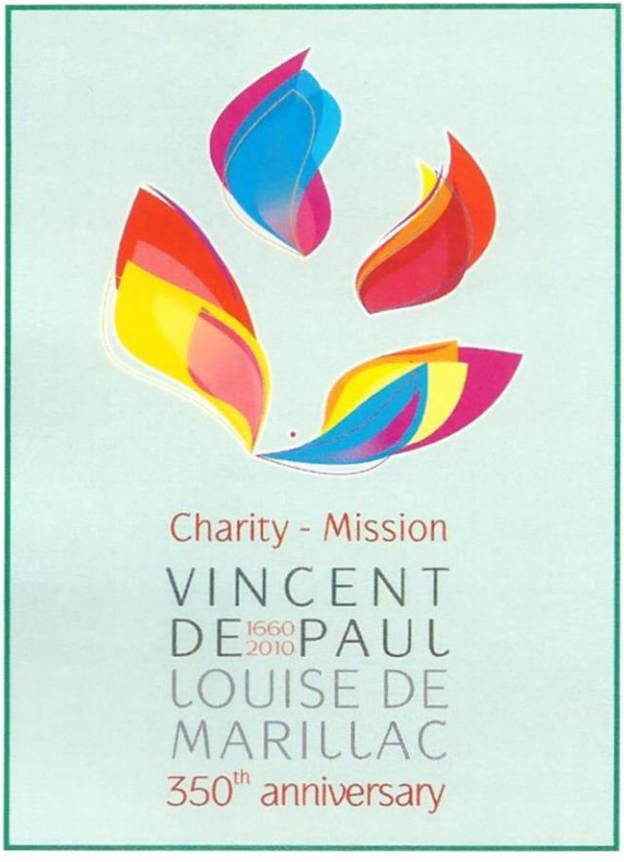
VINCENTIANA

53th Year - N. 4 July-August 2009



Authority and Obedience

CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION
GENERAL CURIA

General Curia

TEMPO FORTE CIRCULAR

(22-27 June 2009)

Rome, 9 July 2009

To the members of the Congregation of the Mission

Dear Brothers,

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

> *"We must decide to live with a sense of universal responsibility, identifying ourselves with the whole Earth community as well as our local communities. We are at once citizens of different nations and of one world in which the local and the global are linked. Everyone shares a responsibility for the present and future well-being of the human family and the larger living world. The spirit of human solidarity and kinship with all life is strengthened when we live with reverence of the mystery of being, gratitude for the gift of life, and humility regarding the human place in nature."*
>
> *The Earth Charter*

I would like to present for your reading pleasure and reflection some of the more important matters discussed in our most recent *tempo forte* meeting.

1. The first part of the meeting was an **ongoing formation** session by our Visitor from the Province of Eritrea wherein he shared with us the activities of the Province.
2. Then we dedicated a good amount of time speaking about the **General Assembly preparation.** Previously the Preparatory Commission for the General Assembly 2010 was present in the Curia and did a rework of the Directory for the Assembly as well

as a calendar that will be used throughout the three weeks that we will be in Paris. We proposed names for the Commission on the Postulata, as well as the Commission for Communication. At the same time we selected four apostolates of the Congregation to be presented in a panel, different ministries dealing with Service of the Poor, Popular Missions, Formation of the Clergy and Formation of the Laity. That panel presentation will be preceded by a video clip of different creative ministries of the Congregation. We also selected the confreres, one from each of the main official languages of the Congregation, to be synthesizers during the Assembly as well as naming the coordinator for the Commission for Social Recreative Activities and a list of possible translators for both simultaneous translation and written translation for the Assembly. All the names of these confreres will be revealed at a later date once we get a positive response from them.

3. We had an updated report on the **350th Anniversary** of our Holy Founders. Among other things regarding the 350th anniversary, we approved $ 25,000 a year for the next five years seed money to contribute to the pilot project that the Vincentian Family will be carrying out, micro financing, in Haiti.

   The Secretary General, who is part of the Commission of the Secretariate, shared with us information regarding the small booklet that has been prepared to celebrate the Anniversary, representing all the members of the Vincentian Family throughout the world, with contemporary images of Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac. Claudio also shared with us the work that has been done so far on the web page window for the Vincentian Family. **We encourage each of the branches of the Family to make sure that they are linked to the famvin web page in the three official languages.**

4. We also reviewed a report on the **reconfiguration of the three provinces of the United States** to form the Western Province wherein they announce that beginning 1 July, Perry Henry (Southern Province) and his team will take over coordinating the remaining transition tasks leading to 25 January and the new Western Province. At this time the Assistant Provincial and the four Council members have been named by the Superior General; the Assistant is Mark Pranaitis (Midwest Province) and the Council Members Dick Benson (Province of the West), Tom Stehlik (Southern Province), Pat McDevitt (Midwest Province) and Jim Cormack (Midwest Province).

5. We had a report with the presence of Father Julio Suescun, the Director of Vincentiana, who shared with us the **evolution of Vincentiana** from its beginnings to the present time. The Council has asked Julio to include this documented history in one of the upcoming issues of Vincentiana for its historic value and interest.

   The following affirmations and decisions were made considering Vincentiana. We will maintain Vincentiana as a way of stimulating and reflecting on the Vincentian charism. It will be left to the Director to prepare special numbers dealing with special themes which affect the whole of the Congregation of the Mission or any of its Conferences of Visitors. The Vincentiana frequency will be moved from six to four volumes a year. The Vincentiana will continue to be published in the three official languages, but once again, we encourage confreres to help in the translation of the different texts to the official languages. One of the most difficult materials for translation is into the French language. **If there are any French confreres out there who can translate from English or Spanish or other languages in which the original documents are written, please offer your services to Vincentiana.** We will continue to place Vincentiana on the internet, as well as publish it in paper form.

6. We reviewed a report from Father Alfredo Bercera who officially covers all matters dealing with **Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation**, an organization established by the Union of Superiors General. For your information, in 2008 the Congregation of the Mission adhered to the Declaration of the Rights of Children that was prepared by the International Catholic Office of Infancy. The communication that came out of this Declaration was sent to the Council of Human Rights and published on the official site of the High Commission of the United Nations. We also, in 2008, responded to a questionnaire regarding ecology, with the objective of constructing a bank of information of how religious communities promote the integrity of creation in their countries.

   In 2009 with the approval of the Superior General, we as a Congregation subscribed to the Declaration of Organizations of Christian Inspiration and Other Beliefs calling for world food security as well as the challenges of climatic change. Also in 2008, after having consulted the different members of the General Council, the Superior General authorized the adhesion of the Congregation to the Worldwide Call for a New Mobilization in Favor of Infants remembering the 20th anniversary of

the Agreement of the United Nations regarding the rights of children.

The final action was to authorize, on the part of the Superior General, the sending of a series of documents to the president of COVIAM concerning the *instrumentum laboris* of the Synod for Africa. I wish to take this opportunity to thank Father Alfredo for fulfilling these responsibilities of connection with the world of justice and peace in an informal capacity, but which is truly beneficial and helpful for the Superior General, his Council and the worldwide Congregation.

7. We discussed a number of **financial matters.** We did the Mission Distribution for 2009. Because of the financial crisis that the world experienced this year and affected us as well, we were not able to distribute as much money to our developing provinces as we did last year. There was a 25% decline in the amount available for distribution. Nonetheless we were able to assist all our developing provinces, certainly not with what they probably need, but with a significant amount to help in the growing costs of ongoing formation, initial formation and care of the elderly confreres as well as responding to the needs of missionaries.

   Also with regard to the economy we reviewed Statute 101 that deals with the assessment of provinces for Curia support. It is hoped that during the General Assembly we might be able to discuss this *per capita* tax as advice to the Superior General.

8. We reviewed the **Vincentian Solidarity Office Report** from Father Miles Heinen, the Director of the Vincentian Solidarity Office. Since our last *tempo forte* meeting in March, the Solidarity Office has received nine new projects as well as two micro project grants. The Superior General and Council approved the hiring of a new staff member of the VSO office who will begin in September of this year.

9. With the presence of Father Manny Ginete, the **Delegate for the Vincentian Family,** we reviewed the report to the Superior General and Council. Manny updated us on his trip to the Vincentian Family Gathering in Plymouth, Michigan that dealt with the question of systemic change, although it was not precisely one of the continental sessions on the topic of systemic change. The main focus tried to tackle the various needs of the urban poor, particularly in the aftermath of the economic crisis. Many of the topics were of an economic and sociological nature, but all throughout the basic orientation was how Vincentians

respond to the dizzying variety of needs on the part of the poor and how a systemic approach can help usher in this response more deeply. A total of 123 people participated in the event, representing more than 12 different branches of the Vincentian Family.

The other event that Father Ginete reported to us was the continental session for Vincentian leaders and advisors on systemic change that took place in Brasilia, Brazil 10-14 June. Father Ginete reported that overall this session on systemic change was outstanding from the level of preparation, conduct and response of participants. It showcased the vitality and dynamism of Brazil's Vincentian Family as a whole and the enduring commitment of the various branches to the charism and mission. There were a total of 114 participants representing 11 different branches of the Vincentian Family.

The upcoming activities for Father Ginete in July will be in Cameroon for an AIC seminar as well as another continental session for Vincentian Family leaders in Africa and then representing the Superior General in the Conferences of Visitors of Africa meeting following the continental session.

Many thanks to the members of the Commission on Promoting Systemic Change that had participated in these continental sessions.

10. On another matter dealing with the Vincentian Family, the Superior General and his council have officially appointed Father Hugh O'Donnell as the representative of the Congregation of the Mission on the Board of Trustees of DePaul International. That position was previously held by the former Vice-Visitor of the Vice-Province of Sts. Cyril and Methodius, Father Paul Roche. I want to take this opportunity to thank Father Hugh O'Donnell for accepting this responsibility and Father Paul Roche for the many years of generous service he contributed to help support this new branch of the Vincentian Family to live more deeply the charism of serving the poor.

11. In the reports from the **CIF team** we had a series of **dates for 2010.** There will be a session for Brothers from 9 April - 4 June. More information concerning this workshop will be forthcoming. The regular CIF session will be 3 September - 27 November.

In 2011 we will have the Heritage Session 29 April - 28 May, and 2 September - 26 November, the regular CIF session. The CIF team hopes to organize another session regarding Leadership during 2011, most likely in June or July. The focus of this session will be members of Seminary staffs.

12. Next is the periodic report to the Superior General from the Vincentian **NGO Representative to the United Nations.** In his report, Father Foley shared with us the activities of two NGO committees that he is presently working on: the Ecumenical Working Group and the Committee on Migration. At the same time he gave us some observations on the way that the United Nations is dealing with the global financial crisis. We also discussed a suggestion that he made regarding better cooperation among the NGOs of the Vincentian Family, particularly with the Daughters of Charity.

    June 5 the United Nations celebrated World Environmental Day. This year's theme was *Your Planet Needs You: Unite to Combat Climate Change*. The theme reflects the urgency for nations to agree on a new deal at the climate change convocation that will take place in Copenhagen in December.

    The Justice, Peace and Integrity Commission of the Union of Superiors General in Rome has issued a prayer service and letters suggesting actions in and around the Copenhagen meeting. It is alarming that the world development, economic and consumption patterns are leading to the depletion of critical natural resources.

    An additional note: The book, Seeds of Hope that was promoted by the Commission on the Promotion of Systemic Change, is now available not only in English, and Spanish, but also French due to the assistance and generosity of the Daughters of Charity. If you are interested in getting copies of this book in French you can contact either the rue du Bac or the Commission for Systemic Change.

13. The Council reviewed a report from John Freund, the web master for the Vincentian Family. His report focused on the web page **cmglobal.org** of the Congregation of the Mission, stating that the basic information and documents about the Congregation have been added across all three sites. The General Council have asked Father Freund to continue to post Vincentiana on the web page as well. The General Council has asked Father Suescun and Brother Adam to be the on-site people at the General Assembly in Paris for the internet web page, with constant contact in the States with John Freund with the hope of being able to promote the Assembly widely even prior to its initiation in June 2010.

14. The Council reviewed the minutes and reports from the various **Conferences of Visitors.** The Presidents of the Conferences of Visitors and Provinces participated in a meeting with the

Superior General and his Council on Monday, 29 June. Each of the Conferences spoke about their strengths and weaknesses as well as major concerns in the area of reconfiguration of provinces and different projects of collaboration. There was a review of each of the different commitments that the Conferences made at the General Assembly 2004. There was an exchange on the proposal of the Commission of the Statutes about the Conferences of Visitors and a discussion of different offices of the Curia that are at the service of the Congregation of the Mission.

15. We reviewed **reports from our International Missions.** Father José Maria Nieto gave us an update on his visit to Bolivia 2-12 May. As a Congregation we commit ourselves to staying in Bolivia while modifying the makeup of the mission in **El Alto** because of reduced numbers of personnel. It has been decided that one of the volunteers from the Mission Appeal Letter will begin his mission in El Alto, Bolivia in September 2009. His name is Aiden Rooney; he is a confrere from the Eastern Province of the United States.

16. In a report from our mission in **Papua New Guinea** Father Rolly Santos the superior of the mission, was unanimously approved as the Secretary General of the Conference of Bishops for Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. Father Justin Eke from Nigeria is also in the mission working as a staff member of the Seminary and teaching at the theological institute. Father Vladimir, the most recently arrived member of the team, works in the mission territory of Woitape and Father Homero is the pastor of the parish in Bomana. They wrote to ask that once again the confreres be encouraged to participate in this international mission.

17. From the international mission in the **Solomon Islands** we received a number of correspondences from the mission superior, Father Greg Walsh. The most significant was the minutes of a major meeting that they had wherein they discussed what their vision for the Congregation of the Mission in the Solomon Islands was, including the future of the candidates that are applying for the Congregation of the Mission. Most important of all is the stabilization of the mission, and fulfilling the original purpose, to run the major seminary for the Bishops and then the other activities that support that, work with the formation of the laity and parish activities. They too request more volunteers to help staff the seminary as well as the other pastoral activities that the mission includes. Presently there are

six confreres in the Solomon Islands, Father Victor Bieler, Father Ivica Gregurec, Father Flaviano Caintic, Father Joeli Nabogi, Father Emanuel Prasetyono, and Father Greg Walsh. In mid-year they hope that Father Augustinus Marsup will return as well as Father Antonius Abimantrono from Indonesia. For the next semester, Father Drago Ocvirk, from the Province of Slovenia, and one confrere from the Philippines will be present.

18. We reviewed a request from a volunteer, and the Superior General will be writing to him regarding the different points to be reflected on in preparation for *missiones ad gentes*.

19. We finished up with a general **review of our calendars** from now until June 2010. Regarding canonical visits: remaining are Austria which will be done by the Superior General and the Secretary General in September 2009; Chile, which Father José Maria Nieto, will do in October and November 2009; and Father Joseph Kapusciak, the Province of Turin in October and November 2009. Father Gerard Du will be accompanying Father Gregory to a visit to Viet Nam in October and he will make a canonical visit, in February 2010, of the Province of Germany.

The next tempo forte will be 5-9 October 2009.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General

FEATURE

Authority and Obedience

Presentation

by Julio Suescun Olcoz, C.M.

This issue of VINCENTIANA includes a number of articles around the theme of its title: Authority and Obedience.

In the summer of 2006, CIF (Center for International Formation) organized a workshop on "Servant Leadership." It was addressed to the superiors of the CM. Satisfaction was such that the directors of CIF thought to organize another for Visitors and other persons with responsibility for governance at the highest level in the Congregation. This was done in the summer of 2008. The reader can find the goals and development of these workshops in the articles by Father Hugh O'Donnell. It is important to underline the interest of the Congregation of the Mission, through its Center for International Formation (CIF) in equipping people, to whom the service of leadership is confided, with new scientific techniques to enhance effectiveness. VINCENTIANA echoes that concern, knowing that reading some articles on the topic is not the same as the practical experience of a workshop.

On May 11, 2008, the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, published, signed by the prefect, Cardinal Rodé, C.M., and secretary, Archbishop Gianfranco Gardin, OFM, an Instruction entitled "Authority and Obedience." At this point, the text of the Instruction is well known. However VINCENTIANA wanted to give it special attention in the reflection that was written by Father Lauro Palu, C.M.

Father Jaime Corera, CM offers in this issue of VINCENTIANA an analysis of the texts governing the exercise of authority and obedience in the Common Rules and in the texts of the Constitutions

of the CM from the post-Conciliar Assemblies of the Congregation. The conclusion is clear: *"Of course there is continuity between the vision that Saint Vincent had on obedience and authority and the vision offered to us by the constitution. 'Of course' because that is precisely what we intend in our various assemblies: to ensure the continuity of spirit between Saint Vincent and the Congregation today despite, or rather through, the changes inspired by the council document cited above: drafting new constitutions in the light of the 'signs of the times' of today while remaining faithful to the spirit of the founder"* (cf. *Perfectae Caritatis* 2.3).

Finally, not only the texts of the CM, and the texts of the Church but also the environment of society have changed their expression of feeling and talking about obedience and authority. That is the intent of the last article in this issue of VINCENTIANA on the new sensitivity in the relationship of authority-obedience since Vatican II.

Vincentiana, July-August 2009

A Report on the Two Sessions of Servant Leadership at CIF

by Hugh F. O'Donnell, C.M.

In the summers of 2006 and 2008 CIF conducted two workshops entitled "Servant Leadership." The one in 2006 was for Superiors and the one in 2008 was for Visitors and other leaders in the provinces. Judging from the evaluations of the core team and the participants, both sessions were successful in meeting and addressing the needs of the superiors and Visitors. The confreres responded enthusiastically to this contemporary theme and it is clear that subsequent Servant Leadership sessions, either international, regional or provincial will be welcome.

The two sessions had different origins. The workshop for Superiors (and other Local Leaders) was motivated by the encouragement of the Superior General and the General Council to expand the outreach of CIF by responding to the needs of the confreres. An evident need was to encourage and enable confreres to accept willingly and carry out energetically the role of Superior. There had been mounting evidence that it was difficult to find confreres willing and able to be Superiors.[1] Local leadership is especially important because the daily life of the Congregation is lived at the local level.

On the other hand, Father Greg Gay's invitation to the Visitors was an outcome of the 2007 meeting of Visitors in Mexico City where the theme was continuing education. Inviting the Visitors

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[1] Reasons for the practical difficulty of finding confreres willing to become superiors may be because they do not feel able or adequately prepared or because the responsibility is perceived to be difficult, thankless or unimportant. There is also the deeper issue of the change in the role and identity of the superior in light of the Constitutions, which speak of individual responsibility, subsidiarity, co-responsibility and collaboration. In addition, there is also the impact of contemporary society, particularly in the importance given to autonomy, self-fulfillment and personhood. Finally, there is the dissonance between the expectations of superiors in a world of superiors-subjects and the expectations of a superior in a world of shared responsibility, self-direction and corporate responsibility.

themselves to engage in ongoing formation turned out to be a double benefit, first to the Visitors themselves and secondly to the members of the Congregation through the leading example of the Visitors. The Visitors were asked to invite another member of their province, if possible and convenient, to accompany them, not only for the shared learning experience during the workshop but also for sharing the insights back home.

Servant Leadership for Superiors

Our goal was to unite our Vincentian themes (Vincent, our history and Constitutions) with contemporary practices of leadership and organizational development. Though CIF is well versed in the Vincentian themes, it was clear CIF needed a partner with knowledge and experience in contemporary practices of leadership and organizational development. De Paul University in Chicago became our partner through its Vincentian Leadership Institute (Vincent on Leadership – the Hay Project) which had already been promoting and advancing Vincentian Leadership at the university for a number of years. Father Dennis Holtschneider, C.M., the President of De Paul University, and Doctor Jack Lane, Ph.D., joined our program and revealed the possibilities of Vincentian leadership through their teaching style and the sharing of their rich experience. Father Tom Lane, C.M., came from the Province of Ireland and gave a very moving account of the Servanthood of Jesus revealed in the Gospels and the letters of Paul.

Dr. Jack Lane was a member of the core team (with Fathers Juan Julian Diaz Catalan and Hugh O'Donnell) for the whole four weeks. He is an affiliate of the Congregation, deeply rooted in our tradition and history, and, at the same time, a consultant to business, educational and religious organizations for leadership and organizational development. His great gift of personal presence to everyone was deeply appreciated by the confreres. He guided the participants in the use and understanding of the ***Vincentian Leadership Self Assessment*** instrument developed by the De Paul/Hay Leadership Project (http://www.leadership.depaul.edu) as a basis for self-understanding and writing a personal leadership plan for growth and development. By the end of the program, the instrument had become a point of reference for the participants.

Father Dennis Holtschneider, President of De Paul University, opened the "how to" weeks, with two days on "How to Promote Organizational Change." He presented "four frames" which have a bearing on leadership and the development of an organization or community: the **structural frame** (nothing can be done without

structures of some kind), the **human resources frame** (the talents of the people and their relationships are the key to change), the **political frame** (the various sources of power and the proper use of power) and the **symbolic frame** (the expressed and unexpressed meanings in our communication and in our way of acting). These presentations underlined the importance of understanding how any organized community works and how to respond with an appropriate strategy. Father Dennis' methodology of stories, examples and participant involvement was a powerful "symbolic" message in itself. Rather than feeling overwhelmed, addressing the complexity of ordinary situations turned out to be freeing and empowering for the participants.

The four weeks were organized to integrate the Vincentian themes with the best practices of contemporary leadership. The first week was **Foundations** (Jesus as Servant, Vincent's journey and Way, Juan Julian Diaz Catalan on Vincent's leadership as revealed in his correspondence with Superiors, and the introduction of the Vincentian Leadership Project). The second week was **Vincentian Community** (the way of Vincent, community in the Scriptures, a systems analysis of community, community in the Constitutions, priestly community). The third week was **Leadership I** (Dennis Holtschneider on change; Jack Lane on the art of leading / listening / dialogue and decision-making). Father Elmer Bauer III gave a very insightful day on Stewardship and Patrimony. The fourth week was **Leadership II** (dealing with special problem situations and confreres; also developing house plans).

At the end each participant made a personal presentation before the group, responding to two questions: what did I learn and how will I use my insights and experience in the future? The presentations showed assimilation of the content of the four weeks, personal engagement, and serious efforts at planning for the future. Each participant had the beginnings of his own personal leadership plan for the future. The team offered to remain available to the participants by internet.

Though the number of participants was small (12), they represented the reach of the whole Congregation. They represented nine provinces and vice-provinces from Asia, Africa, America, Europe and the former Soviet Union: Ethiopia, Eritrea, Nigeria, Indonesia (2), the Philippines, the Eastern Province USA (2), Ireland and Cyril and Methodius (3). As usual, perhaps the most notable feature of the session was the way the confreres became a community. Their feedback gives a sense of the benefits of the session.

Servant Leadership for Visitors

CIF held its second workshop on Servant Leadership at the Motherhouse in Paris 29 June - 19 July, 2008. This session was for provincial leaders and other confreres with provincial leadership responsibilities.

Thirty-five confreres from 16 provinces on five continents attended: Africa (10); Asia (4); Europe (5); Latin America (10); and North America (5). Two members of the General Curia came as participants. Thirteen Visitors participated, each of whom was asked to invite another confrere with leadership responsibilities in his province to come with him, in order to share the experience in Paris and collaborate back home. The result was that a significant number of younger confreres joined with the Visitors to create an engaged experience of brotherhood and corporate responsibility. The participants spoke Spanish, French, Portuguese and English and the simultaneous translations were in French, Spanish and English.

The program was designed and carried out by the CIF team (Fathers Hugh O'Donnell, C.M., Juan Julian Diaz Catalan, C.M., José Carlos Fonsatti, C.M.) and De Paul University's Vincentian Hay Leadership Project (Father Patrick Murphy, C.M., and Sister Patricia Bombard, BVM). Father Dan Borlik, the Visitor of the Southern Province USA, was also involved in the planning and joined both the CIF team and De Paul Hay Leadership team to connect the various presentations and guide the overall process.

Father Borlik's role in facilitating the continuity of the three unified the experience and was appreciated by all. The use of questions was effective in engaging the participants personally and guiding the process from week to week. *What kind of Vincentian leader do I want to be? What are the human, Christian, Vincentian and personal foundations of my leadership? How would I describe Saint Vincent's leadership style? What aspect of Vincentian leadership is most needed today?*

The first week was on the spiritual foundations of leadership, namely, Jesus as Servant, Vincent as Servant Leader and one's own call to be a leader in the footsteps of Jesus and Vincent. Father Gregory Gay spent two days with the group, sharing his vision of leadership and his hopes for the future. He also invited the participants to share their own hopes and dreams. To orient the style of Jesus' servant leadership, Father José Carlos Fonsatti spoke on "Jesus and Power." Father Jean-Pierre Renouard gave a reflective presentation entitled, "The Heart of Vincentian Spirituality," showing the heart of Vincent as the source of his faithful and creative leadership. Father Juan Julian Diaz Catalan detailed Vincent's style

of leadership as found in Abelly, Coste and Vincent's interview with Father Antoine Durand, when he was missioned to Agde as Superior. Father Claude Lautissier spoke on "Devotion to Our Lady of Chartres" as a preparation for our pilgrimage to Chartres on Saturday.

The second week, led by the De Paul team, focused on practices and insights of contemporary leadership, for example, re-framing organizational leadership, Servant Leadership (Robert Greenleaf), Welcoming Diversity and Managing Polarities, and the Five Practices of Effective Leadership (Kouzes and Posner). At the end of the second week each participant received De Paul University's Certificate in Values-Centered Leadership.

The third week was given to integrating the first two weeks and writing one's own personal leadership plan. It focused on integrating Vincentian spirituality and leadership, motivating confreres, overcoming divisions, balancing firmness and flexibility, and assisting confreres to articulate a shared vision of life and mission.

At the end of the three weeks each participant was invited to share with the whole group a significant learning from the session that he was incorporating into his leadership plan. The presentations were brief, but personal and often profound and moving. One theme that recurred in the sharing was the importance of finding one's own voice as a leader.

The evaluations, besides offering suggestions for improving the planning and presentations, opened up a number of valuable possibilities for the future. Clearly the sense was to continue the CIF Leadership program in some sense. Servant Leadership could be offered to specific groups, for example, young confreres, pastors, seminary staff or missionaries ad gentes. Leadership in social justice was also proposed. The program could also be brought to other countries or conferences.

A CD of the experience was given to each participant.

Vincentiana, July-August 2009

Servant Leaders

by Hugh F. O'Donnell, C.M.

The last half of the 20th century witnessed a great evolution in the understanding of institutions, organizations and leadership. Leadership development is currently a topic in educational institutions everywhere. It is theme that has come of age in the Congregation of the Mission.

Confreres are inclined to repeat to one another, and sometimes to strangers, Saint Vincent's words that we are gleaners after the great communities, the Jesuits in particular. This is a useful lesson in humility and it is salutary to admit that others have done more than we may every dream of doing. All of that is in God's hands anyway. But, thinking of ourselves as gleaners from the point of view of leadership, of taking responsibility for our own calling, of recognizing God's call to us for service and evangelization leads us down the path of false humility and sidelines us in our own minds. It is an evasion of responsibility. The Little Company is called to take full responsibility for our vocation, life and mission and to act decisively as Saint Vincent did.

Thomas Merton used to like to quote what the Dalai Lama said when so many Tibetans including himself fled Tibet in 1959. He said, "Now everyone must learn to stand on his or her own two feet." This is true for us today. We must take responsibility for our own lives as well as for our communities and for our mission in the 21st century.

We are now grasping the full impact of what the Congregation of the Mission did in accepting responsibility for writing the Constitutions and Statutes in 1980. We re-invented ourselves. We accepted full responsibility for faithfully living the charism of Vincent in new times and under new circumstances. It was done in complete fidelity to Saint Vincent, the Common Rules and our own history. Nevertheless, there are two significant differences between the Common Rules which governed our lives from 1658 to 1980 and the Constitutions and Statutes of 1980 (1984 when they were promulgated). The author of the Common Rules was Saint Vincent and we wrote the Constitutions and Statues. Secondly, the Common Rules were a reflection of the way the Congregation of the Mission was actually living, and the Constitutions and Statutes, on the other

hand, embody our best understanding of what fidelity to our charism calls us to in the present and future. We have accepted the responsibility to lead in response to the new demands and opportunities of our times. This is both a sobering and exhilarating grace.

The Constitutions and Statues bring us face to face with the fact that fidelity is oriented not only to the past but also to the future. Our fidelity to the past is to Saint Vincent, his charism, his way and his inheritance, which in the past forty years has involved going back to the sources, an effort concerning which the community can rightly be proud. But there is also creative fidelity, that is, fidelity to the charism in new times and under new circumstances. Creative fidelity calls for leadership.

The second paragraph of the Constitutions is remarkable not only for its content but also for its place in the Constitutions, right after the opening paragraph on mission. In tandem with the first paragraph it establishes the hermeneutic for reading and understanding the meaning and challenge of the whole of the Constitutions and Statues. The second paragraph reads:

> With this purpose in view, the Congregation of the Mission, faithful to the gospel, and always attentive to the signs of the times and the more urgent calls of the Church, should take care to open up new ways and use new means adapted to the circumstances of time and place. Moreover, it should strive to evaluate and plan its works and ministries, and in this way remain in a continual state of renewal.

While the first paragraph identifies us as disciples of Jesus with the mission of following Christ evangelizing the poor, the second paragraph gives the historical and temporal setting which creates the dynamic relevance of our vocation today. It is lived in relation to ***the signs of the times*** and the urgent calls of the church and calls us to respond creatively according to the circumstances of time and place. We "should take care to open up new ways and use new means." Evaluation and planning of our works and ministries has become a fundamental dynamic of fidelity to our vocation. The Constitutions anticipate that this dynamic will involve us in a process of "continual renewal," of ongoing conversion. We are called to have the same creative dynamic in our communities in the 21st century that Vincent and the confreres had in the face of the challenges of the 17th century.

Behind this second paragraph we can sense the determination to come up to "the level of our times" and it includes a determination to know when past commitments have been fulfilled, to know when our mission in a particular place is finished, to be open to the present

and to the future, to be free enough to hear the cries of the poor today. It is a vision of ongoing transformation, responsiveness, discernment and attention to events. Still, the past is sacred. It is past fidelity which has brought us to the present. One of the most touching moments in the Gospel is when Jesus is talking about new wine in new wine skins and he says with great feeling for those who enjoyed the old wine: "And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for he says, 'The old is better'" (Luke 5:39). Perhaps in all of us there is a corner of our souls where we feel the old is better. Leaders have to take this into account.

What is the source of new energy in our Constitutions and Statutes? I believe it is the recovery of a sense of mission. It seems to me that after the time of Saint Vincent mission came to be identified with the works of seminaries and popular missions, which was clearly the case in the 130 years up to the French Revolution. In the 19th and 20th centuries missions *ad gentes* also became prominent along with the overseas expansion of the Congregation. The Constitutions of 1954 scarcely say anything about mission but rather speak of works. In the Assemblies of 1968-1969, 1974 and 1980 it was very difficult for some to recognize the difference between mission and works, but the distinction is fundamental and vital to the Congregation. It has become commonplace now in the Congregation to speak of our mission "to follow Christ evangelizer of the poor."[1]

This view of the Constitutions and Statues leads naturally to the role of leadership in the Congregation. This is the horizon, the new world, that calls for leadership at every level in the Congregation. In 1986, as I was finishing my time as Visitor in the Midwest province, I attended a national meeting of provincials from many congregations. A Jesuit provincial addressed us on the topic, "From Maintenance to Mission." He was concerned that too many of us were spending all our time taking care of business as usual and we had no time to dedicate to the mission of our congregations. Leaders and mission go together. Saint Vincent once gave advice to the Daughters of Charity on how to think clearly about new problems facing them. He said first think about the purpose and then all the other elements will fall into place. Our purpose is to follow Christ evangelizing the poor....

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[1] It is in light of our mission that we are called to withdraw from works we judge do not any longer fulfill it (taking time to do it right, for example, in dialogue with the people) see Statute 1. All our works are to be evaluated in the light of our mission. The Constitutions are particularly clear about the directive role of mission in our parishes and educational institutions (see Statutes 10 and 11).

The Art of Leadership

There is a science of leadership, but in practice it is an art. As such, it can be learned. Everyone can learn to lead in his or her specific area of responsibility and as part of a common effort.

The words *leader* and *leadership* are not found in our Constitutions and Statues, but the reality is implied and has been part of our history from the time of Saint Vincent. In the past it depended on the gifts and charisma of individuals rather than insights garnered from research and study. There were exceptional leaders long before "leadership" became the object of systematic study and reflection, just as there were missionaries inculturating the Gospel long before the word "inculturation" was invented after the Second Vatican Council. Experience and performance provided the data for the eventual development of the science of leadership.

Bernard Lonergan, who studied years to understand the genius of Thomas Aquinas said that his purpose was to help people do by method what Aquinas did by genius.[2] Saint Vincent was a genius in his own way, not the kind of genius Aquinas was, but a genius of Charity. He had a genius for attracting people, winning their confidence, evoking their assistance and working together with them. He had a genius for organization and attention to detail. He was busy all the time, but never got ahead of God, not treading on the heels of providence. At the heart of his genius was love. Someone called him the Mystic of Charity[3] in a century when there were many other mystics in the more usual sense of the word. Following Lonergan's lead we want to do by method what Vincent did by genius.

"Method" has a special meaning for Bernard Lonergan.[4] He does not mean tactics or strategies or techniques. For him the method is in the person himself or herself. It is in the way of seeing, of understanding, or asking the right questions, of listening (to God and neighbor), of grasping the reality and truth of a situation, of deciding responsibly on the basis of values, of knowing the differences between the conditional and the unconditional, the negotiable and the non-negotiable. It is not what we usually mean by "method," but it is what we mean by *authenticity*. We want to lead like Vincent did.

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[2] Bernard J. Longegan, S.J., *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas (Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan) (v. 2),* by Bernard Lonergan, Frederick E. Crowe, and Robert M. Doran (Paperback - May 17, 1997).

[3] Giuseppe Toscani, C.M., *La Mystique des Pauvres: Le charisme de la Charité* (Editions Saint-Paul, 1998). Translated and privately printed by Myles Rearden, C.M., as *The Spirituality of the Poor* (Dublin, 2007).

[4] Bernard J. Lonergan, S.J., *Method in Theology* (Seabury Press, 1972).

We may not have his genius, but each and every one of us can walk authentically in his way.

We are interested particularly in value-centered leadership, and, of course, the values we are interested in are Gospel and Vincentian values expressed in an unconditional regard for the value and dignity of the human person. "***Vincent on Leadership – the Hay Project*** at De Paul University in Chicago emphasizes value-centered leadership as it awakens and advances the vision, values and practices of Saint Vincent de Paul in people and organizations worldwide."[5]

Their help in planning and presenting both workshops expanded our horizons and fostered the development of the skills required for leadership. One of the great assets of the Congregation is the presence of post-secondary centers of learning where people strive daily to integrate Catholic and Vincentian values with excellent scholarship and first rate teaching. CIF's collaboration with De Paul points to many other avenues of collaboration.

The two poles of the art of leadership are 1) foundations and 2) the best practices of effective leadership. Our goal has been from the beginning to integrate the two aspects, the why and the how.

Foundations

Our foundations are Jesus, Vincent and the Constitutions and Statutes.

Jesus as Servant. Following Christ evangelizing the poor is the beginning of servant leadership and the source to which we always return. Following Christ means discipleship. It means a personal relationship to Jesus and to him present in the church and the poor. It is in response to an invitation or a call. Vincent learned this lesson from de Berulle. He learned that his priesthood was more than a career and an opportunity, that, in fact, it meant a total and unconditional relationship to Jesus and his mission. Jesus not only proclaimed the Good News of the Kingdom but he did it by going from village to village. Father Andre Dodin, when asked once how Saint Vincent could have said that the Lord waited 1600 years to found a community that did what he did, replied that it was true from the point of view of going from village to village. He said that no other community had every been founded to go from village to village following the example of Jesus. This speaks to the missionary mobility which characterizes our community, especially the interior

[5] See http://leadership.depaul.edu/

mobility of unconditional readiness to go where we are called and sent, as Saint Vincent says, for the glory of God and the good of the neighbor.

The identity of Jesus as Servant and the link to servant leadership finds its deepest Vincentian meaning in relationship and free, unconditional commitment. We are servant leaders as disciples of Jesus unconditionally committed to following him to the poor. It is also important to say that for Saint Vincent the poor are understood in the first place theologically and not economically or socially, certainly not as objects of charity. They are seen as God sees them. For Vincent they are who they are in the sight of God and they are loved as God loves them. This is the invisible and interior foundation of Vincentian servant leadership. This is the dimension which Father Tom Lane presented in 2006 and Fathers José Carlos Fonsatti and Jean-Pierre Renouard stressed in 2008.

Vincent as Servant Leader. The invisible and interior side of Vincent's following of Christ was manifest in a life of remarkable leadership. Here are some of the highlights.

Saint Vincent's primary model was organic rather than architectural — he was the farmer rather than the architect with blueprints. He was tuned into nature, history, Providence, events and people. He did not seek to impose a preconceived model, but acted with detachment and unrestricted readiness, with a great freedom of spirit. He insisted nothing is ruined by taking one's time and that, on the contrary, he saw many things ruined by haste.

He was a collaborative leader. His greatest collaborator, of course, was Saint Louise de Marillac, but the wonderful story of their collaboration has not yet been fully told. Monsieur Portail was at his side from the beginning of the Congregation. He welcomed the collaboration of people from all walks of life, men and women, rich and poor, urban and rural. He had confidence in others and valued their contributions, expecting sometimes more than they knew they were capable of giving. His style of collaboration was creative. He was a catalyst. He helped the women of Chatillon organize themselves in a way that was enduring and repeatable. The same is true for the Ladies of Charity. It was both creative and daring to support them in visiting the sick in the Hotel Dieu. He built bridges between those with money and those in need. For him everyone had a role in doing the Lord's work.

He was a father and mentor to the priests and sisters. His letters show him to be amazingly well-informed about what was happening in each locale. He had a sense for what people needed, whether it

was encouragement or admonition. He was in regular communication with the superiors of the local houses.

He was a visionary leader. Love is the goal, love is the way. Jesus gave himself totally for us, our vocation is likewise *"se donner"* to give ourselves to the Lord and to the neighbor. Whether he was or was not a captive in North Africa, it has always seemed to me that the paradigm of alchemist suited him very well. He met ordinary situations in such a way that they were transformed into something enduring and of greater value. For example, he was not the first to preach missions or to urge general confessions, but the dynamic of the missions as they evolved under his leadership went to the heart of the matter, and would speak to today's world, if we were alchemists ourselves. He offered people a new beginning [through general confession], promoted reconciliation (confreres reconciled families) and established a way to help the neighbor (the Confraternities of Charity).

Some of his rules of action were: detach from the outcome (it is in God's hands), be well-informed, consult as necessary, trust collaborators, do not rush Providence, act decisively when the time comes, and be firm regarding the goal and flexible and gentle regarding the means.

Vincent's life is a study in leadership, but the *intention* of becoming a great leader belongs more to our time than to his. He had evangelical freedom and was tuned into Providence and history. His leadership emerged from there.

Constitutions and Statutes. Though the Constitutions and Statutes do not use the language of "leader" and "leadership," the first general principle states that those exercising authority in the Congregation "should have before their eyes the example of the Good Shepherd, who came not to be ministered to but to minister" and "they shall consider themselves **servants** of the community for furthering its own purpose (end) according to the spirit of St. Vincent in a true communion of apostolate and life."[6]

This service of authority, nevertheless, is done within a constitutional framework, which identifies and guarantees the rights and obligations of all. Authority remains important in the Congregation of the Mission. Those who exercise authority in the Congregation have the right to decide and command what is to be done, after consultation and dialogue.[7] Each confrere has authority

[6] C. 97,1.
[7] C. 97,2.

appropriate to his role and mission in the Congregation.[8] Subsidiarity is a sacred principle in the Constitutions: "Those matters which can be managed by individual members or lower levels of government should not be referred to higher levels of government." [9]

The Constitutions and Statues are equally strong on the rights and responsibilities of all the members of the Congregation. Each one has the right and responsibility "of working together for the good of the apostolic community and of participating in its government" through active and responsible cooperation.[10] This is the first general principle under the organization of our government. Rights and responsibilities reside in the body as a whole and in all of its members. There is a remarkable and unprecedented attention to the individual worth, initiatives, individuality and charisms of each confrere in paragraph 22 of the Constitutions. Like everything else, everything is to be seen in the light of the mission and end of the Congregation.[11]

The voice of each confrere is important and honored in the Constitutions. Dialogue is a cornerstone of community life [12] and is the source of the local community plan.[13] It is presumed to precede the decisions of the leaders.[14] It is fundamental to community discernment and the responsible exercise of obedience. Paragraph 37,1 says: "To participate in this mystery of the obedient Christ requires us all to seek, as a community, the will of the Father. We do this through mutual sharing of experience, open and responsible dialogue in which differences of age and outlook interact, so that common directions may surface and develop, and lead to making decisions." Finally, the road to renewal is through dialogue. "In community prayer we find an excellent way of animating and renewing our lives, especially... when in fraternal dialogue we share with one another the fruit of our spiritual and apostolic experience." [15]

The Visitor and the local superior are urged to be solicitous for the participation of each confrere in the life and mission of the Congregation and the personal development of each confrere. This sense of solicitude and care for the well being of each confrere

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[8] C. 98.
[9] C. 98.
[10] C. 96.
[11] C. 22.
[12] C. 24,2.
[13] C. 27.
[14] C. 97,2.
[15] C. 46.

reflects a level of mutuality and interest characteristic of the Good Shepherd. I know mine and mine know me.[16]

The promotion of the unity of the Congregation stands out as a primary goal of leadership at all levels.[17] It is a unity based on a common mission, shared values, respect, love and dialogue. Coordination and promotion of ministries, animation, and the promotion of continual renewal of the Congregation also define the role of leadership in the Congregation.

Guiding all these decisions is the consciousness that we are carrying on "the mission of the Founder adapted to diverse circumstances." [18] In these brief words we return to the contemporary challenge of creative fidelity to Vincent under new circumstances.

These foundations become the operative foundations of our lives when they are freely affirmed and appropriated by us. A new world opens when our freedom is unconditionally engaged in following Christ in the footsteps of Vincent according to the constitutive elements of our way of life laid out in the Constitutions and Statutes.

The Practice of Leadership

Building on these foundations De Paul University's experience in promoting Vincentian leadership and their use of the best practices of contemporary leadership produced many new insights, encouraged the development of specific skills and enabled the participants to leave with increased confidence in their roles as leaders. As usual, the participants had a lot to learn from one another. The process relied a great deal on the experience of participants themselves.

De Paul's team put us in touch with some of the principal authors in the field of leadership. In addition to the writings and insights of Robert Greenleaf's Servant Leadership, which laid the foundation for our collaboration and transformed our way of looking at leadership, we found deep resonance with The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership by James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner. They have distilled a lifetime of experience, study and practice in the field of leadership into five practices and ten commitments of exemplary leadership, easily understood and identified with within a Vincentian worldview. This became our basic framework for the Workshop with Visitors in 2008. Within this framework Father Pat Murphy, C.M., and Sister Patricia Bombard, B.V.M., enriched our understanding of

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[16] See C. 123,2 and 129,2.
[17] See C. 102; 115; 123,2 and 129,2.
[18] See C. 101.

leadership through the insights of other authors and their own personal experience. What follows is a distillation of some of the most memorable insights.

Authenticity. The most fundamental attribute people look for in a leader is authenticity. When a group of people were asked to name the qualities they considered most important in a leader, the top four qualities listed were: honest, forward-looking, competent and inspiring. It turned out that these same four qualities were the highest also for teachers. Credibility is the foundation of leadership. If people do not believe in the messenger, they will not believe the message. People want to be able to rely on what we say and what we say we will do. The true leader has earned the trust and confidence of the people.

Finding one's voice. Each leader has to find his or her own voice. A leader cannot lead with someone else's values. Kouzes and Posner's first commitment is: "Find your voice by clarifying your personal values." This is especially important in our community where no one seeks to be superior or provincial. The one chosen or appointed has to embrace freely the responsibility and challenges and know what he believes. Each person brings his or her own gifts and values to leadership. Clarifying them is necessary to setting the example and modeling the way (Kouzes and Posner).

Listening. Greenleaf makes it clear that the servant leader listens first. Listening is the key. It is an art concerning which there is a lot to learn. Listening sympathetically and intelligently often is transforming by itself. People want to be listened to and understood. A leader not only listens to the people in the organization or community, but he or she needs to find someone whose advice, guidance and feedback they will listen to. Listening also easily leads to compassion, entering into another's heart and feelings (J.P. Murphy).

Enlisting collaborators and co-workers. Leadership is a relationship. It is a relationship to the other people in the organization. In the workshop it was important to identify the people the leader works with. Leadership, taken wrongly, can be very lonely. Leadership, taken rightly, can involve the leader in a team effort with people who have a great deal to give and want to give it. In the community and elsewhere, people are our greatest asset. Leading *with* people can be a great experience. Enable others to act by fostering collaboration by promoting cooperative goals and building trust; also, strengthen others by sharing power and discretion (K and P Practice 4 and Commitments 7 and 8).

Difficult people and difficult situations. Both workshops devoted time to facing difficult situations and difficult people. Sister Patricia Bombard offered new frameworks for understanding difficult situations and difficult people. She suggested that it may be that the people in question are not *difficult* so much as they are *different*. She cast the question in terms of inclusion and exclusion. Through inclusion we extend our boundaries to take into consideration another's needs, interests, experiences and perspective. "One of the central missions of the Christian community is to welcome those who are excluded." Law, 26. Saint Vincent extended the boundaries of the church in his day to include the poorest of the poor. When it comes to difficult situations she said that we are often called to make decisions that are not clean cut and black and white, in situations which include opposing values, like liberal and conservative, for example. In this case it is a matter of managing polarities rather than eliminating one of them. It is an ongoing process

Motivating. People are motivated by being listened to, by being valued, by being part of something worthwhile, by being understood, by having clear objectives and expectations, by being trusted, by having worthwhile responsibilities, by having their contribution and successes recognized. K and P's fifth practice is: Encourage the Heart: Recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence, and Celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community.

Challenging the Process. A shared vision in new circumstances will create a gap between present performance and future aspirations. It will mean challenging the process, our present way of doing things. Someone has said somewhere that the only change agents we can listen to are those who truly love us and love our organization and love what we are about. I have noticed recently at CIF that confreres have begun to express spontaneously their love for the Congregation. Saint Vincent loved the Congregation. Sharing his love for the Congregation and our mission, we will search for opportunities and seek innovative ways to change, grow and improve. It will involve taking risks "by constantly generating small wins and learning from mistakes." [19]

Inspiring a shared vision. Leadership above all is about the future. It is about pointing in the right direction and leading the way. It is about "imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities"

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[19] This paragraph is the third practice of Kouzes and Posner and expresses commitments five and six.

and "enlisting others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations" (K and P, commitments 3 and 4). The workshop began by asking participants for hopes and dreams, so that we might imagine our common future.

The Future

Looking to the future two questions come to mind: what aspects of Vincentian leadership are needed today? and, what are the possibilities of Servant Leadership training for the future?

During the session, participants were asked what aspects of Vincentian leadership are most needed today? They answered in terms of vision, process and the qualities of the leaders:

> **Vision:** sensitivity to social problems; creativity in developing transforming responses to the realities of the poor; a community committed to speaking out about injustices.
>
> **Process:** listening and discernment; being collaborative and systematic; act rather than talk ("Just do it!"); witnessing and working together as a team.
>
> **Qualities of a leader:** be authentic and credible especially in action; be willing to face problems, confront them and respond to the challenges; be open to present times and be willing to take risks; be hopeful, inspiring and motivating; be strong and prophetic – brave, prophetic and bold (not silent).

Both groups affirmed the value of continuing to offer workshops on Servant Leadership. The Superior General and his Council have encouraged the ongoing development and offer of workshops on Servant Leadership in Paris, in regions, in provinces and also for specific groups, for example, young confreres, formators, missionaries ad gentes. The two workshops in collaboration with De Paul University have laid the foundation for further collaboration and partnership. Most importantly, evaluations and feedback confirm that this topic is very important to the confreres.

The team at CIF (Fathers Juan Julian Diaz Catalan, José Carlos Fonsatti and Hugh O'Donnell) is happy to express our gratitude to the Superior General (who participated in the workshops) and his Council, who opened the way for these workshops and continue to encourage their development, to the Visitors who sent confreres to the first session and participated in the second, to all the participants who as always provided the interpersonal chemistry that makes the experience come alive, to the team members from De Paul

University, namely, Father Dennis Holtschneider, Father Patrick Murphy, Doctor Jack Lane, Sister Patricia Bombard and Ms. Mary McGuinness (in planning the first workshop), and to the presenters Father Tom Lane, Father Elmer Bauer, Father Jean-Pierre Renouard, Father Claude Lautissier, and for his exception work in facilitating the Workshop for Visitors, Father Dan Borlik. We are grateful to the members of the Maison-mere who welcomed everyone warmly.

Vincentiana, July-August 2009

Servant Leadership in the Manner of Vincent de Paul Workshops: A Personal Reflection

by John Jack Lane, Ph.D.

I have been invited to share a few personal reflections on the planning and presentation of a series of leadership development workshops titled Servant Leadership in the Manner of St. Vincent de Paul. At this time, the workshops are presented at the Vincentian Mother House in Paris under the auspices of Centre International de Formation (C.I.F.) The workshops represent one of a number of recent Vincentian initiatives in support of renewing Vincentian leadership in a variety of organizational and multi-cultural contexts. I thank Fr. Hugh O'Donnell, C.M., for inviting me to collaborate with him and his workshop team.

I formed my first impressions of Vincentians over fifty years ago. The men I met then were parish priests, brothers, seminary and college professors, school teachers and principals, and a few returning missionaries. I recall thinking that they had a marvelous capacity for getting things done without a lot of fanfare. I also noted that, by and large, they were affable and unpretentious people. As a boy in Chicago, I admired the work of the Daughters of Charity and the St. Vincent de Paul Society. Thus, without benefit of having read a mission statement, strategic plan, or public relations brochure, I associated Vincentians with serving the poor, the sick, and the uneducated. I still do.

Of course, fifty years ago, the world was a different place. Advances in science, medicine, technology, politics, economics, communication, among other factors, have combined to form new global, interdependent societies. Not everyone has benefitted from these advances. According to recent demographic studies, the number of poor, sick, uneducated, and politically oppressed persons has not diminished during the past decade. To the contrary, we know that when the population in Latin America and the Caribbean tripled between 1950 and 1995, sadly, so did the number of the destitute and

working poor. The 2008-2009 Chronic Poverty Report and the 2008 Global Employment Trend (GET) Report paint dire pictures of the poor, particularly those already living in extreme poverty. Please consider that most of these data were gathered before the current world-wide economic recession. After 384 years, the need for Vincentian leadership and service has not diminished. But fifty years ago the Congregation was nearly twice as large as it is now.

Leadership Reflections

St. Vincent was wary of persons who were too eager to be in charge or who regarded themselves somehow superior to their confreres. I am convinced that today he would have a different set of concerns. Permit me to explain. Over the years, I have met and sometimes collaborated with Vincentians in Europe, Asia, South America, North America, and Africa. Many of these men were pastors, house superiors, visitors, social change agents, and academic leaders. I also encountered a number of individuals who, in my opinion, had great leadership potential; but most of them had few, if any, leadership aspirations and made it a point to say so. With some exceptions, I would have to describe most of the active and potential Vincentian leaders I have known as *reluctant*. For them, leadership was not the reason they had joined the Congregation. To paraphrase more than a few, they preferred "being in the field where the action is to sitting in an office shuffling papers." Most readers will recognize that last statement as the classic confusion that equates bureaucratic management with leadership. Surprisingly, as a consultant and leadership development coach for many years, I encountered that same phenomenon in the competitive environment of the business world.

Potential problems with reluctant leaders

While not axiomatic, it has often been my experience that reluctant leaders, especially those working in non-profit organizations without professional education, are prone to think and act as if they are doing the organization a favor by taking on leadership responsibilities. Such a mindset can reduce the leader's level of commitment both to the work at hand and to the spiritual and leadership development owed to their collaborators. Further, reluctant leaders in a culture of reluctant leaders may feel less impelled to be accountable for their decisions and behaviors. One can easily imagine a reluctant leader thinking or saying, "If you do not like what I am doing or the way I am doing it, then you do it."

Also, I find that reluctant leaders pay insufficient attention to the question of succession. That is, they tend not to prepare others to replace them by arranging mentoring, coaching, internships, graduate studies, and other professional opportunities suitable for promising leadership candidates. Finally, reluctant leaders do not delegate well.

With regard to reluctant Vincentian leaders, I was at first uncertain. Was it diffidence or humility that explained their jaundiced perspectives on leadership? For a time, I found something charming, even laudable, about their outlook. Perhaps I mistook reluctance for manifestations of two of the five Vincentian charisms: humility and gentleness. However, the longer I thought about this matter, the more I realized, how potentially harmful such a viewpoint can be — humility and gentleness notwithstanding. Certainly, leadership entails paperwork, meetings, budgeting, philanthropy, and dealing with egos including one's own. We know that in the early years of the Congregation after 1625, St. Vincent spent an enormous amount of time and psychic energy dealing with the mundane but necessary work of managing an institution. What sustained him was an ever-sharpening vision: Evangelizing the Poor. He understood that, as we now say, perhaps a bit crassly, "More money means more mission." Vincentian leadership is so much more than good management. It is about foresight, vision, and attentive service to the poor and disenfranchised. It is about listening, conceptualizing and developing frameworks for the future that challenge the status quo. It is about preparing practical servant leaders to assist the poor and others living at the margins. It is to lead through generous, loving, and organized service to others after the manner of Sts. Vincent and Louise.

The Workshop Model

Early in the workshops, participants reflect on their experiences with effective and ineffective leaders. Lightheartedly, we insist that as they share, they change the names or omit them altogether to protect the "guilty." The group was interested to note what characteristics effective leaders shared in common with one another. More importantly, we take the time to discover and examine what working definitions or, as they are sometimes called, our theories-in-practice that, for good or ill, we all hold about the nature of leadership. It is during these exercises that many participants acknowledge that they have never formulated clear ideas about leadership, let alone, Vincentian leadership. Throughout the workshop, there are opportunities for participants to identify which values, talents, and

skills sets they would bring to a variety of leadership roles. To that end, we make available a number of well-designed and validated leadership, communication, and conflict management assessment instruments. Individual and group coaching and mentoring sessions are also available. And, yes, we also consider that important kind of leadership available to everyone, the one without formal titles.

One of the major goals of the workshops is to encourage participants to consider how time spent in leadership may be understood as true mission — a service role to be embraced, not avoided. We attempt to present leadership as a genuine mission of service no less important than an assignment to work in the slums of Kenya or the favelas of Brazil. To be fair, I must acknowledge that over the years, I have met a number of outstanding Vincentian leaders who reluctantly but obediently accepted their leadership assignments. Some not only met but exceeded standard leadership performance criteria. They grew magnificently into their jobs. Yet, despite their success, some spoke of their appointments in terms of a jail sentence, counting every day until their term of office expired.

Servant Leadership in the Manner of St. Vincent de Paul

The Servant Leadership workshop programs turn on three key principles:

1. That all baptized Christians are called to serve one another and that Jesus Christ is our Servant Leader exemplar
2. That priests, religious, and laity working in organizations under the auspices of the Church are called to a unique form of servant leadership
3. That St. Vincent de Paul provides a model of servant leadership relevant to 21st century organizations.

Adult Learning Principles

The design of the workshops accords with adult learning principles. That is, presenters and facilitators know that adult learners are goal-oriented and learn best when they can relate new information and planned activities to their own life experiences. Adult learners especially appreciate a good measure of autonomy and self-direction in the learning environment. Another salient characteristic of the programs — and most impressive for me — is the positive effect that group chemistry has on the total learning

experience. For many, it was a foretaste of what community living could be.

Currently the workshops vary in length — seven to ten days or longer. Ordinarily the day begins with Eucharistic liturgies prepared by a group of volunteers. After breakfast, we discuss and reflect on a number of foundational topics, for example: "Jesus Leader and Servant," "The Leadership Way of Vincent," "Experience with the Poor (the Daughters of Charity)."

On the leadership development side, topics include, but are not limited to: "Exploring Your Leadership Hopes and Dreams for Yourself, Your Mission, and the Church," "Finding Your Leadership Voice: Leading Through Values," and "Envisioning the Future: a Conversation with Vincent," "Identifying Partners and Collaborators: coaching, mentoring, delegating," and "The Leadership Role of Women in Vincentian Institutions."

An important aside about leadership definitions. Leadership development is big business. It is no exaggeration to say that today a leadership industry exists in most developed countries. The industry, often based at universities, meets the business needs of the homeland first and then exports its goods and services to developing nations. Dr. Suzanne Dumbleton, a colleague and leader with considerable experience in the publication world remarked a few years ago that in 1999 alone, 2,000 books on leadership "hit the bookshelves." One can only imagine how many different definitions of leadership guided the authors' writing. By the way, it is not only the secular press that produces leadership books. In 2003 Chris Lowney published *Heroic Leadership* with the express purpose of demonstrating how Ignatius and the early Jesuits created a leadership philosophy applicable to the present. Similarly in 2004, C.S. Galbraith and O. Galbraith combed through the fifty-page Rule of St. Benedict to discover *"Classic Management Secrets You Can Use Today"* in *The Benedictine Rule of Leadership*. My friend and colleague, Fr. J. Patrick Murphy, C.M. Ph.D., is thinking of writing a book about leadership lessons from St. Vincent de Paul.

Leadership development experts (authors, professors, consultants, coaches, and mentors) travel the world disseminating their particular brand of leadership development. At the 2006 workshops, confrere participants from Africa, Indonesia, and the Philippines attested to the relative merits of various leadership programs they had attended in recent years. They found that the most successful leadership-for-change programs were those that respected the existing local culture and values and were conversant with local gender and race issues even when the programs advocated cultural changes. Needless to say, the CIF workshop organizers and presenters listened carefully

to the confreres' remarks, eager to ensure that we were as inclusive and respectful as possible in all our interactions. Clear definitions and working assumptions are always important in any learning situation; especially I am most grateful for all that I learned from all the confreres

Vincent understood that the best leaders are servants. He wrote "Therefore embrace that holy maxim (*I have not come to be served, but to serve*) and act toward those with whom you are about to live as one among them to serve them well."

In 1970, Robert K. Greenleaf popularized the notion of *The Servant as Leader*. He wrote: "The Servant-Leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The best test is: do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?"

Nearly thirty years later, Larry Spears (1997), CEO of The Greenleaf Center, analyzed Greenleaf's writings and speeches and identified ten major characteristics of servant leaders. I will try to summarize them briefly. Greenleaf observed that it was not their ability to communicate or make decisions that distinguished a servant leader. Rather, it was their ability to **Listen** first to their own inner voice and then to the voices of those being served. Second, **Empathy** or the leader's ability to convey to others that they are respected, valued, and appreciated for their contributions to the organization. **Healing** refers to the mutual need that leaders and followers have to renew their spirits, to become whole. **Awareness** helps leaders understand their own motivations and the ethical dimensions of decision making. **Persuasion** is the ability to convince others and to build consensus rather than using force, fear, or position power to come to a decision.

Conceptualization is the ability to envision the future of an organization. Servant leaders acknowledge that management skills are necessary to run an organization well but insufficient to create something new, innovative, and responsive to emerging social needs.

Akin to conceptualization is **Foresight.** Foresight is the ability to examine past decisions and organizational processes and structures in light of current realities. Leaders with foresight trust their intuitions about possible futures and explore what new mindsets and actions will lead to effective change and innovation.

Stewardship is the organizational quality that reminds members that they are holding the organization in trust for future generations of persons committed to serving others. A sense of stewardship keeps

egos and pride of ownership in check and encourages members to focus on mission.

Commitment to the Growth of People. Servant leaders respect people for their contributions to the organization but also for their intrinsic value as persons. The leader's respect is manifest by his or her concern for the spiritual and professional growth of every member of the organization. Effective servant leaders assume the roles of coach and mentor.

Building community. Servant leaders seek to create welcoming and supportive environments for members of the organization.

We weave these concepts, traits, and values into our group discussions over the course of several days. I find that Vincentians and Vincentian collaborators easily identify with the ten characteristics. They understand that real challenge comes in learning how to model these behaviors ourselves and, as Vincentian leaders, to teach others the Vincentian Way.

Servant Leadership is by no means foreign to the Vincentian family. The five distinguishing characteristics of the Congregation (simplicity, humility, gentleness, mortification, and zeal) coincide with the qualities listed above. Also, those familiar with the writings of Fr. Robert P. Maloney, C.M., especially *He Hears the Cry of the Poor: On the spirituality of Vincent de Paul* will recognize how compatible the servant leader characteristics listed above are with the Vincentian Way and Vincentian Spirituality. For example, Chapter One is titled "Listening as the Foundation for Spirituality." In this chapter, the author explores topics like: "Listening as an Individual," "Respect for the word of human persons," "Attentiveness," "Listening in Community," "Meetings as Opportunities for Grace," and "Planning for the Future (Providence)." These concepts are Servant Leadership writ large.

According to Greenleaf and his successors, Servant Leadership reverses the old top-down mechanical model of leadership that has prevailed in one form or other for centuries. Hence, this type of leadership places special emphasis on listening, respect, attention, and community. These qualities are means to an end — foresight.

For Greenleaf (1970), the central ethic of leadership is foresight. He noted, "Prescience or foresight is a better than average guess about *what* is going to happen *when* in the future." He said the mark of a leader is to see the unforeseeable. "Leaders need to have a sense for the unknowable and to foresee the unforeseeable." He cites a decision theory expert who advises "If on a practical decision in the world of affairs, you are waiting for *all* of the information for a good decision, it never comes."

What decisions are we talking about? With each passing day the workshop participants shared more and more about their questions and concerns about the future of the Congregation. Some of the issues they presented became case studies whereby we could apply some of the principles and practices we were learning together. Among the major questions raised were:

> How shall we deploy our diminishing human and financial resources? What are our mission priorities? How do we deal with declining numbers of vocations in one part of the world and rising in another? What qualities are we looking for in a new generation of Vincentian leaders? What changes should we incorporate into seminary education and preparation of priests and brothers? How shall we care for our elderly and infirm? How shall we improve community living and increase opportunities to celebrate Eucharist and pray together when there are only two or three of us in some mission locations? What charities should we terminate? Complex as these issues are, most agreed that they are manageable requiring near-term solutions that will affect the future of the Congregation. Most participants were aware that many of these kinds of questions are being addressed by the former and current Vincentian leadership in Rome and elsewhere. The conversations were optimistic and hope-filled.

Understandably, formal and informal discussions concerning the long-term future of the Congregation are another matter. Envisioning desirable future states for any entity requires a different kind of thinking. Trite though it sounds, we are setting sail on unchartered waters where foresight, as defined above, risk-taking, intuition, and prophecy are paramount. Decisions we make within the next five years or so will determine the nature and the very existence of the Congregation. Indeed, as I conclude these reflections, what again comes to mind is the prophetic role the entire Vincentian family could play around the world. The sons and daughters of Vincent and Louise and their collaborators are called to read the signs of the times, interpret them, and lead and teach accordingly. More, they are called explicitly to model the way of servant leaders. They are to listen to their hearts, to the Holy Spirit, to their confreres, sisters, and collaborators and, most especially, to their masters, the poor.

Having collaborated for many years as a foot soldier in the Army of St. Vincent de Paul with Vincentian men and women of all stripes, I know that they have the desire, intellect, talent, and skills to become an even greater force for charity. As servant leaders, with or without a formal title and position, they will work toward the creation of a better world, a world now increasingly defined by

religious secularity. They will attract and prepare lay men and women to continue and to extend the Vincentian mission. I can say with confidence that the Vincentians and the extended Vincentian family are poised to walk among the prophets of our time if they choose to. The Vincentian Flame of Charity will continue to burn brightly, but not without great effort and soul-wrenching change, change that challenges one's Vincentian identity. Experienced leaders know that whether the desirable change concerns structure, cost cutting, process, or culture, it is not the outcome of change that concerns them so much as the daunting problems and double-duty tasks associated with **transition.**

Reality check: A workshop is, after all, only a workshop. It would be the worst kind of hubris to think otherwise. But the servant leadership workshops and similar program offerings have the potential to develop site-level, intentional leaders capable of helping to shape the future of the Congregation and other Vincentian institutions. In addition, such leaders could be incredibly helpful by assisting with the difficult transition process.

St. Vincent said, "Grace has its moments." That describes my experience with the planning and presentation of the Servant Leadership In the Manner of Vincent de Paul Workshops. I am most grateful.

I am grateful to the workshop participants who came from every corner of the world and who, by word and example, taught me so much about walking the Vincentian Way. We prayed together and we learned and laughed together. I am grateful to my De Paul University colleagues whose scholarship has deepened my understanding of Vincent: Rev. John E. Rybolt, C.M., and Rev. Edward R. Udovic, C.M., Finally, there are no words to describe my deep gratitude and enduring respect for Rev. Hugh F. O'Donnell, C.M., and Rev. Juan Julian Catalan, C.M., who I believe led the workshops as Vincent would.

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Readers will recall that Vincent referred to the poor as our masters

Vincentiana, July-August 2009

Vincent de Paul and the Organization of Charity

"There Is Great Charity, But..."

by Thomas G. Fuechtmann, Ph.D.[1]

Vincent and Organization

For those acquainted with Vincent de Paul, several images are familiar. There is Vincent holding a baby — one of the foundlings that he saved from death, or possibly from a destitute life worse than death. There is Vincent caring for the sick man, poor and alone. And Vincent as chaplain caring for the spiritual needs of the convicts condemned to row the French galleys. There is also the gently smiling Vincent in the pictures pervading the halls of DePaul University in Chicago, the university with "his name on the door," as one of the trustees likes to say.

These images tell a truth: Vincent was responsible for an immense out-pouring of charitable care for the poor and the sick, for abandoned infants, for those people of 17th century France on the edges of society, outside the circle of concern. But the images also hide an important truth that we need to uncover to understand Vincent himself, and to grasp the relevance of his enduring mission in the 21st century.

There is no doubt that Vincent instigated, and was the inspiration for, a vast amount of charitable service. "Almost ten thousand children were rescued from certain death. Hundreds of thousands of poor people were helped."[2] "In Paris, at Saint-Lazare, soup was

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[1] Thomas G. Fuechtmann, Ph.D., presently serves as Executive Director of Community and Government Relations at DePaul University, and teaches nonprofit organization in DePaul'a Public Service Graduate Program. This article is adapted from *Vincentian Heritage,* Vol. 23-25, no. 2 and Vol. 26, no. 1, pp. 43-64, and is published here with the permission of the *Vincentian Heritage* editor and Dr. Thomas G. Feuchtmann, Ph.D.

[2] ANDRE DODIN, C.M., *Vincent de Paul and Charity: A Contemporary Portrait of His Life and Apostolic Spirit* (New York: New City Press, 1993), 47.

distributed to thousands of poor twice a day."[3] Religious evangelization organized by Vincent transformed the Catholic Church, especially through the formation of priests.

> Between 1628 and 1660, thirteen or fourteen thousand ordinands attended the ordination retreats. The house of Saint-Lazare alone gave more than one thousand missions. Twenty thousand retreatants were housed at Saint-Lazare and the College des Bons-Enfants.[4]

The image is true. Vincent accomplished miracles. But he clearly did not do it alone. Anyone the least bit familiar with operational detail knows that the key to such outstanding results is organization. While Vincent clearly initiated and participated in preaching and direct charitable work, it has become apparent that he did not personally spend many hours cradling infants in his arms or serving in soup kitchens. As founder and director of major organizational enterprises, Vincent's day was filled with the sort of activities we would — in our time — associate more with a managing director than a saintly priest. He carried on a vast correspondence (some 30,000 letters over his lifetime), chaired or participated in countless meetings, spent hours dealing with personnel issues, and managed a complex financial conglomerate supporting the work of the Vincentian organizational family.

Vincent's biographers typically highlight one week in his life as a key episode in discovering the mission of charity to the poor. It began on Sunday, 20 August 1617. After spending six months as an itinerant preacher in the French countryside, Vincent arrived at Châtillon-les-Dombes on 1 August to serve as a small town parish priest. While vesting for Mass on Sunday morning, he was told that a family living some distance into the countryside was suffering from severe health problems and in desperate need of care. Vincent preached on the family's need at Mass. Later that afternoon, he himself (typically practicing what he preached) set out on the road to visit the poor family. As the story goes, he discovered a veritable procession of people from the parish also on the way to provide assistance. Vincent quickly took stock of the situation: "There is great charity," he said, "but it is badly organized."[5]

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[3] *Like a Great Fire,* Edward Udovic, C.M., ed., English edition (Strasbourg: Editions du Signe, 1995), 16.

[4] Dodin, *Vincent de Paul,* 47.

[5] *Like a Great Fire,* 17.

Vincent's quick assessment led to an emergent organization. He identified nine women (including the châtelaine) willing to provide assistance. They agreed to take turns, one day at a time, filling in for one another's absence. This event is seen as paradigmatic: "Thus was born the Vincentian style of charity."[6] Before the end of the year, in December 1617, the Confraternity of Charity was officially established in Châtillon, with a celebratory visit from the vicar of Laon marking the event. The incident at Châtillon laid the groundwork for the Confraternities of Charity throughout France — a network of grassroots organizational initiatives that channeled individual good will into effective service of the poor.

The Chatillon story, brief as it is, bears careful scrutiny. It is important in understanding the link between Vincent the inspiring preacher and personal caregiver, and the Vincentian family of organizations devoted to the same mission nearly four centuries later. What really happened at Chatillon, and why can it be considered as paradigmatic for Vincent's approach to the organization of charity?

I see four separate moments in the story. First is the moment of *inspiration*: Vincent's preaching identified the problem and communicated it to a larger group. Second is the moment of *response*: the outpouring of charitable activity that spontaneously set in motion the procession of aid to the poor family. Third is the moment of *assessment*: Vincent's realization that the "great charity" that suddenly materialized needed some structure in order to be more effective, and to last beyond that Sunday itself. Fourth is the moment of *organization*: Vincent taking the people's impetus to serve a step further, and creating the simple but effective organization that within weeks was patterned into the Confraternity of Charity model. That parish-based model for lay action in the service of the poor revolutionized the provision of welfare in 17th century France.

Vincent's early biographers were impressed with his "prodigious activity." According to Dodin's 20th century interpretation of Vincent (first published in French in 1960), early writers were "unable to escape the magnetic field of Vincent's ceaseless energy. Vincent's activity continued to overshadow his inferiority."[7] With the recovery of Vincent's papers, particularly the publication of thousands of letters from his voluminous correspondence, scholarship on Vincent has focused on the man himself and the driving motivation for his

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[6] Ibid.

[7] Dodin, *Vincent de Paul,* 50.

work.[8] Thus Hugh O'Donnell, C.M., Dodin's English translator, was impressed with the realization that "Vincent did not have a spirituality. He had a spiritual way." According to O'Donnell, the slim Dodin volume "reveals Vincent's inferiority in relation to history, circumstances and events." [9]

In recent decades the focus on Vincent's "spiritual way" has been important, both for understanding the man himself, and for his personal contribution to Christian spirituality. But the key to understanding Vincent is always (again in the words of Dodin) that: "He reties the knot between religion and action." [10] The first "precept" for understanding Vincent's spiritual way is, "Life must expand constantly through action." [11]

The principle underlying Vincent's organizational activity — important as it is — became clearer to the English-speaking world in 2003 with the publication of the English translation of Vincent's papers dealing with the organizations he founded.[12] Volumes 13a and 13b of *Vincent de Paul: Correspondence, Conferences, Documents* include 725 pages of documents on organizational matters pertaining to the Congregation of the Mission, the Confraternities of Charity, the Daughters of Charity, and the Ladies of Charity. These documents are of particular interest in focusing on how Vincent's inspiring message actually became translated into organized action. In these documents, Vincent is revealed, from the viewpoint of the modern study of structure and management of nonprofit organizations, as an innovative genius. Nowhere is Vincent's practical wisdom more evident than in the study of these pages. They answer the compelling question: Why and how was Vincent so successful in producing results?

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[8] According to Dodin, this thrust in research "started from the letters and conferences of Vincent, which were first published for the general public in 1881. The definitive edition of letters, conferences and documents by Pierre Coste in 1920-1925 set off a new wave of research, writing and reflection" (Ibid.) The English translation of Vincent's papers has progressed to include volumes 1-8, along with 13a and b. *Vincent De Paul: Correspondence, Conferences, Documents,* Marie Poole, D.C., trans. and ed., et al., Vols. 1-8, 13a & b (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 1985-2003). Hereinafter cited as CCD.

[9] Hugh O'Donnell, "Preface," in Dodin, *Vincent de Paul,* 7.

[10] Dodin, *Vincent de Paul,* 73.

[11] Ibid.

[12] CCD 13a and 13b.

Profile of the Charitable Organization in Vincent's Practice

In the United States, the past two decades have seen an explosion of interest in the study of nonprofit organizations. This literature is helpful as a background to reading the Vincentian documents. The student of today's nonprofit organization will quickly notice organizational themes in Vincent's practical rules that exemplify the advice of modern critics. The organizational viewpoint here is particularly informed by the writings of John Carver, who is responsible for a virtual revolution in the understanding of governance of nonprofit organizations in America.[13] Carver's theory focuses especially on organizational features that produce *results,* those that make a difference in achieving the organization's mission. A reading of Vincentian organizational documents from this perspective helps to identify important features that explain both why Vincent was such a successful organizer in his own time, and why the organizational thrust he inspired has lasted for centuries.

What are some features in Vincent's practice that modern nonprofit organizational theory would recognize as key for success?

Modern nonprofit organization theory would recognize three features in Vincent's practice: the attention Vincent paid to the organization's foundation, mission, and structure.

1. Foundation

A major difference between an informal social group and a formal organization is a legally recognizable charter of incorporation. The founding document of the Daughters of Charity provides a good example. What began as an informal group of women dedicated to the "spiritual way" articulated and practiced by Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac became a formal, corporate organization recognized in civil law through the instrument of Letters Patent from "Louis, by the grace of God king of France and Navarre" in November 1657.[14] This royal charter of incorporation was approved by the French Parlement, 16 December 1658. Several features of the Letters Patent are of particular interest.

a) *Legal incorporation.* The royal document identifies the reason for formal incorporation: "It usually happens that works involving the service of God die out with those who have begun them...." [15]

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[13] John Carver, *Boards that Make a Difference* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997); and *Reinventing Your Board* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997).

[14] CCD 13b, 230-235.

[15] CCD 13b, 232.

To assure the continuance of the organization and its service to the poor, the document notes that the King's father has already endowed the organization with revenue from a royal estate, and confirms an additional annual revenue from the profits of a Rouen coach line.[16] The King authorizes and entrusts the organization to the guidance of the "dearly beloved Vincent de Paul for so long as it might please God to preserve his life, and, after him, to his successors as Superiors General." "By these letters signed in our own hand," the King "approves, confirms and authorizes the organization" so that it "may remain firm and stable, now and for the future."[17]

b) *Protected status*. The Letters Patent places under royal protection both the persons and the property of the organization, "very expressly prohibiting and forbidding all persons, whatever rank or position they hold, to conspire against or introduce anything that may be harmful to the Confraternity"[18]

c) *Property*. The Letters Patent confer the right to receive and hold property, "both movable and immovable," by donations *inter vivos* or by will because of death.[19]

d) *Tax-free status*. The Letters Patent confirm the tax-free status of property owned by the community. The organization is not obliged to pay us or our successors the Kings any taxes, sales, rights of repurchase, frank-fees, or new acquests; to hand over money in hand to someone appointed by the court; nor to pay any financial charges or compensation.[20]

2. Mission

According to Carver, nothing is more important for an organization than a clear and concise mission statement, or (in his more technical language) a "global ends statement."[21] Such a statement, preferably in one sentence, should identify the organization's purpose and how it proposes to make a difference. This sounds simple, but for many organizations (even universities) the task is deceptively difficult. The Vincentian documents provide a variety of examples of Vincent's clear thinking about mission.

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[16] CCD 13b, 231.
[17] CCD 13b, 233.
[18] CCD 13b, 234.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Carver, *Reinventing Your Board,* 135-156.

In Vincent's initial organization at Châtillon, the founding document clearly articulates an interconnected two-part mission:

> (T)hey propose two aims, namely to assist body and soul: the body by nourishing it and tending to its ailments, the soul by preparing those who seem to be tending toward death to die well, and preparing those who will recover to live a good life.[22]

In this first organizational effort, Vincent achieves a lucidity in the "global ends statement" that may be considered a model for any organization.

In the General Regulations for the Charities of Women, this mission statement has become even more concise, but has a more inclusive spiritual dimension: "(1) To honor the love Our Lord has for those who are poor; (2) To assist poor persons corporally and spiritually." [23] For Vincent, these two elements are inseparable.

In Vincent's approach the mission, or ends, statement is the first principle of good management. In a Council of the Daughters of Charity, 19 June 1647, Vincent stated: "Sisters, to teach you how to do business, I will tell you that, when matters are proposed, before everything else consider the purpose." [24] The same clarity and simplicity informs the job description of the Sister Servant (chief administrator) at the Foundling Hospital in Paris:

> It is the responsibility of the Sister Servant of the Foundlings to see that the Sisters and the wet nurses do their duties well and that the children are raised and assisted, corporally and spiritually, in the way the Rules prescribe.[25]

3. Organizational structure

The Vincentian documents provide numerous examples of Vincent's expertise in organizational design and management. In particular, Vincent prescribed a participatory, even democratic, style of organizational structure and dynamics. He dealt in very specific terms with such organizational issues as the number and duties of officers, election of officers and term limits, membership, the conduct of meetings, personnel administration, and operational details. As to these issues, the General Rules for Charities of Women are instructive.

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[22] CCD 13b, 3.
[23] CCD 13b, 1.
[24] CCD 13b, 271.
[25] CCD 13b, 216.

Consider the example afforded by the organization of local chapters of women volunteering to serve the poor at the parish level:

I. *Officers*. Every organization needs to identify leaders responsible for specific organizational tasks. Vincent specifies four officers, the first three chosen by the women themselves. (1) The Superioress or Directress has the general task and responsibility of "seeing that regulations are observed and all do their duty well." (2) The Treasurer or First Assistant is to manage the organization's finances. She is instructed to keep the money in a strongbox with two locks (she has one key, the Directress the other) — a principle predating the modern organizational practice of having checks signed by two officers. Vincent also instructs that some petty cash always be available. (3) The Supervisor of Furnishings (or Second Assistant) is responsible for managing the linen and other furnishings, and seeing that the clothes are washed. (4) The Procurator is the only male officer, a man chosen by the group to manage legal affairs. This concession to gender roles of seventeenth-century France is compensated for by the fact that the Procurator serves at the will of the Confraternity.[26]

II. *Election and term limits*. The Directress and First and Second Assistants serve a one year term. The rules for the Confraternity specify that these three officers "will leave office on the Wednesday after the holy feast of Pentecost, and a new election will take place on the same day by a plurality of votes of the entire confraternity."[27] The officers may not be re-elected or continue in office.

III. *Membership*. Membership in a confraternity is limited to women, with the permission of their husbands or parents. (Vincent evidently found the men of his time pretty useless for the purposes of the confraternity, but bowed again to the gender mores that limited women's roles outside the home). The membership in a single confraternity was also limited to twenty, evidently based on the experience of managing such a group efficiently.

IV. *Meetings*. Vincent had a lot to say about meetings, probably because they took such a large amount of his own time. His thinking is really based on the principle that meetings are important for sharing information and making good decisions. Vincent's prescriptions for meetings are found in various organizational contexts.

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[26] CCD 13b, 5-19.
[27] CCD 13b, 17.

First, the importance of meetings is addressed in a conference to the Ladies of Charity dated 1638-1639, in which Vincent provides a theological context for understanding meetings. The assumption here is that serving the poor is God's work. Therefore, he says, "The importance (of meetings) is obvious: Because Our Lord recommends them and promises to be in their midst. 'Where two or three are gathered,' etc. And in another place: 'If two or three join their voices, I will give them whatever they ask.'"[28] For Vincent, holding meetings follows the example of Jesus himself. Jesus "had these two kinds of meetings: the full one, when He chose his disciples, and the smaller one, when he assembled Peter, James, and John on Mount Tabor. The Church itself followed the example of Jesus: the Apostles 'called two councils or general meetings: one for the election of Mathias to replace Judas and another concerning circumcision.'"[29] Vincent sees the Church continuing the example of Jesus and the Apostles in the tradition of church councils, through the Council of Trent. Meetings are important for practical reasons: "Because it's a way of finding a solution to the problems that may arise in the Company and, by this means, to unite it and consequently to help it to survive."[30]

A year or two later (in 1640), Vincent again speaks to the Ladies of Charity about the importance of meetings in a conference at the Hôtel-Dieu. "Attendance at the meetings is required for several reasons," he says:

1) because the Rule obliges this.
2) because the meeting is held to deal with the affairs of God.
3) because the work can't survive otherwise.
4) because in so doing you practice several virtues:
   - patience in bearing with the miserable person who is speaking to you.
   - because you will receive a greater abundance of grace than you would elsewhere, in the same way as the Apostles received the Holy Spirit together.[31]

For Vincent, meetings that dealt with the service of the poor were holy time, a pre-eminent occasion for touching the presence of God and doing His work.

Second, the style of communication in meetings should be clear and forthright. Participants should be confident in presenting their

[28] CCD 13b, 386.
[29] Ibid.
[30] CCD 13b, 387.
[31] CCD 13b, 407.

own insights, but in an objective and "businesslike" manner. In a Council to the Daughters of Charity in 1653, Vincent instructed:

> (W)hen called to the meetings to give our opinion, we should first recommend this to God, and, when questioned, be prepared to answer as follows: "I am of such an opinion for such and such reasons...." If another Sister has spoken before you and her opinion is different from yours, you must reply to the reason she has suggested by giving other reasons, and say, "As to what has been mentioned, which is such or such a thing, I would like to respond with such or such a...." [32]

V. *Personnel administration.* Staffing issues figure prominently in Vincent's conferences. Much of the agenda for the conferences with the Daughters of Charity is devoted to questions of personnel management. A council of 8 April 1655, is devoted entirely to the question of whether Sisters sent to a mission in Nantes should be recalled.[33] In other council records, Vincent deals very openly with the question of whether a candidate should be permitted to remain with the community, or sent away, and under what circumstances. Sometimes a candidate was not permitted to continue for reasons of health, as doing the work of the community clearly demanded a strong physical constitution. Sometimes a candidate's personality was judged to be too much of a detriment. In every case, there is a surprising level of honesty and frankness in these discussions. Despite the level of concern for the individuals involved it is clear that, for Vincent, the good of the mission mattered most.

VI. *Operational details.* Records of meetings with the Ladies of Charity, and with the Daughters, go into great detail about the means for carrying out the mission. The Ladies of Charity are instructed, as in a course in basic nursing:

> She will set up the tray on the bed, place on it a napkin, a cup, a spoon, and some bread, wash the patient's hands, and then say grace. She will pour the soup into a bowl, and put the meat on a plate. She will arrange everything on the bed tray, then kindly encourage the patient to eat for the love of Jesus and His holy Mother. She will do all this as lovingly as if she were serving her own son — or rather God, who considers as done to Himself the good she does for persons who are poor.[34]

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[32] CCD 13b, 312.
[33] CCD 13b, 318-323.
[34] CCD 13b, 13.

This level of detail borders on micromanaging. On the other hand, though, Vincent could stand back in admiration of a good manager. In a council to the Daughters of Charity in 1655, very few words suffice for describing the duties of a Superioress (Mlle. Le Gras) who he thinks is doing her job well: "We need not go any further, since, by the grace of God, she's doing — and has always done — what a good Superioress is supposed to do."[35] The same Superioress is later commended for managing the:

> small amount of material goods you possess; if it's lacking, you cannot subsist.... By the grace of God, Mademoiselle has managed affairs well — so well that I know of no Sisters' house in Paris in the condition in which you are.[36]

A consideration of Vincentian documents detailing the development of organizations founded by Vincent reveals a different dimension to his religious leadership. The image of Vincent emerging from study of the organizational detail is both a complement and a corrective to the popular iconography of the saint. The Vincent of the organizational documents is still the simple, straightforward, gentle and immensely caring priest, concerned for both the spiritual and bodily welfare of the poor. But he is also something of an organizational genius, with the skills of a highly regarded management consultant or corporate leader. The documents help to explain the success and endurance of the organizations he founded. From the modern perspective of organizational theory and practice, he did many things right:

- The *mission* of the organization is clearly articulated, and founded in a firm but practical spirituality.
- The *results* expected are clearly defined.
- The organizational *structure* is simple, effective, and transparent.
- The process of *decision-making* is careful to include the information and insights of all the members.
- *Means* to achieving the organization's mission (or results) are well considered (though Vincent may have been guilty of some micromanaging).
- There is great care for *staffing*: it is ultimately the right people who make the organization effective.

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[35] CCD 13b, 324.
[36] CCD 13b, 325.

From a big-picture perspective, the nature of Vincent's achievement emerges. He not only inspired great charity, he organized it and made it effective.

Vincent solved, for his time, two problems: the problem of *linkage* and the problem of *leverage*.

The problem of linkage can be stated: how does the individual person find an effective way to serve the poor, using his/her particular talents and resources, in the time available? The Vincentian organizational network provided a place for people of all stations in life — from the nobility and the wealthy, to the poorest peasant woman — to become connected with a larger enterprise. Random acts of kindness may be wonderful in themselves. But when linked to one another, when charity is organized, the poor themselves are better served. The poor family at Châtillon was clearly better off when the plan was put in place to provide help on a consistent, daily basis. And the caregivers themselves were more effective, and encouraged to continue their efforts, through being linked to a rudimentary organization.

The problem of leverage is similar: How to maximize the resources of time, energy, and treasure committed to serving the poor? For Vincent, organization was once again the answer. The organization creates a system of charity that is sustained over time. It calls forth, or leverages, further commitment by the single individual, as well as inspires and generates charitable acts by others. The funds provided by the de Gondi family to endow the Congregation of the Mission leveraged further donations of property on behalf of the poor.[37] Organization enhances the single act of charity by calling forth and creating further charity.

In his solution to the problems of linkage and leverage, Vincent created a new organizational structure for charity in seventeenth-century France that looks strikingly similar to the system of nonprofit charitable organizations that emerged in the United States in the 20th century.

The Organization of Charity in the 21st Century

What can we learn from Vincent's experience and organizational genius to effectively serve the poor of our own time?

At the outset, we need to acknowledge that today's society, in particular government and the political economy, is vastly more

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[37] See the study by JOHN RYBOLT, C.M., "Saint Vincent de Paul and Money" (*Vincentian Heritage,* Vols. 23-25, # 2 and Vol. 26, # 1, 2005, p. 81).

complex than in Vincent's day. In Europe and North America, government sponsored and funded social welfare programs now provide service to the poor literally unimaginable to Vincent and his contemporaries. To a great degree, the organization of charitable care in this century raises questions of public policy. For instance, the political agenda in the United States includes such systemic issues as, how to assure medical care for over forty million uninsured citizens, not to speak of the unknown number of aliens residing within our borders. Or, how to provide an income for those unwanted workers a technology-based economy leaves behind.

While acknowledging the critical role of policy development and advocacy on behalf of the poor, 21st century society still depends to a vast extent on voluntary charity to fill in the gaps of the government welfare system. In the United States, a "system" of nonprofit organizations has emerged that is part of the solution, and that provides a new dimension of opportunity for solving the problems of linkage and leverage in our time. One question for the Vincentian mission to the poor in the 21st century is: How do we understand and utilize opportunities in the nonprofit organization arena, at least in the United States? That question requires a brief exposition on the nonprofit sector and its role in American society.

The second half of the 20th century in the United States has seen almost exponential growth in the "nonprofit sector." The term "sector" (an image from geometry) identifies a portion of the social economy organized differently from the other three sectors: the household sector (personal consumption of goods and services), the government sector (public goods and services paid for by taxes), and the business sector (the sale of goods and services to make a profit for owners). Organizations in the nonprofit sector provide a needed service to society, but with the restriction that any profit may not be distributed to those in control of the organization. In recognition of their contribution to society, such organizations enjoy tax-free status.

The growth, size, and importance of the nonprofit sector in the U.S. are analyzed in detail by Michael O'Neill in *Nonprofit Nation: A New Look at the Third America?* [38] O'Neill traces, as early as 1601 in Anglo-Saxon law, the principle of tax-free status, an organization providing public benefit without profit to the principals. That concept was carried over to colonial America, and continued in American national and state government. The principle entered American case

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[38] Michael O'Neill, *Nonprofit Nation: A New Look at the Third America* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002). The following paragraphs are based on O'Neill, 1-19.

law through a Supreme Court decision involving Dartmouth College in 1819, which described "eleemosynary institutions" as a separate category or sector. More on the social side, in 1835 Tocqueville noted the unusual (to him) propensity of Americans to join "voluntary" associations.

In 1913 the national income tax law codified the tax-free status of nonprofit organizations. IRC 501 (C) (3) has become the most well-known category, but the tax code includes 501 (C) (1) through 27, plus other groups as well. In the 1930s, the federal government emerged as a provider of welfare, but federal money was given directly to the individual. That changed in the Great Society programs of the 1960s; for the first time, the federal government used nonprofit organizations as a key link in the distribution of funds for public benefit. In 1980, the growing role of nonprofit organizations was marked by the foundation of the Independent Sector — an organization to represent and support the nonprofit sector as a whole.

At the beginning of the 21st century, the organizational achievement of nonprofits offers unprecedented opportunities for achieving Vincent's great purpose of well-organized service to the poor. At the same time, the capacity of modern organizations amplifies the results of organizational failure.

What Must Be Done?

If this look at Vincent's organizational activity has helped to highlight his skill and success in creating enduring organizations to serve the poor, how does that point a direction for the Vincentian charism in the 21st century?

Let us return for a moment to Vincent's experience at Châtillon. His preaching *inspired* a remarkable *response* of care-giving on the part of the village. Vincent *assessed* the spontaneous outpouring of generosity, and *organized* it for effective and lasting results. There is always need for identifying and alleviating the problems of the poor, as Vincent did. But in our century, as well as in the 17th, there is still "great charity" that responds with overwhelming spontaneity to human need. The response to the disaster of 11 September 2001, provides a very contemporary illustration of spontaneous generosity. The terrorist attacks killed 3,000 people, leaving thousands of families to struggle not only with devastating personal grief, but with serious economic problems. An outpouring of donations for the victims families raised $2.3 billion in a matter of weeks. The problem was not how to raise enough money; the problem was how to distribute the dollars given in such abundance. (The Better Business

Bureau assumed responsibility for monitoring donations, to assure that the funds reached their intended goal).[39]

The task of identifying and naming the problems of the poor is always with us. But it is not the only task. As Vincent demonstrated at Châtillon and throughout his life, the next step is to *organize* the great charity that emerges from sheer human goodness, and to make it effective.

For the Vincentian movement in the 21st century, the example of Vincent suggests two over-arching tasks. The first is to seriously utilize, and to build upon, the vast potential of the nonprofit sector for serving the poor. For followers of Vincent, the challenge is to become expert practitioners of the art and science of organizing, just as he did. The complex of nonprofit charitable organizations, those already in existence as well as new ones yet to be invented, offer a solution to the still-present problems of *linkage* and *leverage*. How can the charitable acts of a single person be linked to others, and how can they generate still further charity, with more effective results?

Success in the challenge of engaging opportunities in the nonprofit sector brings yet a second challenge, one only alluded to in this paper. It is the challenge of keeping the organization and its leadership unselfishly committed to the mission. For Vincent, that meant always seeing the service of the poor as God's work. Besides personally being a holy man, Vincent infused his "charities" with a practical organizational spirituality. Amidst the religious and philosophical diversity of the 21st century, that task becomes infinitely more challenging. But service to those in need is the one great plain that can be reached from many religious traditions and philosophical pathways. The direction one comes from matters not, as long as we arrive at, and learn to collaborate on, the common task of serving the poor.

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[39] Association of Fundraising Professionals, "September 11 Reports Update Giving Information...," October 24, 2003, http://www.afpnet.org.

Vincentiana, July-August 2009

The Service of Authority and Obedience

by Lauro Palú, C.M.

When the new Assistants General were elected in the 1998 General Assembly, a Visitor asked me: "What are we going to do with you now?" I answered, "I would like to be a subject of obedience and not an object of your authority." He said to me, "That's a beautiful phrase." I told him, "I have preached these things many times and would like to live what John Paul II said to the doctors, when he whispered in the hospital, after the 1981 assassination attempt, 'Gentlemen, I would like to be the subject of my infirmity and not the object of your medicine.'"

The Congregation of the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life published the instruction "The Service of Authority and Obedience" with the date of May 11, 2008; it is divided into four parts: an instruction (numbers 1-3) and three chapters, which are proposed to help authority in its triple service: to each and all persons called to live his consecration (first part: nos. 4-15); in the building of the fraternal communities (second part: nos. 16-22); in the common mission (third part: nos. 23-31).

Introduction (nos. 1-3)

If man is in pilgrimage in search of a meaning of his life, at times in an inconsistent manner, the Consecrated Life tries to do so in a most conscientious way: "The consecrated person is a witness, a happy and at the same time laborious witness, of the assiduous search for the divine will, and because of that he elects to use all the means available which help to know it and sustain it in achieving the goal" (no. 1). We do it with diverse roles; all are called to obey, some in a particular office by being signs of unity and guide in the service of authority. The consecrated life is a special human vocation, which configures us to Christ in relation with the Father and the Holy Spirit. We follow Jesus, virgin, poor, obedient (and prayerful and missionary). This following is a way of liberation (no. 2) in the midst

of the difficulties of the modern and post-modern world, with the new forms of conceiving and living authority and obedience in the diverse cultural contexts in which we live.

If we ask ourselves what we would like to find in the text so that it could actually be an instruction, it seems that it is necessary to have a description of the crisis of consecrated life, an analysis of the actual problems and their causes and above all a stimulating catalogue of solutions intended by the Congregations and Institutes, especially the new forms of insertion, of organization and formation of the Congregations which renewed themselves since Vatican II, in these two topics of authority and obedience. Moreover, one has to investigate how the missionary spirit contributed to the expansion of some congregations, and how, on the other hand, it helped in the renewal of others, especially in the insertions of small communities in the popular environment (poor villages, young people of shanty towns), or how these places where the consecrated life appeared are called. Another point which would be good to see in an Instruction would be the destiny which has to be given to the works which have to be closed for lack of personnel.

As an example of the way towards the personal (and communitarian) liberation, the journey of Exodus presents itself, in which the cloud guides the people of God. "A group of slaves was liberated and was converted into a holy people, which knows the joy of free service to God. The events in Exodus are the paradigm which accompanies the entire Biblical story and presents itself as a prophetic anticipation of the very life of Jesus, which in its turn also liberates from slavery by obedience to the providential will of the Father" (no. 2). One can see that we could, from this beginning, concentrate our attention on the person of Christ, because we were "called to give witness to the primacy of God through the free obedience to His Holy Will" (no. 3).

In the last decades there were changes in the church and society in the manner of living authority and obedience because of the consciousness of the value of the individual person, the centrality of the spirituality of communion and because "of the less individualistic conception of the mission, shared with all the members of the people of God, from which are derived the forms of concrete collaboration" (ibid). This allusion to the other members of the people of God, with whom we are called to live our mission of consecration, can indicate that there are very great, unsuspected riches in this field, which were not exploited in the Instruction. We know how much the collaboration of lay persons, how much the women (St. Louise, the Ladies of Charity, the Daughters of Charity) were valuable for St. Vincent de Paul and how they helped him in his projects and in

his ways of working with the poor and how all of this radiated in his prayer and in the formation which he imparted to his foundations.

Supposedly, these critical observations, especially when I allude to the "lack" of certain elements in the texts, are not applicable in an automatic manner to the other instructions cited in the Introduction (*Potissimum Institution,* 1990, *Fraternal Life in Community,* 1994, *To walk from Christ,* 2002) and the apostolic Post-synodal Exhortation "Vita Consecrata," 1996.

The indication of these ecclesial texts makes clearer the lack of reference in this Instruction to the concrete life of the Congregations and Institutions: the founders are not cited and the different ways of incarnating the consecrated life through the centuries, particularly in the last centuries are not cited. Sometimes only St. Augustine, St. Basil, St. Francis, St. Claire, St. Ignatius of Loyola are mentioned, in normative contexts, not always the most inspiring. The documents of the Union of Superiors General and Women Superiors General, the minutes of the international congresses on the Consecrated Life, etc. are not referred to.

First Part: Consecration and the Search for the Will of God (nos. 4-15)

This section is proposed as a help to individual consecrated persons.

Christ asked the first disciples, "What are you looking for?" (Jn. 1:38). As believers we are searching for "a living and true God, the Alpha and Omega of all things; the God whom we have not made out of our own image and likeness, but the one who created us in his image and likeness"; a "God who shows his will and shows us the ways to follow... God wishes above all the free answer of love to his love in order to convert us into instruments of his divine love" (no. 4).

Obedience as listening is a filial attitude, because we have certainty that a father alone has good things to say and give to his son, especially God the Father. "Obedience is the unique form which the human person has, to be intelligent and free, to fully realize oneself.... Obedience to God is the way to growth and consequently the liberty of the person." It includes "a project or a distinct will different from his own, which not only does not mortify or diminish, but which gives foundation to human dignity." Only a son and a daughter can give themselves freely into the hands of the Father, the same as His Son Jesus, who abandoned himself to the Father. And, if in his passion, he even delivered himself to Judas, to the high

priests, to the floggers, to the hostile crowd, to the executioners; he did these only because he was absolutely sure that all found meaning in the total fidelity to the place of salvation wished by the Father, to whom — as Saint Bernard recalls — "what was pleasing was not death but the will of him who died freely" (no. 5).[1]

Christ lived the listening asked of Israel (Dt. 6:4). We will also live it so that the Lord may place his laws in our minds, engrave them in our hearts so that he could be our God as we are His people (Jn. 31-33) (no. 6).

"The loving and daily contact with the Word leads us to discover the life and the modalities through which God wishes to free his sons [and] transmits the meaning of his will and the joy for it; it gives peace and joy to remain faithful to him, at the same time that it makes sensible and prompt those things implied by obedience, either the Gospel (Rom. 10:16; II Thes. 1:8), the faith (Rom. 1:4; 16-26) or the truth" (no. 7). The will of God "can be dramatically different from ours. Hence to obey God means to enter into an order of values which is 'other,' capture a new and different meaning of reality, to experience an unthought-of freedom to touch the threshold of mystery" (ibid.).

Jesus, who freed us through his obedience "until death, and a death on the cross" (Phil. 2:8) knew and lived it. When the Father presented him "the difficult chalice to drink," the Son, because he felt loved by the Father and he corresponded with his whole being, "could reach to this type of radical obedience" (no. 8). Our consecrated obedience will not be humiliation, "but the truth on which the fullness of man is built and realized," because "in imitation of Christ and learning from him, with a gesture of supreme freedom and confidence without conditions, the consecrated person has placed his will into the hands of the Father, in order to offer him a perfect and agreeable sacrifice" (cf. Rom. 12:1). "Christ is He to whom all Christian obedience is directed" (ibid.), passing through the mediations of the fraternal community and the service of authority. "In reality, it is the same Lord resurrected, newly present among brothers and sisters reunited in His name, who indicates the way to go," as beautifully said by Benedict XVI.[2]

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[1] St. Bernard, *Errors of Peter Abelard,* 8, 21 in "Obras Completas de San Bernardo," BAC, 452, Madrid, 1984, II, 563.

[2] Benedict XVI, *Letter to the Prefect of the Congregation of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life on the Occasion of the Plenary Session (September 27, 2005),* published in *L'Osservatore Romano,* seminal edition in the Spanish language, October 14, 2005, p. 4.

The multiple external mediations "make visible the mystery of grace which God realizes in the intimate recesses of the heart.... The mediations which externally communicate the will of God are known in the events of life and in the exigencies proper to the specific vocation; but they are also expressed in the laws which regulate the social life and in the dispositions of those who are called to guide it.... The Rules and other ordinances of life are converted also into the mediation of the Lord: human mediation, yes, but authorized; imperfect and at the same time binding; the starting point from which each day begins and also a point for moving forward with generous and creative impulse toward the sanctity which God 'wills' for those consecrated.... It is evident that all this will be lived in a coherent and fruitful way only if the desire to know and do the will of God are maintained alive as well as the consciousness of one's own dignity, fragility and the acceptance of the validity of specific mediations, including when one cannot grasp all the reasons which are presented" (no. 9).

We know that "mediation is by its own nature limited and inferior to that to which it refers, so much so if it deals with human mediation in relation with the divine will," and that it is precisely in these cases of difficulty where the consecrated person learns to obey God (cf. Ps. 118,71), to listen to Him and to remain devoted to him alone, waiting with patience and full of hope, for His revealing Word (Ps. 118,81), with full and generous availability to comply with His will and not one's own (Lk. 22:42) (no. 10).

"Therefore, one adheres to the Lord when he examines his presence in the human mediations, especially in the Rules, in the superiors, in the community, in the signs of the times, in the expectations... of the people, above all of the poor; when it has the courage to 'cast the nets' because of His Word (cf. Lk. 5:5) and not for human motives only; when he elects to obey not only God but also men, but in any case, for God and not for men.... Therefore it is indispensable to make themselves available to the Spirit, starting with the Superiors who receive their authority from the Spirit and should exercise it under his guidance, 'docile to the will of God'" (no. 11).

"In the consecrated life, each one should search with sincerity the will of the Father, because otherwise this kind of life would lose its meaning. But it is of great importance that such a search is made in union with the brothers and sisters; this is what justly unites and makes a family united to Christ. Authority is at the service of this search, so that it is done in sincerity and truth.... On the other hand, one has to recognize that the work to guide others is not easy, above

all when the meaning of personal autonomy is excessive or conflicting and competitive in front of others.... Therefore, authority on its part, has to search assiduously and with the help of prayer and reflection, together with the advice of others, what God truly wishes. On the contrary, the Father Superior or Mother Superior instead of representing God risks recklessly placing himself in the place of God" (no. 12).

The following are some indicated "priorities in the service of authority" (no. 13):

a) In the consecrated life, authority is above all a spiritual authority to be lived in prayer and a humble search for the action of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the brothers and sisters who should be listened to with the same attention which we give to the signs of the times.

b) Authority is called to guarantee the time and the quality of prayer, the environment and moment of contact with the Word which "has the power to build (Habakuk 20:32) persons and communities, showing them the paths of mission, especially in the Eucharistic celebration."

c) Those in authority are called to promote the dignity of the person, "making to each one the gift of his own self-esteem and self positive consideration" (with great affection for all and great secrecy in relation to confidential information or personal communications they received)... before invoking obedience (necessary), the person in authority has to practice charity (indispensable). Authority is not delegated ('with the implicit invitation to all to do what each wants'), nor is one's own point of view imposed ('that everybody does what I want').

d) The person in authority is called to animate and infuse hope in difficulties, to help to set aside the difficulties of each moment, remembering that they form part of the sufferings which frequently stake the road towards the Kingdom. Nevertheless, the evangelical authority "recognizes humbly its own limits and the necessity that it needs of the help of others."

e) The person in authority is called to maintain alive the charism proper of its own religious family. One of his special duties is to assume the charism in his own personal life and interpret it "as regards the fraternal life in common and its insertion in the ecclesial and social context."

f) The person in authority is called to maintain alive the "feeling with the Church," the sense of faith and the ecclesial communion, because one follows the Lord not as a solitary sailor, but in

"an authentic spirituality of communion, that is, an effective and affective relation with the Pastors, before all with the Pope, the center of the unity of the Church."[3] Concrete witness of love of the Church and the passion of Unity is owed to every one.[4]

g) The person in authority is called to accompany on the road of ongoing formation, to offer to the brothers and sisters "help in resolving eventual problems, or in managing possible crises" and "being attentive to the normal growth of each person in every phase and stage of life." He will try "to maintain a high level of openness to formation, the capacity to learn from life, the liberty especially to let oneself be formed by others and to feel oneself responsible for the road of growth of the other." The instruments of communitarian growth are "sharing together the Word, a personal and community project, communitarian discerning, review of life, fraternal correction."[5]

After listing these priorities in the exercise of authority, the **Instruction** presents synthetically "the particular characteristics of the exercise of authority according to the Code of Canon Law..., the evangelical traits of the power which the religious superiors exercise on various levels" (no. 14).

a) Obedience of the superior. He should be first obedient to the law of God from whom this authority proceeds and to whom he will give an account of his work, to Church law, to the Pope, to the laws proper to his institute.

b) Spirit of service. This should be according to the example of Jesus Christ, who "came not to be served but to serve" (Mk. 10:45). This is due to the charismatic origin and to the ecclesial mediation of the religious authority. In a special way, the superior, "brother among brothers... is called to make felt the love with which God loves his sons," avoiding, because of this, "all attitude of dominion and... all form of paternalism" (ibid.). It is important to elicit, through dialogue, a voluntary obedience, in respect of the human person and an adhesion "in the spirit of faith and love, in order to follow Christ the obedient one" (ibid.).

c) Pastoral solicitude: because it is trying to "build a fraternal community in Christ," which seeks and loves God, "the person in authority is essentially pastoral, inasmuch as it is completely

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[3] *Caminar desde Cristo* (no. 32).
[4] Cf. *Vita consecrata* (no. 46).
[5] *La vida fraternal en comunidad* (no. 32).

> ordered to the building of a fraternal life in the community, according to the ecclesial identity proper of the consecrated life" (ibid.). The means, founded in faith, they are listening to the word, to the sentiment, to the resolutions, to the necessities of each brother in the community. One should not see the members of the community only as needful; it is a faulting of the superiors if they are asked only "to help them conveniently in their personal needs, care with solicitude, visit the sick, correct the rebellious, console the pusillanimous and have patience with all" (ibid., citing the canon 619). By the grace of God, there are also in the communities sane members, happy members, who have true leadership, a spirit of collaboration, capacity for work, tireless dedication to the Lord, to the poor and to the brothers. With the poor ones, one has to have patience. What should be expected of the superior, when the brothers are empowered, have leadership, imagination, initiative, creative spirit and confidence in themselves? It is not always easy to deal with adults who have perhaps the qualities which we ourselves do not. One cannot think of neutralizing them so that they will not be in the shadow (no. 14).

As a conclusion for this first part, a proposal as a help to consecrated individual persons, it must be remembered that, sometimes, the mission directs itself "to persons preoccupied by their own autonomy, envious of their freedom, fearful of losing their independence" (no. 15). And it is said technically (with beauty and truth) "The consecrated person, with his very existence, shows the possibility of a different way of realizing one's own life; a way in which God is the goal, His Word the light and His will the guide; a way in which one advances with serenity, knowing that one is sure of being supported by the hands of a welcoming and providential Father; where one is accompanied by brothers and sisters and pushed by the Spirit, who wishes and can satisfy the desires shown by the Father in the hearts of everyone" (ibid.).

The first mission of a consecrated person is therefore "to give witness to the freedom of the sons of God, a freedom modeled on Christ, the free man free to serve God and his brothers." We should say with our being "that God who has planned the human person from mud" (Gen. 2:7.22) and has woven him in the womb of his mother (Ps. 138,13), can also shape his life modeling it on Christ, a new and perfectly free man (ibid.).

Second Part: Authority and Obedience in the Fraternal Life (nos. 16-22)

With the commandment of love of God and love of neighbor as Jesus loved us ("in this they will know that you are my disciples" John 13:34-35), "the building of fraternal communities constitutes one of the fundamental commitments of the consecrated life; the members of the community are called to dedicate themselves to this, moved by the same love which the Lord poured into their hearts. Because in effect, fraternal life in community is a constitutive element of religious life and an eloquent sign of the humanizing effects of the presence of the reign of God." Authority and obedience are "a valid help to live in daily life the commandment of love, especially when there is a question of confronting the problems relative to the relation among the person and community" (no. 16).

God the Father guides us with his Spirit and configures us to His Son in fraternal community. It is among the jobs of superiors to build a fraternal community in Christ in which God is sought and loved above all things in order to fulfill God's redemptive plan (no. 17). "Exercising authority in the midst of one's brothers or sisters means serving them, following the example of him who gave his life as a ransom for the many (Mk. 10:45) in order that they might give their lives." (ibid.)

Only if the superiors themselves "live in obedience to Christ and sincerely observe the Rule can the members of the community understand that their obedience to the superior is not only not contrary to freedom of the children of God but causes it to mature in conformity with Christ, obedient to the Father."[6]

We live in community, because called by God the Lord himself, we are united equally by the same will to search for God, "notwithstanding differences of race and origin, language and culture.... Contrary to the spirit of discord and division, authority and obedience shine like a sign of the unique Fatherhood which comes from God, of the brotherhood born of the Spirit, of the interior freedom of those who put their trust in God despite the human limitations of those who represent him" (no. 18). The Spirit makes us all available for the Kingdom in the various obligations marked by obedience. This stops the division of the community that can arise from a variety of persons with all their diversity.

Therefore, in the bottom of our relational nature, as human beings, attentive to the value of openness to someone other than

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[6] Cf. *Perfectae caritatis* (n. 14).

oneself, to the fruitfulness of relation with the diversity and enrichment that comes to each from it, we are taken to live a spirituality of community, defined as the "spiritual climate of the Church at the beginning of the third millennium and, therefore... the active and exemplary task of religious life at all levels."

"Holiness and mission pass through the community because the risen Lord makes himself present in it and through it, making it holy and sanctifying the relationships. Has not Jesus promised to be present where two or three are gathered in his name? (Mt. 18:20) Thus brothers and sisters become sacraments of Jesus and of encounter with God, a concrete possibility of being able to live the commandments of mutual love. In this way the path of holiness becomes a way that all members of community follow together; not just a path for an individual but ever more a community experience in reciprocal welcoming; in the common search for the will of Lord, rich in grace and mercy; in the willingness of each to bear one another's burdens" (ibid.).

Community holiness is a convincing witness because it accomplishes the gift of unity which the Lord left us. "This becomes particularly evident in international and intercultural communities that demand high levels of welcoming and dialogue."

The role of authority in the growth of fraternity has to be established in the best possible way in the community rules, indicating what is the role of the superior, of the various councils, of the directors of sectors and of the local community. This should be made concrete especially in the community projects.

Those in authority are asked a very weighty series of services: listening and dialogue, helping in sharing and co-responsibility, stimulating participation in all, equilibrium in attention to persons and to community, discernment and fraternal obedience.

a) Service of listening: For this, to gather the community to say the word, particularly to the young ones, to the most isolated, to those needing attention. To welcome persons unconditionally, with listening full of affection and understanding. Maybe the job which is most difficult, in this case is not the understanding of the superior, but to make these sentiments and this respect be the attitude of each member of the community.

Listening to another as the voice of God "allows one to better coordinate the energy and gifts that the Spirit gives to the community and also, when making decisions, to keep in mind the limits and the difficulties of some members." Listening is not lost time but "can often prevent crises and difficult times both on the individual and community levels."

b) Creation of an atmosphere favorable to dialogue, sharing and co-responsibility, creating an environment of trust and recognition of the capacities and sensibilities of individuals. In order that one can share, he has to have sufficient information, sincere and free dialogue and recognition of being accepted and valued in his own identity. There will be difficulties, but childishness, discouragement, rancor, will be overcome with forgiveness, mutual acceptance, openness to others and their concerns.

c) Soliciting the contribution of all for the concerns of all. One has to repeat once again that "he who presides is responsible for the final decision" (*Vita Consecrata,* no. 43; *Fraternal Life in Community,* no. 50c; *Walking from Christ,* no. 14), but we would like to see in this task what Fr. Robert O. Maloney simply said: the last word, more than a distinct decision of what he thinks, feels and likes has to be a word of synthesis, of welcome of the points of view of all: "Therefore is this it? Have I understood what you wish, you my brothers in the community?"

This is normal when the superior animates and values "as much as possible the free contribution of all the brothers and sisters." One has to motivate everybody so that they can be proud of "their own contribution of charity, competence and creativity." When we feel welcome, we give a sincere effort of loyal participation. One has to promote "sharing of spiritual goods, sharing of the Word of God, faith" more than the individual forces and the work of each person. "The bond of fraternity is the stronger the most central and vital the thing that is placed in common." [7]

If the persons do not share easily, one has "to wisely balance the invitation to a dynamic and enterprising communion with the art of patience," without haste recognizing that only the Lord "can touch and change the heart of persons" (ibid.).

d) The service to the individual and to the community. While respecting the freedom and the different gifts of each member, it belongs to the superior to distribute the various jobs to the members of the community. The necessary balance, more than to please and to be agreeable to everybody and to actualize the common mission, can be found in this: that it is not for the superior alone to answer for the mission, as if the fidelity to what God asks of us depends on him, but, rather that he stimulates the community to answer collectively to the

[7] *La vida fraternal en comunidad* (n. 32).

Lord. It depends then on every one to receive in faith what is being asked of us, contributing with all our gifts, with loyalty and personal effort and affection to the brothers.

e) Community discernment. This is necessary to know what the Spirit is telling the community (Ap. 2:7), in the more important decisions: "The spirit of discernment ought to characterize every decision-making process that involves the community" preceded by a time of prayer and personal reflection, and accompanied by a series of important actuations:

- The determination to seek nothing other than the divine will which is manifested in the Scriptures and in the history of the Institute, with a logic which is often "upside-down" in relation to human logic.
- Openness to recognize in each brother or sister the ability to discover the truth even if partial, and "to welcome his or her opinions as mediation for discovering together the will of God";
- "Attention to the signs of the times, to the expectations of the people, to the needs of the poor, to the pressing needs of evangelization, to the priorities of the Universal Church" and the particular churches and to the indications of Chapters and major superiors;
- "Freedom from prejudices, from excessive attachment to one's own ideas, from perceptual frameworks which are rigid and distorted";
- Courage to ground firmly one's own ideas while also opening oneself to new perspectives and to changing one's own point of view;
- Firm proposal to maintain unity in any case, whatever the final decision might be. The authority "cannot ignore that the community is a privileged place to recognize and welcome the will of God" (ibid.).

f) Discernment, authority and obedience. Persons in authority will be patient during discernment, which they will seek to guarantee in its phases and support in its most critical steps and to be firm in requesting the implementation of whatever is decided. He or she should not abdicate his responsibilities to preserve peace for fear of wounding sensibilities, to avoid situations in which it is necessary to make clear and, at times, unpleasant decisions.[8]

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[8] *Vita consecrate* (n. 43).

"After the time of discernment there is the time for obedience, which is the implementation of the decision. Both are times in which it is necessary to live in the spirit of obedience" (no. 20).

g) Fraternal Obedience. Here the idea is to live a true brotherhood, based on the recognition of the dignity of the brother or sister; it is accomplished with attention to the other and his needs, as well as in the capacity to be happy for his gifts and successes, in putting at his disposal one's own time to listen and to let oneself be enlightened. But all this requires that all be free internally. "Those persons are certainly not free who are convinced that their ideas and their solutions are always the best; who suppose they can decide by themselves without any mediation in knowing the divine will; who think of themselves as always right and do not have any doubts that it is the others who have to change" (ibid.). "Rather, free are those persons who live constantly attentive and reach out to take advice in every situation in life, and above all from every person who lives next to them, a mediation of the will of the Lord, however mysterious" (ibid.).

To make oneself noted or affirmed, to have oneself served or to enslave are means of putting authority outside the evangelical model. Obedience is made less burdensome when "authority places itself at the humble and diligent service of brotherhood and the mission," representing the attitudes and values of the Good Shepherd.

"The effort to form fraternal communities is not only a preparation for the mission but forms an integrating part of it, from the time that fraternal communion as such is already an apostolate.[9] To be in mission as communities that daily seek to build community means affirming that by following the Lord Jesus, it is possible to realize human life together in a new and humanizing way" (no. 22).

As the whole second part wishes to be a help to communities, one has to distinguish always the societies of apostolic life, in which the purpose of the congregation is not the sanctification of the members, but the apostolate, the witness, the service to others, distinguishing them from either contemplative or active congregations which look for the sanctification of its members. Our Congregation, for example, defines very well in article I of the Constitutions, that we work hard to clothe ourselves with the spirit of Jesus Christ, to reach the perfection corresponding to our vocation. We will not say, as in the 17th century, to search for our own perfection.

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[9] *La vida fraternal en comunidad* (n. 54).

Third Part: In Mission (nos. 23-31)

"The Lord Jesus makes us understand with his own form of life that mission and obedience cannot be separated." Jesus came as sent by the Father to do his will (cf. Jn. 5:36-38; 6:38-40; 7:16-18). We collaborate in the same mission of Christ, we make "ourselves the place of his presence and, therefore, the continuation of his life in history, to afford others the possibility of meeting him." To be sent with Christ and as He "supposes reference to the one who sends or to the content of the mission to be developed" (no. 23).

In the mission, there are "difficulties that can be confronted only with the strength that comes from the Lord, in the humble and strong awareness of being sent by him and, because of this, being also able to count on his help" (no. 24). By obedience, we have the certainty of serving the Lord and this certitude is the source of unconditional commitment, tenacious faithfulness, interior serenity, disinterested service and dedication of our best energies (ibid.). We do not pursue our self-affirmation, we leave ourselves to be lead by the desire to do the adorable will of God (ibid.).

Authority has an "important role in relation to the mission, within the fidelity to the congregation's own charism." One has to balance the performance of jobs and the care of persons who work in the mission. The authority animates the community and coordinates "the various competencies relative to the mission, always respecting the roles and in agreement with the internal norms of the Institute.... Authority cannot (nor should it) do all, but yes it is ultimately responsible for everything" (no. 25).

Some important jobs in the service of the superior:

a) Persons in authority encourage the taking up of responsibilities and respect them when taken up. They help to conquer fear for the responsibilities, transmit strength and courage to the co-workers, so that they will conquer fear and the tendency to inhibit themselves. In the coordination, it is important to share information and responsibilities within the just autonomy of the sectors "which allows each one to work and collaborate, to substitute as well as to be substituted for, to take active part and to make one's own contribution even from behind the scene" (ibid.).

b) Persons in authority invite us to confront diversity in the spirit of communion. in the course of the structural transformation which happens within the activities and the mission, with the tensions created at the womb of the communities, because of distinct types of cultural and spiritual formation, the diverse readings of the signs of

the times (and of the Kingdom) for different projects, not always amenable for the diversity of persons, of their origins, of their age. Then the witness of communion and service, of love among the different ethnicities and cultures imposes itself.

Attention to these theoretical-practical principles:

- diversity of ideas should not become conflict of persons;
- plurality of perspectives fosters a deepening of the question;
- for communication among all members, the free exchange of ideas makes the position clear and causes the positive contribution of each one to emerge;
- "to help free oneself of egocentrism and ethnocentrism, which tend to place the causes of trouble onto others, in order to reach a mutual understanding";
- "the ideal is not that of having a community without conflicts but instead a community that is willing to confront its own tensions in order to resolve them positively, looking for solutions that do not ignore some of the values that must be taken into account" (ibid.).

c) He maintains the balance among the various dimensions of the consecrated life. Persons in authority must assure that unity of life "be preserved and that the greatest attention is paid to the balance between time dedicated to prayer and time dedicated to work, between individual and community, between commitments and rest, between attention to common life and attention to the world and the Church, between personal formation and community formation."[10]

The balance "between community and mission, between life *ad intra* and life *ad extra* is delicate and difficult. One has to maintain "at the same time, a spirit of fraternity in the apostolic community and an apostolic sensibility in the fraternal life." Even acting alone a person "can perform an activity... because someone of the community has given time, or has given him advice, or conveyed a certain spirit; frequently others remain in community possibly to support certain jobs of the house, or they asked for it or they sustain it with their own fidelity" (ibid.).

"The apostle should be proudly grateful" and "remain firmly united to his community in all that he does; he may not appropriate to himself the work of the community and he must be careful at all cost to walk together, waiting for, if it is necessary, those who advance more slowly, valuing the contribution of every one, sharing

[10] *La vida fraternal en comunidad* (n. 50).

as much as possible the joys and troubles, intuitions and uncertainties, the manner which all feel as their own the apostolate of the community, without envy and jealousy. The apostle can be sure that, the more he gives to the community, will never be equal to what he received or is receiving from the community" (ibid.).

d) Persons in authority have a merciful heart. They develop a pedagogy of forgiveness and mercy, they are ministers of love of God who welcomes, corrects and always gives ample opportunity to the brother who sins. "May persons in authority spare no efforts so that the whole community may learn this merciful style."

e) Persons in authority have a sense of justice. "Among the members of some fraternal communities, there can be behaviours that seriously harm their neighbor and that imply a responsibility vis-a-vis people outside the community and also within the institution to which they themselves belong.... Understanding for the confrere cannot exclude justice, especially in the face of vulnerable persons and victims of abuse" (ibid.).

f) Persons in authority promote collaboration with the laity. If the laity help us to "discover unexpected and rich insights of some aspects of the charism," bringing in elements of its secularity and of specific service, so that the collaboration become effective and vivid, "it is necessary to have religious communities with a clear charismatic identity, assimilated and lived, capable of transmitting it to others and disposed to share it; religious communities with an intense spirituality and missionary enthusiasm for communicating the same spirit and the same evangelizing thrust; religious communities who know how to animate and encourage lay people to share the charism of their institute according to their different style of life, inviting them to discover new ways of making the same charism and mission operative." [11]

"Moreover it is necessary that there be a well-defined description of competencies and responsibilities of the laity as much as of the religious, as well as of the intermediate entities (administrative councils and the like)" (no. 25).

But one has to seriously think of this: there is a terrible lessening of the priestly and religious vocations, and this is a sign of the times, and, at the same time, there is an unimaginable participation of lay persons in all fields, as volunteers who wish to help drug addicts, the unemployed, the abandoned aged, the street children, to read to the

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[11] *La vida fraternal en comunidad* (n. 70).

blind, to listen to the women prisoners who need to drown their loneliness and suffering, etc. And this is the sign of the Kingdom which God is sending to His Church, so that she may abandon clericalism, centralism and paternalism, accept the presence, collaboration and leadership of laymen and promote with them the Kingdom of God in the world.

The difficult obedience mentioned in no. 26 that can be the result of "points of view or means of apostolic or diaconal action, can be perceived and thought of in different ways." On these occasions one can also wonder "Is it worth continuing?" "Love and communion represent supreme values to which even the exercise of authority and obedience are subordinated" (ibid.).

Yes, it is good to have ideas and to fight for them, always in "open and constructive dialogue," and one should not forget that the model is always Jesus Christ, who in His Passion asked God the Father that His will done, without pulling back from the death on the cross (Heb. 5:7-9). The strong shouts and tears are "right moments to entrust oneself to the Father in order that His will be done and thus to be able to participate actively, with all one's being in the mission of Christ for the life of the world" (Jn. 6:51).

In the blessing of the Lord which accompanies this difficult obedience, "the obedient consecrated person knows that he will recover all that he left behind with the sacrifice of detachment; in this blessing is also hidden the full realization of his very humanity" (Jn. 12:25) (ibid.).

Concerning the objection of conscience mentioned in no. 27. "If it is true that conscience is the innermost sound which resonates the voice of God which indicates to us how we should behave, it is no less important to learn to listen to that voice with great attention in order to know it, to recognize it and to distinguish it from other voices. In effect, one should not confuse that voice with others which arise from subjectivism, which ignores or disregards the sources and criteria that cannot be given up and are mandatory in the formation of judgments of conscience." "The freedom of conscience is never a freedom with respect to the truth, but always and only 'in' the truth." [12]

Consequently, one has to reflect with calmness and to pray in order to recognize where the will of the Lord is manifested, if it is received in a command, or if it is received interiorly from God. We have bound ourselves by vow to capture the will of God through human mediations. It could be that there may be terrible suffering in

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[12] Jon Paul II, Encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* (August 6, 1993), no. 64.

those moments, as in the example of Christ, who "learned through suffering what obedience means" (Heb. 5:8) (no. 27).

Difficult authority is the other face of obedience, when a superior falls into discouragement, disenchantment, feelings of uselessness in what he does and says. He is not a "doer of routine" resigned to mediocrity, inhibited from all intervention, without spirit to assign goals to the brothers and cannot allow his initial love, the desire to witness, to it be lost (n. 28).

But authority is an act of love to the Lord: "Simon, Son of John do you love me?" (Jn. 21:16). The silent interior struggle that accompanies fidelity to one's own task marked at times with solitude and misunderstanding of those to whom one gives oneself, becomes the way of personal sanctification and a means of salvation for persons for whom one is suffering (ibid.).

Conclusion

"With an act of obedience, even unconsciously, we have come to life, welcoming that good Will which has preferred us to non-existence. We conclude our journey with another act of obedience, which we would like to be the most conscious and most free possible, but which is above all the expression of abandonment to that good Father who will definitely call us to Himself, in His Kingdom of infinite light, where our search will end and our eyes will see, in a Sunday without end. Then we will be fully obedient and we will be realized totally because we will say always 'Yes' to that Love who has made us exist to be happy with Him and in Him" (no. 29).

All this is summarized in the prayer for persons in authority: Teach me, Your servant, therefore, Lord, teach me, I pray You, by Your Holy Spirit, how to devote myself to them and how to spend myself on their behalf. Taught by Your Spirit, may I learn to comfort the sorrowful, to strengthen the weak, to be weak with those who are weak, to be indignant with those who suffer scandal, to become all things to all in order to save all. Place true, just and pleasing words in my mouth, so that they all may be built up in faith and hope and love, in chastity and lowliness, in patience and obedience, in spiritual fervour and submissiveness of mind.

Prayer to Mary:

> "You did not wait passively for the action of Your Son but You anticipated it, making Him aware of the need and with discreet authority taking the initiative to send the servants to Him.

At the foot of the cross, obedience made You the Mother of the Church and of believers while in the Upper Room every disciple recognized in You the gentle authority of love and service.

Help us to understand that every true authority in the Church and in consecrated life has its foundation in being docile to the will of God and help each one of us become in fact, authority for others with our own life lived in obedience to God" (no. 31).

Rio de Janeiro, 28 March 2009

Translation: Rolando Delagoza Solleza, C.M.

Vincentiana, July-August 2009

Obedience and Authority in the Congregation of the Mission Yesterday and Today

by Jaime Corera Andía, C.M.

This work is not a historical or sociological study about how one lived obedience and authority in the time of our founder and how one lives them today. One cannot help mentioning facts and dates of this kind, but they are used only as illustrations. The purpose of this study is simply to analyze the norms referring to obedience and authority that held as their normal objective the practice of both virtues in the time of St. Vincent, and then to analyze the norms that regulate them today.

We begin with a comparative examination of two texts from the Common Rules (RC) and the Constitutions (C) concerning one theme that refers to an aspect of the relationship between obedience and authority: up to what point can one who is under the authority of a superior maintain his opinion or point of view when it differs from those of the superior? These are the formulations of this problem in the Common Rules and in the Constitutions

RC V 2	C 37 # 2
We will submit our way of thinking and our will with a type of blind obedience.... We must have confidence in the will of our superiors as if it were a file in the hands of a craftsman.	The decisions of superiors are submitted to the light of faith, since the more we esteem them than our own opinion the better it is.

In both texts one maintains the obligation of obeying, of "submitting one's will." However, in the text of the Common Rules one is obliged to submit to the superior not only the will, but also one's own thoughts (proprium iudicium), and, at that, with a "form

of blind obedience" (caeca quadam obedientia). In strong contrast, in the Constitutions one is no longer asked to submit one's own judgment (sentientiam propriam); and, moreover, while it avoids every image that could suggest something non-rational in obedience (blind obedience, the file), it appeals explicitly to the motive of faith to justify obedience in the Congregation of the Mission. There is no doubt that the texts of the Constitutions presuppose not only an "aggiornamento" that takes into account the psychology of modern man (as the document of the Council "Perfectae Caritatis," 3 [see note 5 just below it] explicitly asks), but also that it offers a theological foundation for obedience that does not appear at all in the text of the Common Rules which is cited.

We propose a few ideas which will give direction to the content of this study:

- There has been a profound change of perspective and of formulation between the normative texts from the time of the founder and the actual texts concerning the way of regulating the practice of obedience and authority in the Congregation of the Mission;
- However, if one wishes to know the true mind of the founder in relationship to the practice of obedience and the use of authority, it is necessary to be aware of other sources of information that also come from the founder himself, other than the Common Rules;
- A good part of the ideas that appear in the Common Rules, but that are no longer held to either in theory or in practice, have their origin in the Rules of other older communities by which Vincent was inspired, or which he simply copied;
- In spite of the undeniable importance of the changes that had also included basic aspects, there is certainly continuity between what St. Vincent held about obedience and authority and what the Constitutions offer us. "Certainly" we say, this is what the the different postconciliar assemblies attempted to do: assure continuity of spirit between St. Vincent and the Congregation of today, in spite of, or, perhaps, through, the changes inspired by the norm of the conciliar document cited above: to formulate the new Constitutions while remembering the "signs of the times" of today without ceasing to be faithful to the spirit of the founder (*Perfectae Caritatis,* 2,3).

Obedience and Authority in the Common Rules

In the Common Rules are named the persons who have authority in the Congregation of the Mission: the Superior General (V 2), the visitor, the local superior, the subordinate officials (V 3, 9); but in all the texts of the Common Rules there is not one single idea about how to exercise authority. One would perhaps make exception for the norm that indicates that one is not obliged to obey superiors if they were to order something dangerous (V 2). There are other limitations to the authority of superiors that are not explicitly mentioned in the Common Rules, but that superiors certainly had to keep in mind: applicable laws of the Church, legitimate civil laws, as well as other norms in force in the Congregation of the Mission relative to the office of superiors.[1]

However, within these limitations, the authority of the superior in the Congregation appears in the Common Rules as a practically absolute authority. Absolute here means: the authority of the superior has no control through consultation, collaboration, or participation on the part of those who are not superiors over its exercise (remember that we are speaking here of the text of the Common Rules, not of anything else. It is well known that, even though it is not mentioned in the text, the Superior General had his consultors who in some way contributed to the governance of the Congregation. The general assemblies also had a contribution, of which there were two during the life of St. Vincent. However these are not mentioned in the text of the Common Rules, nor in the rules for the local superior). The only intervention permitted to non-superiors as a contribution to this authority is the suggestion which one might have to make (if they have something to propose) in the weekly community meeting, a meeting whose purpose is so that everyone be informed about what the superior wishes to arrange for the order of the house (V 5).

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[1] At least from 1655 there existed some norms or rules for the respective offices of superior general, visitor, local superiors and his "officials," as Fr. Angelo Coppo, C.M., showed in his study "The First Draft of the Rules and Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission from an Unedited Manuscript" (*Annali della Missione,* 3-4, 1957; cf. *Vincentiana,* 6/7, 1957, pp. 62 and 73-74; 3, 1972, pp. 115 ss.). This is a study of a manuscript known as the "Code of Sarzana" which can be found today in the archives of the General Curia of the Congregation of the Mission in Rome. Nobody seems to know up to what point those rules of "offices" were known through the years by those who held the offices which are spoken of in them. In fact, Fr. Coppo ventures to affirm that among the texts that are found in this Code, with the exception of the Common Rules, "nothing other than the text had been considered."

Outside of this small occasional contribution to good government (a contribution that, on the other hand, it is not said that the Superior must accept), the Common Rules do not mention any more than numerous topics that the subject must obey or rely on the Superior's permission. Here is an incomplete list of these topics:

Order of daily life

- eating outside of the set time (V 12)
- entering the room of another (V 13)
- talking with the novices (VIII 5)
- writing and receiving letters (V 11, IX 7)
- seeing the doctor and taking medicines (VI 14)
- letting externs into the house (V 14, IX 5-6)

Distribution of work

- dependence on the orders of the superior (II 10)
- to help any member of the community (V 8-10)
- in the spiritual direction of other persons (IX 2)
- in missions (XI 3)
- in hearing confessions (XI 4)
- in other pastoral works (XI 8)
- in consultations in cases of conscience (XI 9)
- in the work with the Daughters of Charity (XI 11)

Material goods

- various norms concerning their distribution and management (III 3-6, 9)

Themes of conscience and of the spiritual life

- problems of conscience and temptations (II 16-17, VIII 8, X 11)
- concerning dangers against chastity (IC 4)
- concerning help for the discouraged (XII 4)
- to help against vanity and ambition (XII 4, 9)
- penitential practice (X 13, XII 14)
- mortifications (X 15)
- adding acts of piety to those foreseen in the Rules (X 21)
- selecting books for spiritual reading (X 8)

As one can understand by a simple glance, there is hardly an aspect of the life of the other members of the community that is not under the control of the authority of the superior, except that at

times the other members can tell him how he should use his authority. So that the superior who knows well the Common Rules (given that if he has immersed himself habitually in the history of the Congregation of the Mission, precisely to obey what is foreseen in the same Common Rules, which lay down the rule that they should be read in their entirety every two months XII 14) but at times is unfamiliar with the other teachings of the founder (given that until relatively recent times one has given scant attention to the letters and conferences of St. Vincent), could find himself tempted to use his authority in a discretionary, arbitrary way, including at times approaching despotism, whenever he avoids violating in an uproarious manner the limits imposed by civil, divine, or ecclesiastical law. In effect, in the Common Rules there is not one word about how the superior should use his authority not only in conformity with the radical evangelical teachings about the use of authority among the disciples of Christ, but also not even as St. Vincent wished, a façade that we know from sources different from the Common Rules, which shall be cited below.

If the word "despotism" hurts a reader because he has a more delicate sensibility, or because he never had the experience of suffering it in his community life, or that others had suffered because of it, we would refer him to known cases of despotism that were not small from past history, and not so past history in the Congregation of the Mission. As an example, look at no less a person than a superior general, P. Bonet, who had no scruple in calling despotic the actions of some superiors, and that in 1719, scarcely 60 years from the death of the founder; "Some superiors dispose of material goods as they wish, without consulting the procurator or the other officials of the house (NB this participation, which means 'taking into account,' and 'consulting,' is not foreseen in the Common Rules). They believe themselves to be in charge of the goods of the community, and think that they can dispose of them in a despotic manner" (Collection of Circular Letters of the Superiors General of the Congregation of the Mission, Paris, 1877, Typ. Chamerot, p. 319).

One must admit without any difficulty that in the theme about which we are speaking the content of the Common Rules seems very scant for the genuine style in which St. Vincent wrote them and gave them to the Congregation. This poses the problem of how to explain such a strange incongruence in a man who had nothing incongruent in his speaking or in his working.

We will hazard an explanation: on the theme of which we speak, Vincent de Paul is not original, and he does not show forth his true personality (even though he does so in many other themes in the Common Rules, and above all in chapter II), but he also simply lets

himself be influenced by the style of the Rules of other Orders and Congregations before him. P. Coste signals many dependencies, including a literal copying, of norms taken from the Society of Jesus.[2] As a result, there are many norms found as well in the Constitutions of St. Ignatius of Loyola that are in the Common Rules. However, one must also note that St. Vincent was inspired by the rules of many older orders,[3] to the point that one will never know if St. Vincent did his borrowing from the Society of Jesus, or from other older Rules which St. Vincent undoubtedly was aware of and consulted.

So that the reader may form an idea of up to what point some Rules were copied from others during the centuries, we place a list, without comment, of some norms that already appear in the Rule of St. Pachomius, from the fourth century. Many of these rules are found in numerous Rules written after him, including those of St. Ignatius of Loyola, and the Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission as well: leave the house always accompanied by another and with permission (IX 11); do not accept anything from anyone without permission (III 3, 5); do not keep anything in your room without permission of the abbot (II 4); do not lock the door of your own room with a key (III 8); do not leave your room without being decently dressed (VII 6); do not enter into the cell of another monk without permission (V 13, 14); do not eat outside of the hours for meals without permission (V 12); do not invite anyone from outside the monastery to eat (IX 6); when on journeys, stay in a related monastery (IX 16); do not take anything from one monastery to another.[4]

Obedience and Authority in the Teaching and the Practice of St. Vincent

As one can anticipate from what is above, it is rather easy to note styles different from one another, not small discrepancies and even contradictions, between the way of exercising authority and the

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[2] *El Señor Vicente. El grand santo del grand siglo,* CEME, Salamanca, 1990, tomo II, p. 10 [*Le grand saint du grand siecle,* Paris, 1932, tome II p. 13].

[3] *Monumenta historica Societatis Jesu,* vol 64, series tertia, tomus secondus, pp. CCV ss.

[4] The Rule of St. Pachomius is the first known rule of the cenobitic life. It had great influence on the ancient rules of the East, like that of St. Basil, and in the West, where it was known through the Latin translation done by St. Jerome. Its influence is readily seen in the writings of Cassian and of the rule of St. Benedict, and, through it, it influenced many later rules. You can easily find the rule of St. Pachomius on the internet in Latin or in Castilian (and in other languaes as well) with the aid of a good search engine.

practice of obedience as they appear in the text of the Common Rules, and the way to dispose of the personal practice and the numerous ideas of the founder as they appear in letters and conferences.

In the teaching of St. Vincent, the legitimacy of the use of authority in the Congregation is based in the traditional idea, which comes from St. Paul, that authority has its origin in God, and demands immediate obedience. "When the superior says 'I order,' because he has authority from God, one cannot circumvent his order without circumventing God and that which He asks of us" (XI 119, 241) [XI 199-200, 349].[5] Only legitimate superiors have authority in the community, and for that reason "a superior must always reserve to himself the freedom to celebrate, to preach, and to accomplish all public acts, and to send to do them whoever it seems opportune to send" (IV 186-187; VI 513) [IV 189-190; VI 560]. And also: "It is not up to the community to elect the procurator... or the other officials, but it is up to the superior general or the visitor to name them" (VII 406) [VII 475].

This is the traditional vision, a vision rather pyramidal according to which authority descends from a high point in which one meets God, to an increasing number of persons closer to the base (superior general, visitors, local superiors). But the members of the Congregation who find themselves at the base of the pyramid have no form of participation in the exercise of authority, except the passive participation to obey. This vision of authority certainly forms with sufficient solidity the very drastic vision of authority that appears in the Common Rules. While the superior acts within the limits of the law of God, of the Church, and of just civil laws, his concrete decisions cannot be appealed, just as the will of God cannot be appealed.

By no means is this a false vision of the origin of authority in the Church and in the Congregation, but it is certainly incomplete, and easily exposed to uses and abuses that are more or less authoritarian. One could always justify the mandate, even when one gives an order arbitrarily, as founded in the last instance in the will of God Himself. What is missing to this vision so that it be complete is to remember that, besides the witness of St. Paul, there is an earlier and more important witness from Jesus Christ Himself, for whom the one who has authority is above all the servant of his brothers, and for this reason he cannot treat them as subjects or inferiors. St. Vincent writes to a confrere recently named superior to encourage him to accept the office: "I ask you, in the name of Jesus Christ, that you

[5] References in parenthesis ( ) are from Coste; those in brackets [ ] are from the Spanish version SVP.ES (note of the Editor).

serve the community in his place" (II 252) [II 299]. And in another letter to another superior: "Those who run the houses of the Company should not look upon the others as inferiors, but as brothers" (IV 53) [IV 51].

There are cases in which St. Vincent writes or says things directly, that are contrary to the norms that he himself had given in the Common Rules. In VIII 3, the Rules had made provision for an elaborate ritual of gestures of respect and deference to superiors by those who are not superiors. But he writes in 1656, one year after the rules had been edited and printed: In some places and on some occasions, it is permitted each one look at his rank in the priesthood, according to age, to learning, of jobs, etc., but among us this is not observed (V 777) [V 609]. In another letter in the same year: "Let him live with his brothers cordially and simply, in such a way that when they are seen together no one can know who is the superior" (VI 68) [VI 66].

One can mention as well other aspects in which the explicit teaching of St. Vincent offers, if not a straightforward contradiction, a vision of the exercise of authority of which not even a whisker appears in the Common Rules. As indicated above, there is no mention in the Common Rules of the possible collaboration of those who are not superiors in the governing of the Congregation, and it says as well that they are held to obey "with a kind of blind obedience." In strong contrast, look at what Saint Vincent writes: "It is so far from the truth that it is bad to seek counsel, that, to the contrary one must do so when a task of considerable weight is involved, or when we cannot decide on our own.... In our internal life we consult consultors and other persons of the Company when it seems necessary. I ask many times even the coadjutor brothers in the things that concern the offices they hold. When this is done with the necessary precautions, the authority of God, which resides in the superiors and in those who represent them, suffers no impairment. Rather, the good order that follows this way of dealing makes that authority more worthy of love and respect (IV 39, cf. also III 167, 421, V 53) [IV 35; cf. III 185, 462; V 53].

In spite of the quasi-sacred vision implicit in the Common Rules about authority, a vision that seems to be inevitable only if it is thought about as coming from God, Vincent had an extremely critical opinion about the human aptitude to exercise authority and was even a pessimist. If those who have authority "were impeccable and infallible they would not need it [to have counselors]. But since they are capable of sinning and of committing mistakes, it is not just that they do not have persons from whom to ask advice" (II 528; cf. II 343; VII 505-506) [II 618; cf. II 410; VII 595-596].

Vincent de Paul does not think in any way that the desire to have authority, basing oneself on the idea that it is a gift from God, could be good. Those who want authority "want the devil in their body" (XI 59) [XI 138], or they have "an evil and diabolical spirit" (XI 61) [XI 141]. Nor is it any guarantee the fact that, since authority comes from God, he who receives it enjoys certain advantages for his sanctification and salvation. Vincent says: "I tried for a long time, and I see that for the greater part this happens, that this state of being superior and in government is so evil that it leaves by itself and by its nature (NB note how crude this expression is if we remember that authority comes from God), a malignancy, a villainous and cursed stain. Yes, my brothers, a malignancy that infects the soul and all the faculties of man... unless he is one of those men who is consumed by God. However, believe ne, brothers, of these there are very few" (XI 60) [XI 139].

Summing up what has been said in these last lines: if one wishes to know how in practice the exercise of obedience and authority relate to one another according to the mind of St. Vincent, it is good to be well familiar with the Rules that St. Vincent left for his Congregation. It is good, but it is not sufficient. One has to be familiar with many other ideas concerning this theme that St. Vincent shared throughout his life in his letters and conferences to the confreres. If you do not have this second source, trying to govern with only the text of the Common Rules in hand can lead, with a certain facility, to trying to govern with arbitrary ways, not very reasonable, and in an almost despotic manner, everything that makes up the Congregation, the provinces, and the local communities.

Obedience and Authority in the Constitutions

30 years before the Constitutions of 1984 other Constitutions were written to respond to the mandate of the Church to update the old Constitutions to the prescriptions of the Code of Canon law of 1917. In these Constitutions of 1954 there is nothing new concerning the theme we are developing, nor was there any intent to revise them according to the "signs of the times," but only a simple literal copy of various texts from the Common Rules, including the idea of submitting one's own judgment to that of the superior, and the harsh expressions of "blind obedience" and the "file" (n. 183). As opposed to the Common Rules in these Constitutions are mentioned all the different types of assemblies and of advice in all the levels of authority.

This edition of the Constitutions had a short life, a little more than 10 years. It could not stand up to the real avalanche of new ideas and

of the change of sensibility that came along with the Second Vatican Council, and its mandate to revise the Constitutions and the Rules of all the orders and congregations to adapt them to the conciliar teachings. The Congregation of the Mission accomplished this revision in three successive general assemblies, the first which took place right after the close of the Council, and the last in 1980. This last assembly drew up the Constitutions that were approved by pontifical authority in 1984. We now pass to look at what the new Constitutions say about the relationship between obedience and authority in the community life of the Congregation of the Mission.

The Constitutions establish in n. 96 a type of "democratic" principle concerning the subject of authority in the Congregation of the Mission. Now not only do the superiors expressly nominated monopolize authority, so to say, but rather "all the members of the Congregation... have the right and the obligation... to participate in the government of the same, according to our own law." In n. 98 there is a concrete application of that principle through the idea of subsidiarity. Having lived it today, that principle and idea would have been without a doubt pleasing to St. Vincent, but it is difficult for us to imagine him writing them down as they are in those two numbers of the Constitutions. The "proper law" of the Congregation of the Mission never included such a "democratic" principle, nor the idea of subsidiarity from the time of its foundation until 1984. However, neither that principle nor that idea are very distant from many of the things that Vincent said and did, including the very important theme of government of his community. For example, in setting down the Common Rules, which was without doubt a project "by a team" and delegated to others on many points, all that was there was not exclusively his.

In strong contrast to the Common Rules, the new Constitutions offer ideas about the good use of authority in the Congregation of the Mission. Even though here it also says that "authority comes from God (97, 1)," it adds immediately the evangelical principle that all those who have authority "should keep in mind the example of the Good Shepherd, who came not to be served, but to serve," and thus "should consider themselves the servants of the community." There is nothing in these statements that St. Vincent would not have subscribed to, but he did not include them in the Common Rules, nor, as far as we know, in any other official document of the Congregation of the Mission, even though he expressed them more than once in spoken or written word, as we have already seen.

Nor is it said in the Common Rules in a direct and explicit way why authority exists in the Congregation of the Mission. A simple reading of Chapter V, which treats of obedience, leaves the reader

with the painful impression that authority exists in the community above all so that there be order in the life of this community. Thus, it would also have pleased the founder without a doubt what the Constitutions say on this point: the superiors are the servants of the community "to promote the end proper to the community according to the spirit of Vincent"; that is why, by implication, that obedience is owed to the superiors: to promote the end proper to the Congregation.

In n. 97, 2 the principle is maintained that the taking of decisions is always the competence of one person only, and what it excludes is the taking of decisions by vote (except in general assemblies, as well as in the General and provincial councils concerning the matters expressly indicated by the Constitutions). However, one does not wish to have decisions proclaimed like edicts over those whom the decision affects, but rather that there be established "a dialogue with the companions." As a kind of institutionalization of that dialogue two helps are offered to the local superior: the domestic council (134, 2), and the community project (Statute 16), which has to be worked out by the whole community. This last, which refers to the community project, is something completely new in the history of the Congregation, of which one finds not a hint in the time of St. Vincent. There is more: it would be incompatible with what St. Vincent himself expressly says in the quote that we gave above (IV 186-187 [IV 189-190], about how the local superior is the one who assigns offices and jobs in the community as he sees fit. Would it be senseless to suppose that Vincent de Paul would have also approved today the idea of the community project, nullifying expressly that which he himself wrote in the Common Rules concerning the power of decision of the superior: a power not moderated in the text of the Common Rules by anything or by anyone among the members of his community?

In the theme of obedience there has been a rather profound reformulation which affects not only the manner of practicing it, but also its theological-evangelical foundation, a theme which is more radical in the Constitutions than in the Common Rules. The Common Rules had proposed, as an example for the obedience of the confrere, the example of Christ Himself, not so much to the Father, as to such human beings as their fathers or as legitimate authority (V 1). The Constitutions propose the example of Christ, obedient even to death, in whose imitation every confrere must be disposed to do always the Will of the Father (C 36). This Will is to be sought in community (C 37,1), an idea which also does not appear in the Common Rules.

The Common Rules and the Constitutions coincide, as mentioned above, in the idea that only he who has authority has the power of

decision (except in those cases which have been indicated above). This is not said in the Common Rules; however, something essential is said in the Constitutions: one is to obey the decisions of superiors "in the light of faith," a precision totally necessary so that the act of obedience not be a mere act of disciplinary acceptance of what authorities have ordered, as could happen in an army, a business, or in a political party. The Common Rules and the Constitutions come together in the "style" or way of obeying with "promptness, joy, and perseverance." Concerning the important theme of the submission of "one's own judgment," we return to what was said above on this theme.

Conclusions

1. The obedience which the Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission propose today is as radical and as exigent as that proposed by the Common Rules. It is actually more exigent, if one compares the phrases used in both to express its radicality: obedience unto death following the example of Christ in the Constitutions; the image of the file and of blind obedience in the Common Rules.

2. The formulation of the way of exercising authority and obedience in the Constitutions is more dense in theological content than in what appears in the Common Rules. According to the Constitutions, all exercise of authority in the Congregation of the Mission must be an act of service in imitation of Christ; all obedience must be the obedience of faith, also in imitation of Jesus Christ in his obedience to his Father. Even if one certainly supposes all these ideas, none of them expressly appear in the Common Rules.

3. Keeping in mind the suggestion of Perfectae Caritatis, 3[6] in the text of the Constitutions the way of ordering and the manner of obeying has been "humanized." Those who hold authority are asked to dialogue with their companions before taking decisions; those who do not have authority are still asked to obey even though their opinions do not coincide with those who hold authority. However, no longer must they renounce their way of thinking, nor need they think the way those in authority think.

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[6] "The way of working, of praying, and of living, is to be adapted according to the actual physical and psychological conditions of the members.... According to the same criteria, one is to revise the form of government."

4. Even if the Common Rules speak of the evangelical counsels in their totality (RC II 18), in the paragraphs that speak of obedience neither the Common Rules nor the Constitutions express the relationship that should exist between obedience and mission. It would be greatly desired that the Constitutions express this, if for no other reason than a pedagogical one, so that the confrere, whether superior or not, who rereads or meditates on those paragraphs relative to authority and obedience always remembers that both are ordered to complete the mission proper to the Congregation.

5. A more "modern" or "human," not to mention a more "evangelical" way of expressing in a constitutional text the relationships between authority and obedience does not guarantee in and of itself that these relationships will be more human or evangelical today than they were in the past. Through the new formulation we try to avoid old abuses of authority and limited forms of obeying, but the problems of a good harmonization between authority and obedience go on today, about as they did in the past. We refer to perennial phenomenon of the small gains made when one obeys, or the eternal temptations to use authority for one's own enjoyment, or to let oneself be drawn into authoritarian inclinations, or, on the other hand, to fear requiring the obedience needed.

6. An unresolved, thorny problem still standing happens today when the decisions of authority oblige something to be done that goes against the proper nature of the Congregation, or simply when it has nothing to do with it, and obedience is demanded when those who ask for it do so "according to the Constitutions and Statutes" (C 38, 1). This is a thorny problem truly, but we will not enter into it here. As was said at the beginning, this article is limited to a comparative study of what the Common Rules say and what the Constitutions say, concerning the good exercise of authority and obedience, and the relationship between the two.

Bibliographical Note

An abundant bibliography on the theme of this study can be found in the *Diccionario de Espiritualidad Vicenciana,* CEME, Salamanca, 1995, in the article *Authority,* and in the article *Obedience,* both written by P. Miguel Perez Flores. The bibliography is in Latin, Franch, and Castillian. For bibliographies in other languages, you will have to use other sources not accessible to the author of this work.

Translation: Robert J. Stone, C.M.

Vincentiana, July-August 2009

New Sensitivity in the Authority/Obedience Relationship Since Vatican II

by Julio Suescun Olcoz, C.M.

CHANGES IN THE AUTHORITY/OBEDIENCE RELATIONSHIP

Vatican Council II reflected on the changes happening throughout our world and concluded that the Church needed to relocate itself in this changing world in order to fulfill its mission in the world. And whatever one thinks on how this Council set into motion ongoing renewal, almost fifty years of implementation have yet to bring about the final result. We need to continue the process of relocation and of ongoing conversion.

As one particular example of this relocation that the Church must attempt, the authority/obedience relationship needs to be read in harmony with those societal changes that affect the person in his/her social relations.

In outline form we could sum up these changes thus:

– Today's person strongly stresses the dimension of **personal freedom.** For men and women today freedom is an irrevocable conquest. Consequently, today obedience can never be proposed or required as negating personal freedom, explicitly or implicitly. Nor can obedience be understood as a sacrifice of personal freedom, but rather as freedom's maturation and perfection.

– Today's person seeks to find his/her own self the roots for his/her personal development. **What do not work** for contemporary men and women are **solutions imposed** for obscure and unknown reasons or as something having nothing to do with their lives. This was not so in other times, when we tried to adapt to the famous principle of *quod supra nos nihil ad nos (what is beyond us should not concern us).*

- Today's person instinctively reject any formalism. To them it matters not so much to do things as it does to accomplish what one intends in doing them. "So... why am I doing this?" Here is a question one hears not only from children today, but also from adults.
- Today it is preferable to **fight out one's own opinions** within the group rather than with the superior of the group. People recognize the power existing in the group and, when conforming with it, they feel more secure and protected. The superior will be accepted only when he is on target when directing and animating — not because of his own personal methods but rather from his situation as representative of the whole community, sent by the community and towards which it orients people.
- Today it is strongly felt that **nobody decides for us** or, at least, that there should be an effort to have decisions made with our participation.
- Finally let us point out that in our religious or apostolic settings, it is desirable to have a leader who is more a **brother** or a **friend** than one's superior or boss. What has happened is that relationships with the superior have shifted to relationships of such confidence and familiarity that, until a short time ago, would have been unthinkable.

Exercising authority in the Church cannot disregard these attitudes affecting today's person, attitudes applying to anyone's exercise of authority. On the other hand, neither should it especially difficult to adapt the exercise of authority to these requirements, however much the practice may have been otherwise until recently. Furthermore, I dare say that we have already achieved this on the level of principle. Thus we are able to see this in the documents of the Church and in the Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission. We could say that, in this arena, progress in the Church's relocation and updating begun in the Council has been noteworthy.

In ***Fraternal Life in Community*** (**FLC** from here on), published in February, 1994 by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CICSAL from here on), there is a new image of authority in service of the building up of community life and its mission, as referenced by its evangelical roots of service; as a spiritual authority that favors and sustains the members' self-surrender to God; as a creative authority of unity in a climate favorable for communication and co- responsibility; as an authority that knows to make final decisions in a process of communal discernment. Here the mission makes authority *necessary not only to*

build up fraternal life in the community but also for the individual member's own spiritual journey.[1]

And ***Vita Consecrata*** (**VC** from here on), John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation published in 1996, while recognizing the absolute necessity of authority in environments such as ours so influenced by individualism, reminds one of the fraternal and spiritual sense of authority such as found in its purpose to involve everyone in the decision-making process, even if the final world is reserved to the superior and the obligation to respect decisions that have been made remains.[2]

In May, 2008, CICSAL, with the approval of the Holy Father, published the instruction ***The Service of Authority and Obedience*** (**SAO** from here on). It emphasized how in recent years the way to perceive authority and obedience has changed as much in the Church as in civil society. And the instruction proposes authority as a triple service — to the person, to fraternal community and to the mission.[3]

When reviewing the text of the *Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission* we find the authority/obedience relationship to each other described in a way very different from what we have lived and suffered in times still not so long ago. Only as examples I will recall these principles taken from the *Constitutions*:

– *"To participate in this mystery of the obedient Christ requires us all to seek, as a community, the will of the Father. We do this through mutual sharing of experience, open and responsible dialogue...."*[4]
– *"All members, since they have been called to labor for the continuation of the mission of Christ, have the right and responsibility, according to the norms of our own law, of working together for the good of the apostolic community and of participating in its government...."*[5]
– *"Those in the Congregation who exercise authority, which comes from God, and those who have part in this exercise of authority in any way, even in assemblies and councils, should have before their eyes the example of the Good Shepherd, who came not to be ministered to but to minister. Hence, conscious of their responsibilitybefore God, they shall consider themselves servants of the*

[1] FLC, nn. 47-53.
[2] VC, n. 43.
[3] Cf. SAO, n. 3.
[4] Const. CM, n. 37 § 1.
[5] Const. CM, n. 96.

community for furthering its own purpose according to the spirit of St. Vincent in a true communion of apostolate and life."[6]

– *"All members, in accepting assignments given to them by the community, have the authority necessary to carry them out. For this reason, those matters which can be managed by individual members or lower levels of government should not be referred to higher levels of government. That unity of government which is necessary to achieve the purpose and good of the entire Congregation must, however, be preserved."*[7]

There is no question that a new concept of authority is enshrined in these fundamental principles and as a consequence a new concept of obedience as well. This concept, consistent with the principles of coresponsibility, subsidarity, and evangelical service already declared in the Vatican II documents, is fully in agreement with church documents, even those written after the *Constitutions*.

In SAO these changes which have modified the authority/obedience relationship, are attributed to, among other things, keeping in mind the value of the individual, the centrality of spiritual communion and, a distinctive and less individualistic way to think about the mission.[8] Still, these changes are rooted in other, more profound, changes which happened in our society, such as democratic awareness and new concepts of power.

DEMOCRATIC AWARENESS

Perhaps one thing most characteristic, and one which somehow summarizes the change in how society relates to power, might be the rise of democratic awareness. Already Ozanam, in times when it was rare for catholics to support democracy, writes: *"The more I know of history the more reasons it gives me to believe that democracy is the natural end of political progress and that God is guiding the world towards democracy."*[9]

Gonzalez-Carvajal[10] has done a wonderful analysis of the authenticity of this sign of the times as manifesting the closeness of the Reign of God. Here we will review the various ways that

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[6] Const. CM, n. 97 § 1.

[7] Const. CM, n. 98.

[8] Cf. SAO, n. 3.

[9] *Lettres de Frederic Ozanam,* París 1873, t. 2, p. 251.

[10] L. González de Carvajal, *Los signos de los tiempos,* Sal Terrae, Santander 1987.

authority can be understood and exercised. In the democratic mindset, authority is situated in the same base of society which all its members should be serving. The new mentality does not conceive of authority as something originating in power exercised over society but rather as an institution of service to society.

Authority as Participation

Every social relationship is a power relationship in the form of mutual influence. To the degree one exercises social relations, one exercises power and is subject to power. Authority is one form of living out that social relationship and of exercising power.

Each society needs and possesses some form — more or less definitive — of authority. And, to note something essential, without it no society can operate. The Scholastics used to say that authority was the form/structure of society. But this concept of authority is neither primary nor original, but rather secondary and derived, insituted with regard to the Community. Community does not exist because of authority but it is rather authority which exists for the community.

To point to the community as the originating source of power does not question the divine origin of authority, since the *Constitutions*[11] clearly affirm this, at least regarding authority in the Congregation; the community is only the concrete form of origin.

These considerations are valid for every class of society, civil or religious. Even Paul VI, in *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971), stated that our times are characterized by two fundamental aspirations: **equality** and **participation.**[12] And Vatican II, in *Lumen Gentium,* has that social relationship terminology spill over into the Church, placing them first with the people of God and later, in service to them, with the hierarchy.[13]

One will notice the same spillover in one of the constitutional principles of the CM already noted. *"All members, since they have been called to labor for the continuation of the mission of Christ, have the right and responsibility, according to the norms of our own law, of working together for the good of the apostolic community and of participating in its government."*[14]

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[11] Const. CM, n. 97 § 1.
[12] *Octogesima Adveniens,* n. 24.
[13] LG ns.
[14] Const. CM, n. 96.

This does not deal just with the right to be named to the office of superior, which itself could have its difficulties, since Article 100 of the Constitutions states that *the superiors should be invested with sacred orders,* but rather that even those who are not superiors also participate in governance. This means that governance is exercised participatively. The conclusion made by the Constitutions is partial and limited. *"Consequently,"* they state, *"members should cooperate actively and responsibly in accepting assignments, undertaking apostolic projects, and carrying out commands."*[15] Participation in governance is not limited to this. It extends as well to the process of discernment, planning, implementation and evaluation, all coming from response to the vocational call, as well as in the administration of goods and in some way in the organization of members. From all this it is necessary that no individual in the Congregation should act on his own accord in any matter that pertains to all.

This is also what SAO points out. Superiors, it says, *"[will have concern to] be sharing not only information but also responsibilities, committing themselves to respecting each one in his or her own rightful autonomy."*[16] And it adds that *"whoever exercises the service of authority will have to be attentive not to give in to the temptation of personal self-sufficiency, to believe that everything depends on him or her and that it would not be important and useful to foster community participation."*[17]

Authority as a place for direction

Understood as a relationship of mutual influence, power exercised in the midst of society needs those instances for unifying and coordinating in order to keep society together while in the midst of individualistic aspirations to power apart from any common objectives, and so that it be capable to unite efforts in bringing together the potential of everyone for the good of all. St. Vincent, speaking to the Daughters of Charity, came up with the example of a ship, its captain, and its sailors or also the organization of the human body:

> *You have entered, then, into the ship where God guides you by His inspiration. A pilot is needed to keep watch while you are sleeping. Who are those pilots? The superiors. They are in change*

[15] Loc. cit.
[16] SAO, n. 25 *a*).
[17] Loc. cit.

of admonishing you about all you need to do in order that you arrive to port, safe and sound....[18]

So that you understand this, imagine it as you would a body, if the arms and the the feet, which are the principal members for action, not want to be united with the body. There would be nothing more ridiculous, they would leave the body mutilated, and they themselves would begin to putrify; because, apart from the body, they would be good only for burial. The same would happen with a community where obedience is not observed. The superior who would not have the virtue of obedience in its proper and needed form, and the sisters who would not practice it, would be dismembered one from the other.[19]

As for FLC, *"The Christian community is not an anonymous collective, but it is endowed from the beginning with leaders for whom the apostle asks consideration, respect and charity."*[20]

And, in VC, we read that *"those who exercise authority cannot renounce their obligation as those first responsible for the community, as guides of their brothers and sisters in the spiritual and apostolic life."*[21]

So there is no society without authority. We have already said that the Scholastics spoke of authority as the structure of society. Because of this eminently formal characteristic, the institutionalization of power in authority would be more or less in relationship to the concrete situation of the community: its dimension, its complexity, its problematic tendencies.

The concrete structure of this power would depend on the distinctive characteristics of the community; no hard and fast structure can be set down for every community. But it seems fair to establish the economic principle of institutionalization by means of which a community structures and organizes itself when its own needs call for it and for no other reason.

Also in FLC there is acknowledgement of a diversity of ways to exercise authority, corresponding to distinctive forms of community:

"Every community has a mission of its own to accomplish. Persons in authority thus serve a community which must accomplish a specific mission, received and defined by the institute and by its charism. Since there is a variety of missions,

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[18] SV IX, 167.
[19] SV IX, 419.
[20] FLC, n. 48.
[21] VC, n. 43ª.

> *there must also be a variety of kinds of communities and thus a variety of ways of exercising authority."*[22]

And SAO stresses the relevance of each community's charism, when it is time to exercise authority in service of directing and coordinating the efforts of all for one common mission.[23]

The Congregation of the Mission is a missionary community. *"The Vincentian community is, therefore, organized to prepare its apostolic activity and to encourage and help it continually."*[24] It must be the mission then, and not other applications of religious life, which determines the level and form of community structure and consequently that of its authority. Furthermore, when the mission is becoming ever more differentiated and specialized today, this merits particular attention, so that not everthing has to pass the criteria and competence of the superior.

Obedience in faith is not submission of human wills but rather a replicating of the attitude of the Son who, in order to fulfill the Father's loving design, *became obedient even unto death.*[25] And thus obedience is required not only of subjects but of all confreres in community, subjects and superiors, submitting to the supreme authority of the Word that has been proclaimed to us as expression of the Father's loving design.

For this reason we should not be questioning so much, or at least alone, the obedience and submission of the confreres to the Superior as much as the service of the superior to the missionary community that desires to obey the Father's call, in continuation of the mission of the Son sent to evangelize the poor. If the superior were to focus on imposing his authority, on having his will strictly followed, even with a flattering paternalistic style, authority would be perverted with authoritarianism established in its place.

Along the same lines, overcoming the temptation to command requires placing first the law's object over subjective interpretations by the superior presently on shift. This is not about smothering the spirit with the letter of the law, but rather overcoming one's own personal preferences and ideosyncrasies. Right on target are our formulas for taking the Vows of the Congregation. They speak of obedience to superiors in accordance with the Constitutions. The same sense is rich in the teaching of St. Vincent. For if the superior

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[22] FLC, n. 49.
[23] Cf. SAO, n. 25.
[24] Const. CM, n. 19.
[25] Cf. Const. CM (C. 36).

were to command something that is against the will of God or the Constitutions, one would not need to obey.[26]

St. Vincent cautioned us about the malign effects of the office of superior and everyone's experience tells us at which point one would be righto not to rely on the human condition when able to command and dominate.

The deceased lord cardinal de Berulle, great servant of God, used to say that it was better to be underneath, where the situation of little ones is the most secure, and that in the high and elevated places there is some kind of sickness and danger; for this reason the saints have always run from honors and our Lord, so to prove this to us by his example as well as with his word, said concerning himself that he had come to the world to serve, and not to be served.[27]

It is the Community's responsibility, by participating in the decision-making process, to assure that the superior does not give into this dangerous sickness about which St. Vincent warned and which every one of us has been able to witness.

Authority as Command

If authority in any society has to be something, and we have already seen that it is part of the very essence of society, one has to recognize the power to administrate, to issue a final order after all the discussion. But this does not mean to say that it has to be the regular way of exercising authority, but rather its extreme case.

Since Vatican II, when this new way of conceiving authority was institutionalized, all church documents still state that the superior has the right to the final word in decision-making.

Also in PC we read: *High level superiors should listen to their brothers and promote collaboration for the good of the insitute and of the Church, while still clearly maintaining their authority to administrate and to order what needs to be done.*[28] Note that this deals less with imposing as with promoting collaboration, since all exercise of obedience has to be done in freedom.

In FLC, the final decision is considered as the culminating point of a discernment process which the superior should encourage: *"Community discernment is a rather useful process, even if not easy or automatic, for involving human competence, spiritual wisdom and*

[26] Cf. SV IX, 423.
[27] SV XI, 51.
[28] PC, n. 14.

personal detachment. Where it is practiced with faith and seriousness, it can provide superiors with optimal conditions for making necessary decisions in the best interests of fraternal life and of mission."[29]

In VC, it is said openly and explicitly: *"While authority must be above all fraternal and spiritual, and while those entrusted with it must know how to involve their brothers and sisters in the decision-making process, it should still be remembered that the final word belongs to authority and consequently that authority has the right to see that decisions taken are respected."*[30]

The final word cannot be confused with the only word, even though it could be the last word because no more is allowed to be said. Authority exercised consistently with the new mindset comes to the last word only after a long process of discernment, where everyone's involvment has been promoted, even to achieving consensus if possible. There, if well formulated by the Superior, the actual final word of everyone involved can be stated. If what must happen is the extreme limit, where one appeals to the power to have the last word, so very far from fraternal consensus, this would affect normal relations in a community; authoritarianism would have been established, bossing others around, not obedience.

It would be fitting to remember here St. Vincent's advice to a young missioner recently named superior, Father Antoine Durand:

> *Live with the rest of the confreres cordially and simply, in such a way that, to see them together, no one could determine which is the superior. Decide nothing about any matter, no matter how unimportant it seems, without knowing especially the assistant's opinion. As for me, I gather all mine when some difficulty in governance needs to be resolved, whether spiritual or church or temporal matters; when dealing with these, I consult also with those in charge of them; I request even the opinion of the brothers in what has to do with the care of the house and its offices, given the knowledge they have about these things. This is done so that God blesses the decisions made out of common agreement. I beseech you to make use of this way of doing things in order to discharge your office well.*[31]

But the superior also can feel tempted to let everything go, abdicating his responsibility and depriving the community of a service that is due to them. Placed between the temptation of

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[29] FLC, n. 50.
[30] VFC, n. 50.
[31] SV VI, 71.

authoritarianism and the abdication of his duties, the superior should choose to **work with** the confreres, to call out everyone's gifts and dedicate them to one common Project, impelled by the Spirit, in obedience to the Father.

VC acknowledges that *"in these years of change and experimentation, the need to revise this office has sometimes been felt. But it should be recognized that those who exercise authority cannot renounce their obligation as those first responsible for the community, as guides of their brothers and sisters in the spiritual and apostolic life."*[32]

For this reason, SAO notes: *The one who presides is the one responsible for the final decision, but he or she should not come to this by themselves, without respecting as much as possible contributions given freely by all the brothers and sisters. Community is what its members make it; therefore it is essential to initiate and encourage the contribution of every person so that they experience their duty to offer their own contribution of charity, competence and creativity.*[33]

AUTHORITY IN THE EVANGELICAL COMMUNITY

In every form of authority, even ecclesiastic, there is, then, a participative power, an obligation to orient and a right to make decisions. The Gospel must be the handbook to which any exercise of power is conformed.

The Attitude of Service, Basic in every Christian Community

In conformity with the New Testament (NT) texts, fraternal relationship in the grass roots is more important than the exericse of authority from the top of the community structure. The NT concentrates its attention on fraternal life, where everyone's situation is stressed as being active subjects and servants, one for all.

In apostolic communities all participate as active subjects, bearers of the breath of the Spirit; all have the right to speak, everyone is equal, no one is superior to the other, there are no bosses but only brothers. We might say that the name that best captures the style of such communities is fraternity, brotherhood. One brotherhood of everyone united in the same faith, baptized in the same baptism, and subject to the one and same Lord, Jesus Christ. The whole

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[32] VC, n. 43ª.
[33] Cf. SOA, n. 20 *e*).

community is called to exercise the kind of critical thinking which is called the discernment of spirits: *"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God*;[34] *test everything; hold fast to what is good,"*[35] and judge as to what is authentic gospel: *"But there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ,"*[36] and determining the credibilty of truthful prophecy; *"Brothers and sisters, do not be children in your thinking."*[37] The whole community takes on the duty to take care of the tasks when they become necessary: *"I will send any whom you approve with letters to take your gift to Jerusalem*;[38] to encouraging everybody: *I urge you, beloved, to admonish the idlers, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them"*[39] and even to taking care of its leaders: *"We appeal to you... to respect those who labor among you, and have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you."*[40] This active and responsible participation of everyone was not just some beautiful theory as the book of the Acts and the First Letter to the Corinthians demonstrated to us in practice. There Paul appeals to the community to discern and to decide about concrete cases which had been found to be particularly difficult for them.

Furthermore, the NT emphasizes that Christians should make themselves servants one to the other. *"Through love become slaves to one another"*[41] writes Paul to the Galatians and *"be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ"*[42] he admonishes the Ephesians. Mutual service is set up as the norm for relationships among the brothers and sisters.

In the Letter to the Philipians,[43] fraternal relationship is deduced from the reproduction in each one of the same sentiments of Christ who, being God, made himself one of us and obedient up to death. The obedience of Christ is practiced in the life of service, since the *"Son of Man came to serve."*[44] And Jesus is most certainly the Servant. Following Christ the humbled servant, brings the Christian to face a life where nothing is done out of rivalry, egoism or self-conceit,

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[34] 1 Jn. 4:1.
[35] 1 Tess. 5:21.
[36] Gal. 1:8 ff.
[37] 1 Cor. 14:20.
[38] 1 Cor. 16:3.
[39] 1 Tess. 5:14.
[40] 1 Tess. 5:12-13.
[41] Gal. 5:13.
[42] Ef. 5:21.
[43] Phil. 2:1-11.
[44] Mc. 10:45.

but rather from a perspective that considers others as superior and that has each person looking out not just for his/her own interests but rather in the interest of all the rest.[45] This is what allows the Christian to resolve the apparent paradox to being free while living as slave of others, because instead of giving free reign to his instincts, he subjects his needs to the law of the Spirit of Christ who consummates his mission in giving up his life for others. The Letter to the Galatians resolves the fullfillment of Christian liberty in this way: *"For you have been called to freedom... only do not use your freedom as a opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another."*[46] For the Christian to serve is to reign, to live in freedom, to truly become a Christian, to triumph. The Lord's example, dramatized so well in the washing of the feet, is without doubt an invitation to everyone. *"... I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you."*[47]

In Christian Communities, the superior must be the servant of servants

New Testament texts which make reference to service certainly are recommended to all Christians. Mk. 10:41-15 speaks of ***whoever wants to become great*** and of ***whoever wishes to be first among you,*** proposing to them that he be a servant and a slave. The same is found in Mt. 20:26-27. The desire to be great and to be first is universal and so the teaching is valid for everyone. Luke has amplified the text making it directly applicable to the leaders of the community: *the greatest among you must be like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves*.[48] So, if all Christians must be servants of the brothers and sisters, then those leading the community must excel at it.

In Service of the Word

SAO makes a fine presentation of the consecrated community as a listening community. Above all in reference to listening to God who, having spoken in different ways at other times, in this final epoch has spoken to us in his Son.[49] To incarnate in each one of us the ideal

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[45] Cf. Phil. 2:3-4.
[46] Galt. 5:13.
[47] Jn. 13:11 ss.
[48] Lk. 22:26.
[49] Cf. Heb. 1:1.

Christian, to incarnate the Word that today God proclaims to the world, is the first response in obedience to the call and is the expression of our consecration to God. This obedience to God extends itself to the obedience of confreres, gathered in the name of the Lord, accepting those human mediations made manifest in each day's ordinary activities.[50]

If, as it is written in VC, it is the Spirit who guides the communities of consecrated life in their completion of their mission to serve the Church and humanity, according to their particular charism,[51] it necessarily follows that the first function of authority would be to encourage discernment with the confreres, out of this inspiration with which the Spirit guides the community. And then to nurture the confreres' faithfulness to the same Spirit who calls each one of us, gathers us together, and sends us forth.

St. Vincent once said to a superior: *Continue, Father, submitting yourself to God's plan and conforming yours to that of our Lord, who is full of humility, meekness, concerning himself always with others while accommodating himself to everyone else's mood and weaknesses, having as his final goal the glory of the Father and the good of souls, both in general and in particular.*[52]

In FLC it says that *"if consecrated persons have dedicated themselves to the total service of God, authority promotes and sustains their consecration."*[53] Right away we ought to see how helpful to the consecration of persons have been the various kinds of spiritual activity, different kinds of communities and apostolates, adapting the charism to distinct communities, but we would be able to conclude along with this document that authority is *"a function which is both necessary for the growth of fraternal life in community and for the spiritual journey of the consecrated person."*[54]

In Service of Encouraging the Response

Following the habit of listening should be the desire for a response. And this also would have to come from the whole community, from the generous contribution of each one according to his abilities. The community's participation has to happen in all aspects of social life and activity, in projects, decisions, implemen-

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[50] Cf. SOA, nn. 4-10.
[51] Cf. VC, n. 42[c].
[52] SV IV, 556.
[53] FLC, n. 50.
[54] VFC, n. 48.

tations, etc. Without this happening it might seem all right to spread out those distinct moments of activity to particular people in the community, as if some individuals should plan, others should decide, and still others implement. Participation requires the involvement of each and every one, according to his situation and capacity, in all the distinctive phases of activity.

Identification of community participation with some generous concession on the part of the superior as a favor to the community is inviting a perverse concept of authority that considers the leader as owner and not administrator of the power exercised. Community participation must not come as some largesse of the superior, but rather as the exercise of an inalienable right, to which there follows correlatively an obligation, and which is rooted in one's belonging to a community.

The superior, according to the description of his functions in the CM Constitutions, is there to encourage the participation of all: moving the confreres towards co-responsibility (Const. CM, n. 25 2º; n. 37 § 2); engaging them in the works of the community (Const. CM, n. 129 § 2); calling them together to make decisions (Const. CM, n. 24 2º; n. 97 § 2; n. 37 § 1); having them face problems that arise and not dealing with decisions already made; guiding them towards consensus (Const. CM, n. 37 § 1); gathering legitimate initiatives from each one, identifying, respecting and valuing their gifts (Const. CM, n. 22); formally announcing or officially declaring decisions made together in the Spirit (Const. CM, n. 37 § 2; n. 97 § 2).

This is what we can call a service of animation. Animation comes from the heart as an interior principle of movement and life. The Holy Spirit is like the soul of the Church and of every community in the Church. The Spirit in St. John is called Paraclete, which means advocate, defender, consoler. And much of all this the superior has as his function in the community. In a way, he makes this help of the Spirit present and felt.

The apostles visited the communities to animate them. We hear from Paul and Barnabas that they visited throughout the communities *exhorting the disciples to persevere in the faith.*[55] And in his letters, Paul rarely uses the voice of command; but rather, with a tone very intimate and familiar, he says, *I beg you to lead a life worthy of [your] calling....*[56] Exhortation is a function of animation. To animate is to blow softly over the coals, rekindling the fire without putting it out. Animation is positive action. Above all it has

[55] Cf. Acts. 14:22; 11:23; 13:43.
[56] Cf. Eph. 4:1;2; 2 Cor. 5:20; 6:1.

nothing to do with reprimanding, prohibiting, but rather helping the confrere to grow, nurturing each one's vocational response towards its full response, offering one's services to help him develop his gifts. The superior needs to enable action and excellence in the confreres. If he is not above his own concerns, if he does not conceive this animating function as his principal task, he will tend to reprimand rather than energize, criticize rather than praise, close up within himself rather than open up possibilites in others.

We could point out three areas for effectively stirring up a response:

Animate for a Gospel way of life

This concept of animation does not mean that the Superior has to approve everything, because the object of animation is the attainment for the end of the Community: following Christ evangelizing the poor. As such it is not about approval but rather is the expression of one's conversion to the Lord and faithfulness in following the call.

It is not enough for a Superior to be an excellent organizer and work motivator, if at the same time he is not an animator of living out Gospel conversion, an animator of communion with the Lord in the service of whom we consecrate all our apostolic activity and to whom we direct our whole life in prayer, and who makes himself present in the love of confreres.

The first of the three parts that make up SOA is dedicated to explaining the kind of help from authority to live out one's own consecration (vows), to respond to the call that one has heard, being obedient by following the Son obedient until death, doing so by means of human mediations.[57]

Animate for the Apostolic Mission

Practically the only task that the Constitutions assign specifically and properly to the superior is that he *"should promote the ministries of the house and show that he and the community are concerned for the personal development and activity of each confrere."*[58]

The Superior needs to know how to call forth and encourage discernment of the calls felt, to stir up a passion for the apostolate in the community, to protect the community from fatigue, to clarify misunderstandings that could arise concerning its members, to keep the community tied to the provincial's authority, and, by means of

[57] Cf. SAO, nn. 7-9.
[58] Const. CM, n. 129 § 2.

information about what it is doing, to gladden the community in celebration. In FLC, finally, we find it written that celebrating together also contributes to the apostolate.

"Being able to enjoy one another; allowing time for personal and communal relaxation; taking time off from work now and then; rejoicing in the joys of one's brothers and sisters, in solicitous concern for the needs of brothers and sisters; trusting commitment to works of the apostolate; compassion in dealing with situations; looking forward to the next day with the hope of meeting the Lord always and everywhere: These are things that nourish serenity, peace and joy. They become strength in apostolic action." [59]

The third part of SAO is dedicated to this animation of apostolic life by authority,[60] while its second part concerns the authority's service for making communities truly fraternal, united in one spiritual communion, faithful to the inspiraton of the Spirit in service of the Reign of God.[61]

Animate for community participation

Animation for the sake of work comes about from the stimulus of co-responsibility and out of confidence in the value of the people, who with their limitations, provide a valid response which the Lord makes sufficient for His designs. But it is not enough to have excellent workers. The Community is made up of brothers who have to learn to consider the concerns of others as important as their own. And this is not to set up some hodgepodge of services where everyone does everything with nobody responsible for anything. Certainly, distributing tasks well seems necessary, since it is impossible for everbody to be good at everything. Still, along with attention to the tasks and responsibilities of each confrere arises the concern to help everyone towards success in the enterprise entrusted to them, so that, at some occasions, one might need to fill in and substitute common tasks, permitting others to complete specific tasks. All of this requires that each one sees the concerns of others as his own. And indeed they are, just by being the community's concerns.

The Constitutions speak of an integration of individuals into the Community through personal self-giving, of the regard that is given to personal privacy by the Community's advocacy of personal self worth, individual intiatives being evaluated in light of the end and

[59] FLC, n. 28.
[60] Cf. SAO, nn. 23-27.
[61] Cf. SAO, nn. 16-22.

spirit of the Mission, all so that our diversity and each ones gifts contribute to build up communion and make the mission fruitful.[62]

This is not about a superior endeavoring to get his subjects to collaborate with his plans but rather to interest them in collaboration that is complete and free, united in a plan, well laid out and implemented together. In SOA we are reminded of the example of Benedict XVI who, when asked at the beginning of his pontificate what his plan was to lead the Church, responded: *"My true plan for governance is not to do my will or to follow my own ideas, but to set out along with all the Church, to listen, for the Word and the will of the Lord and to allow myself be by guided by Him, so that it is He who guides the Church in this time of our history"* (n. 12).

Still, the superior might yet feel the easy temptation to revert to governing like a boss, to use his power to say the final word, unnecessarily anticipating the end of discusson. He will overcome this temptation only when deeply convinced that true authority over the community is manfiestly shown by the Lord who by his Spirit keeps us united and promotes the Community using many paths of faithfulness. Authority to make decisions is not exercised with Gospel legitimacy except through a process of faithful seeking and a sincere, trusting dialog with the confreres.[63]

From this perspective, evangelical authority is, before all else, a moral strength characterized more by a willingness to serve others rather than to lord over them. Some have contrasted effective authority with coercive authority. The first assists the growth and development of others, the second accomplishes nothing other than their dominance.

Translation: Daniel P. Borlik, C.M.

[62] Const. CM, n. 22.
[63] Const. CM, n. 37 § 1; n. 97 § 2.