more precise reference in the Common Rules II, 2 where we read that we need to prefer spiritual things to temporal things, the salvation of the soul to the health of the body, the honor of God to that of the world and that thus we resolve to choose, with Blessed Paul, "privation, infamy, even death itself rather than being separated from the love of Christ." The text clearly references Rom. 8:35: "What can therefore separate us from the Love of Christ, even if we are troubled or worried or being persecuted, or lack food or clothes or being threatened or even being attacked?" Here St Vincent has entered into the depths of the Pauline doctrine on

charity, not seen simply as external works or services but as inserting oneself into the essence of the Paschal mystery. He confirms it in this passage of the Rules: "Therefore we should not torment ourselves for material goods (cf. you should not disturb yourself, but in everything make your requests to God in prayers and supplications Phil. 4:6; Mat. 6:21, 25-30; Lk. 12:22-34), but cast your worries and cares before the Lord because he cares for you (1 Pet. 5:7; Is. 55:23), convinced that when one is rooted in this charity based on this hope (Eph. 3:17) he shall remain always under the protection of God (Ps. 90:1). So he will not suffer any bad thing (Ps. 90:10) and will not be deprived of any good (who seeks the Lord lacks nothing, Ps. 34:11), even if it seems that all is going bad" (cf. Lk. 12:4-7). Saying, *rooted in this charity and founded on this hope*, Saint Vincent reached a level of Pauline doctrine based on an extraordinarily profound charity, "agape" which consists in insertion of the love of Christ in a living and life-giving way.

A passage closely connected with Eph. 3:17 and Rom. 8:35 remains a classical text that became the motto and seal of the Daughter of Charity, even if cited only partially: "... and this is because the love of Christ overwhelms us once we have the conviction that one man has died for all, then all have died" (2 Cor. 5:14). The text moreover unites with the following verses. "And the reason he died for all was so that men should live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised to life for them" (2 Cor. 5:15). The two verses in fact, according to scripture scholars, remain closely joined and express the genuine love of Christ (in a subjective and objective sense), and are the true and authentic basis of love of neighbor as also for the poor. It seems undoubtedly that the writing around the seal reflects well the thoughts of St. Vincent. The fact that from the beginning it contains the word "crucified," absent in the Pauline texts, shows that Paul was interpreted more than correctly. In fact the word, the motto and verse contain a difficult verb "*urget nos*" of which the translation in the modern language, especially without the verse that follows, at times loses its expressive force. The Greek word *synécho* (active and median — passive in the conjugation) in the New testament is used above all by Luke (six times in Luke and 3 times in the Acts of the Apostles). Paul used it only two times and Matthew only once. This verb needs to be examined a bit.

Analyzing only the close significance and parallels with 2 Cor. 5:14 (it has in fact many different meanings), we can deduce that the verb means to be in anguish in a real or metaphoric sense. Jesus talks about the baptism that He must receive (Lk. 12:50), where He

indicates both His radical donation to His mission and the strong desire that pervades Him. Then the term also describes the crowd that was pressing on Christ (Lk. 8:45), the soldiers who were keeping Him in custody (Lk. 22:63); the enemies that will flock together in Jerusalem from every part (Lk. 19:43); those that were stoning Stephen to death “cried out however in a loud voice covering the ears” (Act 7:57) (so as not to hear the blasphemy of Stephen). It also indicates being taken over by a sickness: the mother-in-law of Peter was with fever (Lk. 4:38; cf. Act. 28:8; Mt. 4:24); or from fear: the inhabitants in the territory of Gerasene “were taken by a great fear” because of the swine (Lk. 8:37).

Paul appeared as one “dominated,” “governed” and “lorded over” by his duty as a herald of the Word (cf. Act. 18:5), or one who feels obliged to live for love of Christ and not for himself (2 Cor. 5:14), or finally as one who is strongly consumed by the desire to be with the Lord or with the church (Phil. 1:23). Therefore, the sense of this passage is not that of an urgency or a push that comes from an external necessity but from an internal “pressure” originated in *agape*, that is from the fact that Paul feels totally taken, caught up, dominated, possessed, illuminated, filled and brought to self-awareness by the love of Jesus Christ (cf. the doctrine of St. Thomas), fully aware and caught up by the influence of the Holy Spirit, so that he cannot hold it inside and cannot refrain from pouring it out and communicating it. Very correctly the new Constitutions of the Daughters of Charity recite: “The Charity of Jesus crucified urges us.” The charity of Jesus Christ crucified which animates and inflames the heart of the Daughters of Charity, that urges them to run to the service of all the poor. The heart cannot function if not “inflamed and filled,” as we cannot go to all the poor if we do perceive fully in our hearts that “He died for all, because those who live cannot live for themselves, but for Him who died and was raised for them” (2 Cor. 5:15).

THE POOR

We understand very well that talking about the poor in St Vincent in a few paragraphs is very risky. For now let us focus briefly mostly on Paul, in which the theme of the poor regards predominantly those of the community of Jerusalem and environs for whom he organized the famous collection. He however, has no theological vision different from the other inspired authors as regards the humble, the meek and the poor in the material or spiritual sense.

Paul tells us that after his first visit to Jerusalem “recognizing the grace that was given to me, James, Cephas and John the reputed

pillars, gave me and Barnabas their hands as a sign of communion; we were to go to the pagans and they to the circumcised. The only thing they insisted on was that we should remember to help the poor, as indeed I was anxious to do" (Gal. 2:9-10). He speaks four times about the famous collection "for the poor that are among the holy ones of Jerusalem" (Rom. 15:26,28; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 8:20), that becomes an occasion for developing an extraordinary theology of the service in two chapters in his second letter to the Corinthians, 2 Cor. 8 and 9. Here Paul teaches many things on abundance, on generosity, on love and care towards others, on the duties of the rich, on giving spontaneously for the poor. They are two chapters of fundamental importance together with the famous "note" to Philemon.

The famous phrase of 1 Cor. 13:3: remains always a classical monument: "If I give away all that I possess... but am without charity, it will do me no good whatever." Naturally here the term charity does not have the sense of helping or attending to those with a need (otherwise it would be a contradiction). In fact this phrase in a literal context can be useful for a transition towards the right thoughts of St. Vincent though in these paragraphs it does not seem necessary to open this very vast theme. Making a global comparison between St. Vincent and St. Paul we can see that both start from the foundation of faith in the paschal mystery: Christ our rule, and Christ made for us "wisdom, justice, sanctification and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30). From this starting point and through all the "*tradito*" flowing from the preaching of Christ, we reach all the teachings on help and relief of those in need, with well known biblical texts from Matt. 25:31-46 and many other parables (Good Samaritan, Lazarus), as well as the "*loghia*" of giving a cup of fresh water. But as it is well known that St. Vincent teaches that we can as well celebrate the Holy Mass, teach catechism, hear confessions, yet not do a work that pleases God — and more in accomplishing other good works (cf. XII, 150-165 with exact biblical references), we could do grand works for the poor and yet not act with supernatural charity that is absolutely essential for completing an act of charity (cf. Mt. 10:41).

We can conclude with the recommendations of St. Paul to the Christian slaves to be obedient to their master, especially if they are believers, and to do so out of the love of Christ, as he also commended the masters to treat their slaves with love (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 6:5-9; Col. 3:22; 4:1; 1 Tim. 6:12; Tit. 2:9; also in 1 Pt. 2:18). This teaching reminds us of the famous confession of St. Vincent, referring to when he was chaplain of the galleys: "When I praised them for their resignation and felt sorry for them in their sufferings

and I called them blessed because they were doing purgatory on earth, and I would kiss their chains, having pity for their pains and would show myself as one who participates in their tribulations. They would listen to me and give glory to God and be placed in a state of salvation” (IV, 52-53).

Translation: GEORGE DENIS ASOMUGHA ONYEBUCHI, C.M.

St. Paul and St. Vincent de Paul

Two Converging Roads

by Nelio Pereira Pita, C.M.

INTRODUCTION

To be a Christian is to be a follower of Jesus. According to the words of the Apostle St. Paul, every baptized person is “called to holiness” (Rom 1:7), challenged to be an imitator of Jesus independently of the variables of the space and time in which he lives. Throughout history the response to this universal vocation has taken on various forms. In truth the “modus vivendi” of the follower is always determined by two poles: on the one hand, by the action of the Holy Spirit which endows the believer with a charism, a particular grace which moves him to act in a particular way; and on the other hand, by the historical circumstances, the indefinite factors, which offer the ingredients which determine one’s action, and which, simultaneously, will be determined by his action. These two elements — charism and context — make the history of each call unique and unrepeatable. Despite the fact that we are all followers of Jesus, no two histories are the same, except perhaps for some common, perhaps coincidental lines; because in his essence man is always the same, and the action of the Holy Spirit in us has as its purpose making us like the Son, Jesus Christ.

The objective of this work is to ascertain and propose some lines of reflection between two lives separated by almost 16 centuries: St. Paul and St. Vincent de Paul. In the first place we will highlight some aspects of the life story of the two men: the road they traveled until they discovered the true God. Secondly we will present some aspects of their doctrine which unite but also distinguish the two missionaries. Finally, we will examine their pastoral practice, the way each one has found to announce the Good News and how it is related to the problems of their times.

1. THE ROADS OF CONVERSION AND VOCATION

1.1. Paul

To speak of the conversion of St. Paul is to refer to the event which transformed the life of a man, a man who was the cause of the transformation of the lives of many others, and who, directly or indirectly, contributed decisively to the transformation of the course of the history of humanity. The different accounts of the principal episode, the apparition of the Risen Christ on the road to Damascus, are presented in the Acts of the Apostles and also by the Apostle himself. The different nuances which appear in the three accounts in Acts (9:1-8, 22:4-16, 26:9-18), and the way in which Paul himself describes the experience (Gal 1:12-16, 1 Cor 9:1, 15:8-11, 2 Cor 4:6, Phil 3:12) make us think that what really happened in his life was not just one episode, but rather a whole series of factors which determined his conversion. According to some authors the account presented in Acts is a “kind of legend”¹ whose purpose was to explain to the community the radical change in the man who once persecuted the church, but who now, with equal zeal, spoke of Jesus Christ. The communities which heard it said: “The one who persecuted us now announces the faith that before he wished to destroy” (Gal 1:23-24). As a response to the communities’ questions, Luke draws up an account with a catechetical and apologetic tone in which he endeavors to offer an explanation for such a transformation. But how did this change come about? What factors determined it?

The animosity of the Jews toward the nascent community is well known, especially towards the group of Greek origin (the Hellenists), stemming from their rejection of the Mosaic law and the temple. The followers of Jesus openly criticized Jewish traditions. They defended the position that “the cult practiced in the Temple and regulated by the Law now made no sense after the redemptive death of Jesus.”²

¹ Cf., for example, J. BECKER (1992-2007), *Pablo, el apóstol de los paganos*, Salamanca: Ed. Sígueme; H. ALVES (2008), «Paúlo, de fariseu a apóstolo,» in AA.VV., *S. Paúlo, Apóstolo da Palavra*, Rev. Bíblica: XXXI Semana Bíblica Nacional, (17), pp. 19-78; G. OPORTO (2008), «Fui conquistado por J. Cristo. A experiência pascal como chave da vida, da teologia e da missão de Paúlo» (I Was Conquered by Jesus Christ: The Paschal Experience as the Key to the Life, Theology and Mission of St. Paul), in AA.VV., *S. Paúlo*, Fátima: Difusora Bíblica, pp. 55-64.

² A. OLIVEIRA (2008), *Um ano a caminhar com S. Paúlo. Proposta da Conferência Episcopal Portuguesa para a vivência do Ano Paulino*, Coimbra: Gráfica de Coimbra 2, p. 20.

Paul, the young Pharisee who had made his own the traditions and doctrines of his ancestors, acted in accord with the three basic principles of Judaism: 1) the duty of obeying the Law of Moses; 2) scrupulous respect for the Sabbath rest; 3) the Jerusalem Temple as the sign of the presence of God among men. The confrontation between the zealous Pharisee and the followers of the crucified was inevitable.

Nevertheless, despite its victims, from this confrontation a new life sprang up. The persecution of the Nazarenes organized by Paul caused him to come into contact with the person of Jesus Christ, alive in the attitudes of the Christians. The disciples of the crucified faced with surprising courage and inner freedom the tribulation, the offenses and the punishments of which they were the victims. The testimony given by his contemporary converts awakened many questions in the heart of the future apostle. Who was, after all, this Jesus? What power did he have to give life to these people? The death of St. Stephen at which Paul was present would have made a deep impression on him: someone who dies pardoning his enemies, someone who relates to God in a new way so personal and intimate. Paul tried to get to know the God who inspired this group. But in his first phase he found the idea of a crucified Messiah repugnant, because crucifixion was considered a curse (Deut 21:23; Gal 3:13).

As time passed Paul gradually sensed that the Mosaic law of itself was no guarantee of man's salvation. He became more convinced that fulfilling the Law did not make one more just before God. Thanks to his own life as a fervent Pharisee with the natural successive alternatives of hope and then of failure in the face of the Law, the idea grew in him that justification is not acquired by the practice of good works, but rather is a gratuitous gift of God. He also came to understand that the duty of adoring God in a determined geographic space with its associated rituals was a scheme that excluded many other men and women who were searching for God with sincere hearts, despite not being able to visit the holy city or not knowing the traditions in which he was educated. Henceforth, in the light of his encounter with the Risen Christ, for Paul, every person, in the intimacy of his own being, is a Temple of God (cf. 1 Cor 3:17). Finally he realized that the precept concerning the Sabbath had been surpassed, when the One who had risen on the First Day of the Week won out.

These ideas were bubbling beneath the surface for days and months, perhaps years, in Paul's mind and in his passionate heart. They would become clear when, according to St. Luke, on a certain day on the road to Damascus, Paul hears his name pronounced by the God he was persecuting: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting

me?” (Acts 9:1-18). We do not know for sure the details of this vision. We only know its consequences. Paul acquired the interior conviction that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God, the Lord.³ He “saw,” surely not with his bodily eyes, but with those of faith. That “interior light” was the turning point in his life. From that time on he became the greatest of the Apostles.

Going beyond that, on the road to Damascus Paul was not only converted, but he also discovered his mission,⁴ the role God had determined for him from all eternity: to announce the Good News about God. “I had been conquered by Christ” (Phil 3:12-14).

1.2. St. Vincent de Paul

The description of Paul’s conversion is the great entry way into the long history of men and women who were converted to Jesus of Nazareth. In Paul’s case, as in Vincent’s and so many others, we cannot state that before that key moment of interior illumination they lived apart from God’s ways. But they were traveling, surely, according to their own rhythm, moved by their own projects and convinced they were on the right road. St. Vincent de Paul, already a priest, also passed through different stages of inner purification until he recognized what his place in the church was and what God he should be serving. The same thing happened to Paul. What were the factors that determined this change of heart?

The accusation of robbery of which Vincent was the victim in Paris (1608) was, for example, an important reference point in this conversion process. Because of being publically humiliated, St. Vincent de Paul had the experience of a “fall.” Like Paul, St. Vincent de Paul realized that his own projects, carefully planned and motivated by his own ambition, were leading him down a dead end street. But they were not without lessons for one who was open to learn. This episode made him come down from his clerical “status” and make his own the place of those who had nothing — neither honor nor riches.

Another key episode in the conversion process occurred during the time when St. Vincent de Paul was almoner to Queen Margaret. The luxurious atmosphere was conducive to a frivolous life without challenges or goals. This submerged him in a “dark night,” a time

³ J. MURPHY-O’CONNOR (2004-2008), *Paúlo, um homem inquieto, um apóstolo insuperável*, Lisboa: Ed. Paúlinas, 2ª Ed.

⁴ L. CERFAUX (1962-1976), *O cristão na teologia de S. Paúlo*, S. Paúlo: Ed. Paúlinas.

when God seemed absent. His silence, dense and often inexplicable, almost made Vincent renounce his own faith. According to his first biographer, this period lasted for three years and Vincent only managed to overcome it when he made the firm resolution, under the inspiration of divine grace, to consecrate himself totally to the poor.

When we read the histories of these people — and remember our own — we realize that there is a divine pedagogy at work in the process of conversion. It is the moving force of transformation through the language of events but also of silence. God speaks and is silent. He reveals himself and he hides his face. And in this dialectic, he instructs people to discover the truth, that truth that is the road to liberation and personal fulfillment.

In January 1617, on the feast of the Conversion of St. Paul (what a coincidence!), another apparently unremarkable event was to change St. Vincent de Paul's life radically. In the light of faith, the sick man of Folleville was the spokesperson of the poor who, in the name of God, clamored for more and better human and religious attention. The original intuition, the "interior light," would take on more defined contours a short time afterwards in the institutions Vincent founded: the Ladies of Charity, the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity. All of these, in different ways, would take on the commitment to carry out the liberating mission of Jesus.

From 1617 onward, like St. Paul, St. Vincent de Paul understands that his vocation was not just to do the mission in one town, but rather to do in every place "what the Son of God did who came to set the world ablaze with the fire of his love" (SVP XI, 553). Later on, like St. Paul, Vincent recognizes that his work was the fruit, not just of a personal whim, but rather of the will of God. Both men considered their action as a duty, as an obligation that, from all eternity, had been providentially imposed upon them.

Shortly before his death, the peasant of the Landes, imparting his blessing to various members of the institutions he founded, calmed them with the words of the Apostle Paul: "The God who began this good work in you will bring it to completion" (Phil 1:6, SVP X, 231). God was the author of everything. God would also be its principal guarantor.

Today, with the divine assistance, it is the turn of the Vincentian Family to carry this project forward.

2. DOCTRINE

2.1. St. Paul in the texts of St. Vincent

Explicit references to the Apostle Paul are not frequent in St. Vincent's writings. The saint of charity has recourse to the Apostle of the Gentiles to establish his positions with the aim of changing the attitude of his listeners. In general, Vincent does not speculate about Paul's theology. On the basis of the sacred texts he gives direction, draws practical applications, makes recommendations for the concrete situations of daily life such as community conflict or the need of practicing charity. He makes use of Paul's "divine authority" to "bring water to the mill." To do this he makes interpolations and adaptations of the text which are sometimes surprising.

He invokes St. Paul's authority when he insists that the members of the Congregation work free of charge, just as the Apostle did, in the popular missions (SVP X, 520); when he emphasized the importance of practicing the virtues like mortification (SVP X, 472; XI, 522), indifference and detachment (SVP XI, 533); when he asks the missionaries to center their preaching on the person of Jesus Christ crucified (SVP XI, 529-530); when he counsels a missionary to resolve community tensions in a peaceful way. He reminds them that even St. Paul had words with St. Peter and St. Barnabas (SVP IV, 233), but that union prevailed among them.

In his conferences to the Daughters of Charity as well, he cites St. Paul when he refers to the need of worthy preparation for communion (SVP IX, 220-229); when he speaks of temptations (SVP IX, 656-668) and perseverance in vocation (he presents Paul as the substitute for Judas) (SVP IX, 328); when he develops the theme of virtues like uniformity, chastity and modesty (SVP IX, 943-944). In the same way he refers to the Apostle to say that despite his choleric temperament, he was a great saint (SVP IX, 256-257). Therefore, even those with an impulsive and aggressive temperament (as he himself was) also had the possibility of a saintly life.

Vincent also calls on the figure of the Apostle in his allocutions to the Ladies of Charity. When these women hesitated to take on the work of the foundlings, with all its consequences, Vincent has recourse to St. Paul's authority to say that the priest Melchisedech, like other important figures, had neither father nor mother because he had been an abandoned child (SVP X, 919; 939).

He cites Paul in a passing way in a talk to the Daughters of Charity in July of 1657 (SVP X, 956); in the study about grace (SVP X, 192); in the text used when presenting a priest to a parish

(SVP X, 471; 529); while giving advice (SVP X, 846), as for example about marriage (SVP II, 136).

But the presence of St. Paul in St. Vincent's writings goes much further than explicit references as we shall now see. Surely both men had an obstinate and obsessive temperament, quite helpful when there was need for persistent effort, even when conditions were not in their favor. Both had regular contact with the communities they founded by way of correspondence. In their letters we see some aspects they had in common: the topics they presented, the practical recommendations, the calls to fidelity to the "proclamation" (kerygma); the concern for organization and community stability; the challenge of being authentic "imitators of Jesus." The terminology they use is sometimes full of tenderness (sons, daughters, friends...), but in other cases he makes use of severe language to put down the positions of his adversaries.⁵

2.2. The Centrality of Christ

2.2.1. *In St. Paul*

In the beginning of I Corinthians, Paul declares categorically what the essential content of his preaching is: "Among you I did not want to know anything except Jesus Christ crucified" (1 Cor 2:2). As the center of his proclamation we find Christ who accepted the humiliation of Calvary to save us. Time and again he refers to the redemptive death of the "Son of God who loved me and handed himself over for me" (Gal 2:20); that crucified Christ who is a "scandal for the Jews and foolishness for the pagans" (1 Cor 1:23). One statistic is very revealing all by itself: the name of Jesus (and associated terms) appears 380 times in the Apostle's letters. Contrary to the "enlightened ones" who presented in the community the facet of the glorious Christ, relegating the cross to a secondary plane, Paul centers his theology on Jesus Christ crucified. As the writer Santiago Oporto points out: "Looking upon the crucified, Paul captured all the force and scope of Jesus' handing over of himself: for love of us he became poor; even beyond that, God made him a curse for us and even guilty of sin (literally sin). On the cross Jesus showed himself to be the mystery of God's love for men and his project of salvation for all humanity."⁶

⁵ Cf. Phil 3:2; SVP XI, 397.

⁶ G. OPORTO, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

The Christ that Paul knew was not, however, the Son of Mary, the man of flesh and blood. Despite all of Paul's personalizing of his relationship with Christ ("He loved me and handed Himself over for me"), for the last-minute Apostle, as for his contemporaries and for future generations, it was impossible to "follow" or walk side by side with the historical Jesus. After Jesus' death and resurrection, it was no longer possible "to be with" him; but it was possible "to be in" him.⁷ As H.U. von Balthasar emphasizes, this expression reveals the new reality of being Christian, until by death, it is again possible, but in another sense, "to be with Christ."⁸ Therefore, contrary to what we find in the Synoptics, we do not find in Paul's writings the terms "to follow" (akolouthēin) nor "disciple." In the light of the Resurrection, Paul avails himself of new language to express the relationship of the follower with the master.

Now the believer is called to **imitate** those who, like Paul, are true imitators of Jesus — "be imitators of me as I am of Christ" (1 Cor 11:1; 2 Thes 3:6-9). In the new context of life "in Christ," the one who proposes to imitate Jesus is also invited to live in intimate communion with the Risen Lord and to prepare himself to walk, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, keeping in sight the goal of **identification** with Christ: "Have among you the same sentiments which Jesus Christ had" (Phil 2:5).⁹ For Paul, this is the common goal for all the baptized, not just for some.

To the Galatians Paul presents the Christian life as a progressive "con-figuration" with Christ: "My children, once again I suffer the pangs of birth until Christ is formed in you" (Gal 4:19). In this perspective the Christian ideal is to put on "the form of Christ," which suggests an ontological transformation of the subject, in the measure in which he passes from the way of being of the old Adam to the new way of being in the image of the divine model. In one of the passages of the Letter to the Romans, taking up the same theme but in other terms, the Apostle emphasizes that "those he knew beforehand, he also predestined to be an identical image of his Son" (8:29). To be a Christian is to be invited to con-form one's life to the

⁷ F. NEIRYNCK (1969), «Doctrina de San Pablo sobre "Cristo en nosotros" y "nosotros en Cristo",» *Concilium* (50), pp. 610-619.

⁸ HANS URS VON BALTHASAR (1965), *Ensayos teológicos*, Madrid: Guadarrama, t. 2, p. 90.

⁹ G. Uríbarri emphasizes the meaning of the term "froneite" whose root is "fronesis" which means "reason," intelligence, wisdom, thought, spirit, feeling. All believers, therefore, are called to identify themselves in everything, with Christ (G. URIBARRI [1996], «La conformación plena con Cristo: peculiaridad de la Vida Religiosa,» *Razón y Fe* [234], pp. 326-327).

image of Jesus. In synthesis it is “reproducing,” here and now, the filial experience, thanks to the action of the Holy Spirit.

“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me” (Gal 2:19-20).

2.2.2. In Vincent de Paul

The attentive reading of the letters, conferences and documents left by St. Vincent leads us to the conclusion that his doctrine is developed in a way that is bound up with the person of Jesus Christ. The centrality of Christ is also confirmed by the number of times expressions like “to imitate Jesus” appear — around 400 times.¹⁰ For Vincent, Jesus is the absolute reference: “He is our father, our mother, our all” (SVP V, 511); “he is the rule of the mission” (SVP XI, 429); the “true model and the great invisible painting with which we should conform our actions” (SVP XI, 129).

The Christ of St. Vincent is not the glorious Christ, risen and seated at the right hand of the Father. He is rather the crucified Christ of St. Paul, not just the one who died for us in some distant past, but rather the One who is still nailed to the cross in the person of the poor person who suffers hunger or cold, who is the victim of violence, of injustice, of people’s selfishness. In Vincent’s view, those who have been marked by misery, by ill fortune have the honor of being the representatives of Christ crucified.

“When one serves the poor, one serves Jesus Christ. My Daughters, how true this is! You serve Jesus Christ in the person of the poor. And that is as true as that we are here. A sister will go ten times a day to see the sick, and ten times a day she will find God in them.... Go to see the poor condemned to life imprisonment, and in them you will find God; serve the children and in them you will find God. My Daughters, how wonderful this is! You go to some very poor houses, but there you will find God. My Daughters, once again, how wonderful this is! Indeed, God is pleased with the service you render to the sick and he considers it, as you have said, as done to himself” (SVP IX, 240).

To honor these crucified Christs, “our lords and masters” (SVP XI, 273), it is necessary for the follower of Christ to be willing to die

¹⁰ Cf. F. GARNIER, « Enchiridion spirituale sancti Vincentii a Paulo, » *Vincentina* 3 (1979), pp. 15-18.

“in Christ” so that “with him he can live” (SVP I, 320). This “mystical death,” for example, is very clear in a letter written by the saint to a missionary (M. Portail):

“Remember, Father, that we live in Jesus Christ through the death of Jesus Christ, and we must die in Jesus Christ through the life of Jesus Christ, and our life must be hidden in Jesus Christ and filled with Jesus Christ, and in order to die as Jesus Christ, we must live as Jesus Christ” (SVP I, 320).

Therefore, St. Vincent has recourse to the Pauline language of the **Imitation of Christ**, of the **configuration** and **conformity** with the will of God to emphasize, again and again, the need of emptying ourselves of ourselves in order to put on the same Spirit of Jesus (SVP XI, 236). Only in that way can we become like the “divine model,” the Christ presented by St. Paul in the letter to the Philippians:

“Who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2:6-8).

3. PASTORAL PRACTIS

The activities of the institutions founded by St. Vincent have markedly Pauline characteristics. Among these I would point out Charity as the motor of action and the missionary spirit of the organization. We will stop and look at these two aspects.

3.1. “The Charity of Christ Impels Us” (2 Cor 5:14)

The wish that the Daughters of Charity be true servants of the poor, the crucified of this world, moved Vincent to break the “yoke of the Law” which did not permit any form of religious life outside the convent cloister. The birth of the Daughters of Charity marks a milestone in religious history. That group of women who wore a habit without being religious, lived together by the same norms and purposes without taking vows — (their only purpose was) the corporal and spiritual relief of the poor. They were not religious because, if they were, they would not be able to walk about the streets of a miserable town to succor a beggar. But each year, in the

intimacy of their own hearts, each one of the servants of the poor renews the vows; that is, she “commits herself to do what Our Lord did on earth” (SVP IX, 34) in poverty, chastity and obedience.

Like St. Paul, St. Vincent knew how to value and make good use of women’s role in the church. With their action, they became privileged evangelizers, signs of the love of God to the crucified of this world. The driving force of this great but small revolution in the church was Charity. And the motto they made their own is also Pauline: “The Charity of Christ impels us” (2 Cor 5:14).

The love for these crucified Christs contributes decisively to bettering the conditions of the life of the poor, who were already benefitting from the work of the Ladies of Charity, the Daughters of Charity and the priests of the mission. The love for these crucified Christs moved St. Vincent to relativize some rules of community life which, even today, are a challenge to us. For the Saint it was perfectly legitimate to miss prayer when there was some sick person to aid. Even on Sunday, in case of necessity, if someone had to go to the home of a poor person instead of going to mass, St. Vincent recommended doing it without scruples, because to do so was “to leave God for God” (SVP IX, 725).

3.2. The Mission: “He Sent Me To Preach the Good News to the Poor”

It was also the love for these crucified Christs that motivated the missionary expansion of the little company, the C.M. Even in the time of the Founder, the missionaries travelled to foreign countries like Poland and Ireland. Among the missions “ad gentes,” the one that most consumed the energies of the already aged Saint was the Madagascar mission. Like St. Paul, St. Vincent wanted the gospel to be announced even to the ends of the earth and to all peoples, even when, associated with the mission, there was a great probability of losing lives. In the Madagascar mission all the missionaries sent by St. Vincent died — some during the voyage, others shortly after arriving at the island. In light of these tragic results, voices arose in the C.M. counseling prudence, the suspension of the sending of missionaries. Even though he was already quite weak, Vincent did not give in. Like an army which loses two or three thousand soldiers in a battle, but does not surrender, in the same way the Company should carry on this combat (cf. SVP XI, 297-298). Vincent himself shows a desire to participate in this distant mission. But he was already at the end of his life; he did not go. The work went on without him.

Like St. Paul, St Vincent had the firm conviction of having been chosen by God to bring the gospel to all peoples. The love for the crucified never let him abandon the road to Calvary. He knew that the Cross was the only sign of a greater love that, shortly afterwards, in communion with all the saints, he was to experience.

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Translation: JOSEPH V. CUMMINS, C.M.

Possessed by the Love of Christ

(2 Cor 5:14)

by Antonella Ponte, D.C.

Therefore, since we know the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade others; but we are clearly apparent to God, and I hope we are also apparent to your consciousness. We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you an opportunity to boast of us, so that you may have something to say to those who boast of external appearance rather than of the heart. For if we are out of our minds, it is for God; if we are rational, it is for us. For the love of Christ possesses us, once we have come to the conviction that one died for all; therefore, all have died. He indeed died for all, so that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. Consequently, from now on we regard no one according to the flesh; even if we once knew Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know him so no longer. So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come.

(2 Cor 5:11-17)

“L’amore del Cristo infatti ci possiede” (“For the love of Christ possesses us”). This is the text of the translation of 2 Cor 5:14a in *La Sacra Bibbia*, CEI 2008. We recall the previous translation, “the love of Christ impels us,” and, perhaps even more, the Vulgate version, *“Caritas enim Christi urget nos.”* It is useless to deny that the verb “to possess,” as used in the new translation, is a surprise. Still, it is worthwhile to look even quickly at some modern language translations to verify the notable differences of translation of the Greek text; this is a clear sign of the semantic multiplicity of the Greek: *hē gar agapē tou Christou sunechei hēmas* and of the resulting exhaustion facing a translator. Since every text should be understood in its context, it is still important i) to place the pericope of 5:11-17 in the epistle; and then ii) to understand the organization of the text itself, and then, within it, to understand the function and meaning of the affirmation: *hē gar agapē tou Christou sunechei hēmas*.

i) The context of 2 Cor 5:11-17

After the “preamble” (1:1-11) Paul shares some news, announces the change of his itinerary, and then begins to speak of himself and his own behavior. He has to defend himself against some accusations: his behavior is considered ambiguous and not very sincere. In 2:12 he begins to tell the story of his ministry and his journey to Macedonia to meet Titus. The repetition of the story of his journey leads him to make a long digression filling several chapters, up to 7:4, dealing with his ministry as an apostle. In chapter 5, Paul stopped to reflect on the transitoriness of the human condition and in verse 10 conclude with an admonition: we will all appear before the judgment seat of God and our works will be judged by him.

ii) The context of verse 14a and the organization of verses 14-16

In verse 11, linking himself with the preceding discourse on the judgment of God, “therefore since we know the fear of the Lord...” Paul begins to speak of the apostolate and of the necessity of proclaiming it which moves him to “convince” the non-believers. He is conscious of having enemies and also knows that the Corinthians must combat the accusations that they are moving against him, and, among others, that he is suspected of being mad. The reference comes spontaneously to mind of an episode narrated by Luke in Acts 26. Paul is in the court room, before King Agrippa and the Roman governor Festus, and he reports his Damascus experience. Festus interrupts him and exclaims: “You are mad, Paul. Much learning is driving you mad” (Acts 26:24).

The accusation of madness, therefore, was not new for Paul, and he defended himself energetically: certain facts happened because of his zeal, his ardor for God. On the other hand, the Corinthians can testify to his calmness while among them. “Mad” for God, but “rational” for his brethren: this is how the apostle defines himself.

In verse 14, Paul interrupts his apologia; he has no need of defending himself with his audience, and he has just affirmed that he can speak in a balanced way with them. He can open his heart to them and express what he is experiencing in the deepest part of his being. He senses the need of unveiling what stands at the beginning of his behavior. He then affirms: “The love of Christ finally possesses us; and we know that the one died for all, and so all have died. And he died for all because those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died and rose for them.”

Schematically, the text can be organized as follows:

Thesis	<i>For the love of Christ possesses us.</i>	<i>hē gar agapē tou Christou sunechei hēmas</i>
Motivation	<i>once we have come to the conviction that one died for all</i>	<i>krinantas touto, hoti heis huper pantōn apethanen</i>
Result	<i>Therefore all have died</i>	<i>ara hoi pantes apethanon</i>
Purpose	<i>He indeed died for all so that those who live might <u>no longer</u> live for themselves <u>but</u> for him who for their sake died and was raised.</i>	<i>kai huper pantōn apethanen hina hoi zōntes <u>mēketi</u> heautois zōsin <u>alla</u> tō[i] <u>huper autōn apothanonti</u> kai egerthenti</i>

The organization of the text is linear. The main sentence illustrates the thesis: “For the love of Christ possesses us,” (*hē gar agapē tou Christou sunechei hēmas*), and the participle¹ (*krinantas touto*) expresses the motivation: “And we have come to the conviction that one died for all,” (*hoti heis huper pantōn apethanen*). Then, with great ability, Paul continues his argument and, thanks to the repetition of the verb “to die” (*apethanon, apethanen*) he holds the argumentation together. In addition, using the Greek particle *ara* (therefore), he demonstrates the result: “All have died” (*hoi pantes apethanon*); and thus, with the conjunction expressing purpose *hina* (so that), he explains the purpose: “So that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised” (*hoi zōntes mēketi heautois zōsin alla tō[i] huper autōn apothanonti kai egerthenti*).

The Thesis: *hē gar agapē tou Christou sunechei hēmas*

Paul immediately reveals the origin, the source of his apostolic ministry: the love of Christ (*hē agapē tou Christou*). Greek has various terms² to define love, but the favored term in the New Testament

¹ Literally, “knowing,” but it can be translation, as in Italian, as “we know.”

² Besides *agapē* there are other terms in Greek: *storgē*, the mutual love of spouses, and then toward children, or the love of brothers and of children for their parents; *erōs*, which is especially passionate love; *filia*, mainly the love of friendship among equals.

is *agapē*. This particular expression of love is for that which, “in contrast to other types of love that can remain hidden in the depths of the person, it must be manifested, it must show itself.”³ Of all the New Testament authors, it is Paul who uses *agapē* the most, and he is the only one to use the expression we find in this text under discussion, “the *agapē* of Christ, (*hē agapē tou Christou*).⁴ In fact, it is not easy to specify the meaning of the genitive here, *tou Christou*. In 2 Thess 3:5, there is a similar expression, “the *agapē* of God,” (*hē agapē tou Theou*), where the genitive indicates possession (the “subjective genitive,” the love with which God loves). Still, the context (see v. 13) may suggest that the genitive *tou Christou* is objective, indicating the object, (the love of Paul for Christ). It is probable that both possibilities are not excluded.⁵ Although we cannot task grammar itself to express a concept that belongs to the realm of mystical theology, we can still try to explain as follows the expression *hē agapē tou Christou*: it is Christ’s but at the same time it is love for Christ.⁶ To explain the meaning of the expression *hē agapē tou Christou* we would have to have a verb that expresses action. But it is exactly around the difficult translation of the verb *sunechō* that our reflection revolves. The Greek language recognizes three basic meanings for this verb:⁷

- 1) “To hold something together.” This is its fundamental sense, its oldest meaning. The other uses of the verb developed out of this and go beyond a purely concrete meaning. We find it, for example, used to express the action of the gods who “hold the cosmos together,” and, hence, it acquires the meaning of “maintaining order.”
- 2) “To enclose, close.” Derived from the fundamental meaning of holding something together, it shows a developing idea of an act of constricting or enclosing.
- 3) The third meaning, “to oppress, to overpower, to dominate,” pushes the preceding meaning to the edges of the semantic field.

³ C. SPICO, “*Agapē*,” in: *Note di Lessicografia Neotestamentaria*, GLNTS 4, vol. I, 55.

⁴ The other two occurrences are in Rom 8:35 and Eph 3:19.

⁵ Zerwick defines it as “*genitivus generalis*.” Cf. M. ZERWICK, *Graecitas Biblica*, Roma, 1966, § 36.

⁶ C. SPICO, “*Sunechō*,” in: *Note di Lessicografia Neotestamentaria*, GLNTS 4, vol. II, 624, note 16, defines it as “comprehensive genitive.”

⁷ Cf. H. KÖSTER, “*Sunechō*,” in GLNT XIII, 213-236.

Given the various ways of translating the verb *sunechō* in 2 Cor 5:14a, it is interesting to see how different other translations are in modern Italian: “ci incalza” (Bibbia, ed. Marietti 1964), “ci comprime” (E.P. 1964), “ci spinge” (CEI 1971; Traduzione in lingua corrente 1976; E.P 1995), “ci costringe” (Nuova Diodati 1991), “ci possiede” (CEI 2008); and in English: “overwhelms us” (Jerusalem Bible, 1966), “impels us” (New American Bible, rev. ed., 1986), “controls us” (Revised Standard Version, NT, 1946). Only certain versions reflect the meanings laid out above. We should especially note those that attribute to *sunechō* the meanings of “possess” or “impel.” It is now time to ask whether these shades of meaning are present in New Testament Greek. Sometimes the New Testament can be helped by examining the way in which the Septuagint translated the Hebrew text, but in our case, the Septuagint is no help since its Greek translators employed the verb *sunechō* 48 times to translate Hebrew *ʿsr*, whose main meaning is “to enclose.” Only rarely does the Septuagint use the verb for other meanings. Consequently, what basis did the translators have to render *sunechō* with “possess” or “impel”? The only way is to examine the New Testament use of *sunechō*⁸ and, in particular, Paul’s use of it. We can lay out its dozen occurrences in four aspects of the same semantic field:

- I. To restrain, constrain, press, someone or something in a real physical sense. Lk 8:45: the crowd presses in on Jesus from all sides; Lk 19:43: Jerusalem restrained by siege; Acts 7:57: the killers of Stephen shout and block their ears; Lk 22:63: the soldiers keep guard over Jesus (literally, restrain him). In all these texts, the verb is transitive and has an object being restrained.
- II. Related to the previous meaning is that of “to crush,” or “to oppress,” always in a real sense, but accomplished through illness (Matt 4:24; Lk 4:38; Acts 28:8) or fear (Lk 8:37).
- III. A meaning distant from the preceding ones⁹ is in Acts 18:5 where Paul is presented as completely dedicated to preaching. Here *sunechō* means “to dedicate oneself completely.” Contrary to the preceding meanings, in which the action expressed by the verb means to impose some limit on the subject, here by contrast the verb has a dynamic value and is carried out positively.

⁸ In all, 12 occurrences: 9 in Luke (Gospel, Acts), 1 in Matthew, 2 in Paul: 2 Cor 5:14 and Phil 1:23.

⁹ The meaning in classical Greek, for example in Plutarch.

- IV. A final meaning, still linked to the semantic field “to constrain,” is that found in Phil 1:23 and Luke 12:50. In these two texts, *sunechō* is linked to the idea of “to constrain,” but not in a physical or even moral sense, since in these texts the constriction or force is exercised on the interior level. The verb *sunechō*, therefore expresses the idea of “to torment oneself interiorly,” or “to suffer anxiety.” In Phil 1:23 “I am caught between the two” (*sunechomai de ek tōn duo*): “I long to depart this life and be with Christ, for that is far better.” In Luke 12:50 Jesus says: “There is a baptism with which I must be baptized, and how great is my anguish (*sunechomai heōs hotou telesthē*), until it is accomplished.”

An observation emerges from this overview: the translation given by the Italian Bibbia CEI 2008 “the love of Christ possesses us” does not respect any of the meanings present in the New Testament. “To possess” may be considered as a meaning derived from “to crush” or “to overwhelm,” such that a reality presses me, moves me on or may invade me or possess me. It therefore appears that the translators made an interpretive choice based on context. We now have to examine the context by considering the elements brought to light in our initial outline: motivation, results and purpose.

Motivation, Result, Purpose

V. 14b Christ “died for all” Paul affirms. The traditional formulation in 1 Cor 15:3 “he died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures” (*apethanen huper tōn hamartiōn hemōn kata tas grafas*) has been changed. Christ dies not “according to the scriptures” but “for all.” This is a rereading in a universalist framework concerning the death of Jesus. Paul employed well the repetition of the verb “to die” and its contrast “to live” to construct the following outline:

- A** And once we have come to the conviction that one **died** for all; therefore, all **have died**
- B** and he **died** for all so that those who **live** might no longer **live** for themselves
- A'** but for him who for their sake **died** and **was raised**

A) Christ died for all and the efficacy of his death has reached all and is so great that Paul affirms: “All have died.” This is an absolute image, expressing in a dramatic and grandiose totality the solidarity

of Christ with the human condition, but also with the benefits received from humanity.

B) The goal of this “died for all” is introduced by the conjunction “so that” and it is explained: “Those who live might not live any longer for themselves alone.” Paul says that the death of Christ brings forth new men no longer centered on themselves alone but freed from the prison of egoism.

A’) “... but for him who died and rose for them.” Up to this point, Paul has spoken separately of “to die” and “to live,” which we find in the combining of the concepts “died and risen” (where “to rise” takes the place of “to live.”) This binomial is not simply a linguistic play on words since it brings about the important affirmation according to which, in Christ who died and rose for all, men find the center of their existence, the orientation of their life that is no longer egotistical, the dimension of new men.

Paul dwells on contemplating this extraordinary newness that takes over a man, and he continues his reflection: (5:16-17) “Consequently, from now on we regard no one according to the flesh; even if we once knew Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know him so no longer. So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come.” The ancient prophecies (cf. Isa 43:18-19; 65:17; 66:22) have reached their fulfillment: a new man is born made in the image of Christ (cf. Col 3:10; Eph 2:15; 4:24).

The construction of his thought

As a final operation it is possible to reread the text and to follow the development of Paul’s thought by observing the conjunctions and their logical links.

V. 14a: FOR the love of Christ possesses us. The particle “for” (*gar*)¹⁰ joins the reflection on the agape of Christ to the preceding text in which Paul is defined as “out of his mind” for God but “rational” with the Corinthians. The conjugation “for” binds the love of Christ with the divine sphere, the same that determines Paul’s “madness” (v. 13). The love of Christ that is in us, like the “madness” in Paul, finds its cause in God.

¹⁰ Perhaps it would be preferable to keep the causal value of the particle *gar*, translating it with “since” as did the CEI translation of 1971.

V. 14b: The expression “we have come to the conviction that one died for all” is joined to the following affirmation:

“THEREFORE all have died”

Similarly in v. 15, from the principle that “he died for all” there depend the following successive affirmations:

- SO THAT those who live might no longer live...
- CONSEQUENTLY from now on we regard no one... (v. 16)
- SO whoever is in Christ... (v. 17)

All the reasoning found between v. 14b and v. 17 depends on the affirmation, according to which “Christ died for all.” Consequently, the statement of v. 14a *hē gar agapē tou Christou sunechei hēmas* is joined to the preceding affirmation by a causal nexus (*gar*) but it is joined also to the following expression thanks to the participle *krinantas* that the Bibbia CEI rendered in a coordinative way: “And we have come to the conviction (*krinantas*, *knowing*) that the one died for all” with which it confirmed the fundamental event of the salvific death of Christ and its universal value.

The Love of Christ possesses us

The expression *hē gar agapē tou Christou sunechei hēmas* now appears rich in shades of meaning, due especially to the presence of the verb *sunechō*. The translations of the Bibbia CEI 2008 wished to respect this semantic richness in their choice of an open translation, one which does not constrict the reader to a rigid interpretation. Based on the context, they interpreted and rendered the verb *sunechō* with “to possess” and the entire expression as “for the love of Christ possesses us.”

The love of Christ fills us, possesses us, like a power that reaches beyond the human; it is love for Christ that makes us “out of our minds for God!”

The love of Christ fills us, possesses us, so that it might sink its own roots in the cross of Christ. It is not the fruit of our moral force, but it is a gift that arises from the gift of Jesus, who died for all.

And again, the love of Christ fills us, and possesses us in that we might become new creatures, radically changed through the death of Christ.