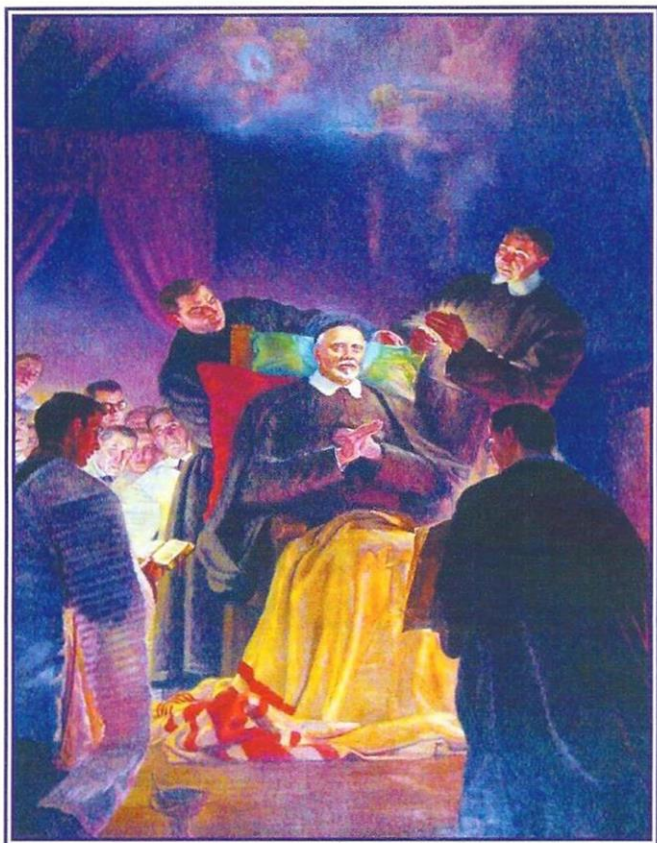


VINCENTIANA

54th Year - N. 2

April-June 2010



350 Years and the Mission Continues

CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION
GENERAL CURIA

GENERAL CURIA

TEMPO FORTE CIRCULAR (7-11 June 2010)

Rome, 22 June 2010

To the members of the Congregation of the Mission

My dear brothers of the Congregation of the Mission,

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

We initiated our *tempo forte* meeting of June 2010 with an ongoing formation session given by Dr. Giancarlo Gallici, a member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul who spoke to us of the reality of the Society in Italy as well as in the world. Afterwards there was a lively interchange of dialog with the presenter.

1. The first matters treated dealt with the **General Assembly** and all the minor details which are slowly but nicely falling into place.
2. We had a report from the Executive Committee of the **350th Anniversary** Jubilee Celebration and an additional report of the Projects Commission regarding Haiti.
3. We had a special session in which we spoke about **confreres in particular difficult situations**. The Secretary General shared with us statistics of confreres who are absent from the Congregation, which continues to be a significant problem
4. We spoke about some **possible candidates for the different roles within the Curia**; the Postulator and Procurator General, Secretary General, Director for the Office of Communication and a new member from the community of Brothers. We have made contact and received a positive response from Brother José Ivan Hueichan Sanchez. The other positions will be determined during the first *tempo forte* of the new administration.

5. We received a letter from Sister Evelyne with the terms of **contract for the three Sisters** we have in the Curia. We discussed the possibility, in the future when it becomes difficult to replace the Sisters with others from the Daughters of Charity, that those places be filled by members of the Congregation of the Mission.
6. We had a report from the **Commission for Promoting Systemic Change** wherein the Commission made recommendations to clarify the criteria for the Systemic Change Award and the Mission Award. It was also recommended to the following administration that an Assistant General be appointed to follow up on the different prizes that are awarded and their use and implementation in the particular provinces.
7. We had a report from the **Vincentian Solidarity Office**; Miles Heinen, the Director, was here to answer any questions we might have.
8. We had a number of **economic issues** shared by the Econome General.
 - We reflected on and selected the winners of the Mission Award 2010. That money will be distributed on the feast of St. Justin de Jacobis. Projects that were winners came from Curitiba, El Alto, Bolivia, the Province of Central America, Mozambique and Ethiopia. We thank all of the other five participants for their efforts and good works.
 - We made the distribution of the **moneys for the provinces (MDF)** that receive help in the realization of their apostolates, for some Bishops of the Congregation, the international missions and the Conferences of Visitors and/or Provinces.
 - Father Gouldrick gave us an update on the different **donations received** for the seed money of the micro credit project of Haiti as well as donations for reconstruction of Haiti.
9. We received a report from Father Ginete on the **Vincentian Family** and the Council gave its evaluation of the services rendered by the Delegate in these five years of his service.
10. We discussed a letter from the President of **DePaul International**, a new branch of the Vincentian Family that is internationally established and deals mainly with street people and drinkers. The highlight of their report was the request for continual support particularly in ongoing formation on the part of the Congregation of the Mission and other branches of the Vincentian Family. As a Council, we are in full agreement with the need to collaborate in a common initiative to deepen our Vincentian spirituality and formation.

11. We received the report from Father Joe Foley, **Vincentian NGO representative to the United Nations.**

- Specifically he talked about mining-extracting industries. Last year a group was formed to address the **issue of mining**. Many of the communities in which the Congregation serves know the negative impact of mining only too well: toxic water supplies, destroyed environments and devastated communities. The approach that the working group took from the Declaration on Indigenous People was the right to free, prior and informed consent before undertaking mining activities. They have decided to gather and analyze some case studies from the experiences of our membership.
- Joe wrote about **climate and poverty** showing the relationship between the two and using India as a model. It examined the link between climate change and political will and the government in adapting to climate change. A working group will continue to educate itself on the connection between poverty and climate change so that they can create a critical mass for effective advocacy. Again they will use experience-based stories to create a poverty and climate change position paper.
- The other issue mentioned was the **Committee on Migration**. A task force on The Global Forum of Migration and Development will meet in Mexico in November 2010. The theme for this year's meeting is "Partnership for Migration and Development: Shared Prosperity, Shared Responsibility."
- Another item was the 10-year review of the **Millennium Goals**. It is interesting that our new project in Haiti through Zafen, aligns itself with the ten millennium goals which are supposed to reach realization by 2015.
- The joint web site of the CM and the DCs is progressing. You can see it at www.cmdcngo.org.
- With regard to International Catholic Organizations, they are now a totally civil society organization for NGOs and by NGOs. Having **Catholic space for NGOs at the UN** is a very valuable asset at this time.

The Council had a discussion once again around the importance of the representative at the United Nations. I personally feel that because of the issues that are dealt with, all effecting in one way or another the poor, if a Vincentian is not aware of the issue, his witness as a Vincentian is incomplete. We thank Father Foley for his commitment and for encouraging us to get involved as best we can.

12. We received a letter from the Brothers who participated in the two-month program of **CIF in Paris**. Brother Fahed, from the Curia, gave us an evaluation and exposition of the workshop, sharing with us the Final Document that will be distributed to the delegates at the General Assembly.
13. We examined a report from the visitors and their councils of **Spain on the question of reconfiguration**. We continue to encourage all provinces to look for ways of better collaboration in order to be more efficient in the service of the poor.
14. With regard to the **international missions**,
 - We received a number of communications from our mission in **El Alto, Bolivia** where we have four confreres working in two parish missions. The mission team will be studying a draft of the new contract with the diocese which will be studied at the next *tempo forte* of the new administration.
 - With regard to **Papua New Guinea**, we received reports from one of the missionaries, Father Vladimir from Poland. We have two confreres awaiting visas to go to Papua New Guinea as well as a layman from MISEVI to help reinforce the different works of this mission, that involves both seminary and missionary parish outreach.
 - We received a report from **Solomon Islands**. The community is made up of five confreres at this time with the help of other confreres who come sporadically to give courses. Another confrere will be joining them full time. He is awaiting his visa and at the same time studying English.
 - The **missionaries that we have named** to our international missions are Joel Vasquez from the Province of Colombia, who is the current Director of the Daughters of Charity in Bolivia. He together with Father David Paniagua from the Province of Chile, former Director of the Daughters of Charity of Bolivia, are beginning a new mission outside of Cochabamba, Bolivia.
 For the mission of S.I. Father Raul Castro from the Province of Argentina will be assigned there. Before going he will be studying English in Australia.
 For the mission in PNG, a confrere from the Province of the Philippines, Emmanuel LaPaz and a confrere of the Province of the Orient, Georges Maylaa, both await visas. Georges as well will be studying English in Australia.
 - We received a **request from one of the Bishops of Angola** whom I spoke to personally in my visit there. It will be

recommended as a priority for the next administration. It is a mission that will be asked to support the three communities of Daughters of Charity, other members of the Vincentian Family and the diocese that has few priests.

This is the last *tempo forte* circular for this administration. We hope that we have served as best we can in these meetings which allow us to discuss issues that impact in a deeper way our presence in the world as members of the Congregation of the Mission desiring to be faithful in following Jesus Christ, evangelizer of the poor.

Your brother in Saint Vincent

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "G. Gregory Gay, C.M." The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "G" and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General

FEATURE

350 Years and the Mission Continues

Presentation

by Julio Suescun Olcoz, C.M.

We present this issue of *VINCENTIANA* in two installments. One can say that the author of one of these is Saint Vincent himself. It is he who speaks to us about himself, he who relates to us about his life. Father Bernard Koch C.M. has done us the favor of putting neatly in the mouth of our Founder some texts of the letters, conferences and other documents that have been handed down to us. He has conveniently chosen these and has verified them as he went through his investigative work in the main archives containing these Vincentian references. What comes out is a kind of short original autobiography, which goes further than a mere anthology of Vincentian texts, giving us an opportunity to see the interior process at work in Saint Vincent.

We could have published this work, in spite of its length, as another article in the usual issue of our periodical. But *VINCENTIANA* wished to join the celebration of the 350th anniversary of Saint Vincent's death, by putting in the hands of our readers this little Supplement to serve as a remembrance of a much-admired life as well as to stimulate our own faithfulness to the mission. It will serve also as grateful recognition of the untiring work of Father Koch, a true Vincentian researcher who will be completing his 80 years on July 30.

In line with our foundational fidelity, *VINCENTIANA* remembers two unique persons from the beginnings of the Congregation of the

Mission: Father Antoine Portail — who also died 350 years ago — an intimate companion and effective collaborator of Saint Vincent and Brother Bertrand Ducournau, the faithful secretary whose work and acumen has provided us with the greater part of our direct knowledge about the saint.

The other installment of this issue of *VINCENTIANA*, in the usual format of the periodical, includes, aside from the Curia's official communications, an exposition on the "Institute" or "Foundational Letter" of our Congregation as it is found in the papal bull, "Salvatoris Nostri," together with the precise notes that this bull makes on the petition letter signed by Saint Vincent. This document points out the basic lines of our identity and it has to be at the basis of our Vincentian fidelity.

This second installment contains the remembrance of Saint Justin de Jacobis, an incarnation of fidelity to our vocation that is much closer to our own time as well as one that is rooted in Vincentian values, such as faith in the mystery of the Incarnation, Eucharistic devotion, and openness to the Church's concerns relative to the unity of all Christians, in obedience to the Lord's bidding. During the 350th anniversary of our Founders' death we also observe the 150th anniversary of the death of Saint Justin de Jacobis which took place on July 31, 1860.

Moving forward to the present time, *VINCENTIANA* presents the call to creative fidelity to the Mission, a call that the 2010 General Assembly wishes to extend to the Congregation throughout the world. The Consultation Document is a means by which the whole Congregation can accompany, with their prayers and reflections, the confreres gathered together in the General Assembly and give echo to their voice.

Finally, *VINCENTIANA* wants to echo the voice of the Brothers who formulated a Declaration during their First International Formation Session in CIF. They speak to us about the ways in which at the present time they can incarnate in their vocation as Brothers, a creative fidelity to the mission.

Translation: MANUEL GINETE, C.M.

“According to Our Institute”

The Charter of the Congregation of the Mission

by John E. Rybolt, C.M.

Vincent de Paul often mentioned the “Institute” of the Congregation, calling it also “our Institute.” What is the meaning of this term? Does it have any continuing relevance?

An ambiguous term

The term “Institute” has been used equivocally, that is, with more than one meaning. The more common understanding is simply “Institution” or the “Congregation,” or in a more dynamic way, “foundation.” For example, Vincent often refers to *notre petit Institut* (letters 2910, 3191, 3281).

However, there are several places where this explanation is not sufficient, since it misses the basic meaning of “Institute.” Article 1 of the Common Rules has the Latin title: *De Fine et Instituto Congregationis*. The French original of these rules, composed by Vincent himself, reads: *De la Fin et de l'Institut de cette Congrégation*. The English, however, is less literal and strives for interpretation: “The Purpose and Nature of the Congregation.” Here, too, “nature” is not a direct translation of *institut*, but an interpretation. I propose that it should instead be “charter,” or “institute,” but understood in its fundamental meaning. This is the case in his mention of the “grandeur of our Institute” (Letter 634).¹ Vincent would not have exalted the greatness of the institution, but rather of its founding charter granted by the Church.

The term *institutum* is also used in several places in the Latin Common Rules (CR), but each of these, at least in the English translation, misses the central meaning of the word. The Spanish translation, however, simply translates the word directly. CR 2:15, (“repugnant to our charter,” English: “Which conflict... with our

¹ Letter 634, *Vincent de Paul. Correspondence, Conferences, Documents* [CCD] 2:373.

Congregation,” Spanish: *repugnan a nuestro Instituto*); 2:18 (“according to our charter,” English: “As understood in our Congregation,” Spanish: *según nuestro Instituto*); 5:1 (“according to our charter,” English: [omitted], Spanish: *según nuestro Instituto*); 7:1 (“on the basis of our charter,” English: “Obliged by our Institute,” Spanish: *por su Instituto están obligados*); 9:2 (“Although our charter obliges,” English: “By the very nature of our Congregation,” Spanish: *por razón de nuestro Instituto*); 11:11 (“other functions of our charter,” English: “Other ministries of our Congregation,” Spanish: *fundaciones de nuestro Instituto*); 11:12 (“according to our charter,” English: “By the nature of our Congregation,” Spanish: *obligados... por nuestro instituto*); 12:11 (“opposed to the charter of the Mission,” English: “The whole purpose of the mission,” Spanish: *contrarios al Instituto de la Misión*).

Even the French original was in one place mistranslated into Latin, showing a clear lack of understanding of this term. CR 1:2 has in French: *conformes à notre Institut* (“in agreement with our charter”), but the Latin obscures this intention: *prædictis functionibus deservientia* (English: “Ministry which is supportive to those mentioned”).

Other early sources, particularly the Codex Sarzana, also mention the Institute or Charter.² In the preliminary version of the CR 10:2, Codex Sarzana (CS) reads: *Cum iuxta Bullam Institutionis nostrae*, (“When, according to the Bull of our Institution [or Foundation]”), the final version has *Cum iuxta Bullam erectionis Congregationis nostrae* (“When, according to the Bull of erection of our Congregation”), a much clearer statement.

Codex Sarzana has several other references to the Institute, either in the preliminary version of the CR or in other documents, such as the Rules of Office. In a passage omitted from between CR 10:14 and 10:15, CS has “Each one will have the intention of dedicating himself for his entire life to the exercise of the mission in the Congregation according to our Charter” (*iuxta Institutum nostrum*).

Even more important for this purpose is the decree in Codex Sarzana entitled *Cum felicitatis recordationis* concerning vows. In this case, this text mentions the Charter or Institute as one of the various levels of legislation existing in the Congregation: statutes, ordinations, good order and government..., and everything not contrary to the holy canons, apostolic constitutions, the decrees of the Council of Trent, and *the institute*. It concludes by speaking of the

² For the text, see “Codex Sarzana,” *Vincentiana* 35:3-4 (1991), 307-406; it is also available in electronic form at http://via.library.depaul.edu/cm_construles/.

perfection required by the aforementioned institute (*perfectioni ad dictum Institutum requisitae*).

The traditional vow formula also mentioned the Institute, but the translations are less clear, making it appear that “Institute” and “Congregation” are identical: *juxta Instituti nostri Constitutiones et Statuta* (“according to the Constitutions and Statutes of our Institute”) (Statute 21).

The rules of office as given in CS also mention the Charter or Institute in several places. In the rules of the visitor: “In acquiring perfection according to the plan of our own Charter” (*iuxta proprii Instituti rationem*). Admission or readmission of candidates demands that they be apt or appropriate to our Charter (*ad institutum nostrum idoneos*). Visitors should, during official visits to houses, question whether anything is happening that goes against the works of our Charter (*a laboribus instituti nostri aborreat [sic]*), and provincial assemblies should see to it that the matters being discussed should conform to the major points of our Charter (*de substantialibus instituti nostri*).

Later versions of the rules of office (1850 and 1891) also refer to the Charter of Institute. One text in particular, article three of the rules of the secretary general of the congregation, distinguishes between the Congregation and the Institute: “He should be very devoted to the common good of the Congregation, and have an accurate knowledge of the Institute, the Constitutions, Rules...”³ Some other parts of the same rules, however, do not make this distinction.

In his letters and conferences, Saint Vincent mentioned the Charter or Institute occasionally, generally with certain fixed expressions, such as “contrary to our Institute” (letters 461, 716, 1869, 2684; conference to CM, 197); and “according to our Institute,” (letters 541, 1391; conferences to CM, 216, 221). There are several other instances in letters 1236, 1478, 2187, 2435, and conferences to CM, 180, 212 (but this latter reference is ambiguous, referring either to the Congregation or to its Charter).

The usage of the term in the Congregation is also ambiguous. This is most easily noticed in the circulars of the superiors general. The two expressions most used are: “Purpose (*fin*) of our Institute,” and “functions of our Institute,” but these and similar expressions

³ “Communi bono Congregationis debet esse addictissimus, et Instituti, Constitutionum, Regularum, Bullarum, Decretorum, Ordinationum, necnon et rerum aliarum omnium quæ gubernationem spectant accuratam habere debet cognitionem...,” *Regulae Officiorum Congregationis Missions...*, vol. I, Paris 1850, p. 11.

tend to identify the Institute with the Congregation. In general, however, the use is correct, that is, clearly noting that the Institute and the Congregation are not one and the same thing. In the earliest years of the Congregation, this was clear, whereas in later years, the distinction was blurred. Another ambiguity arises from the custom, in French, of calling Vincent de Paul *notre instituteur*, “our founder.” This originally arose from the necessity of distinguishing between the Gondis, who had endowed the Congregation (or assured its financial foundation) and could be called its “founders,” and Vincent de Paul, who began the Congregation. On his tombstone, however, this distinction is not evident since he is given both titles: *Hic Iacet Venerabilis Vir Vincentius a Paulo, Presbyter, Fundator seu Institutor et Primus Superior Generalis...*, but the engraving that forms the frontispiece of the first volume of Abelly calls him simply *instituteur*. This was the more common title in the earliest years of the Congregation, *instituteur* instead of *fondateur*.

The root meaning of the Latin *instituere* is “to found, establish” and in its various verb forms *institutum* or *institutum* are used to mean “foundations” or “establishments.” This led to such expressions as “a house of our Institute,” (*une maison de notre Institut*), “the Institute of Saint Vincent” (*l’Institut de saint Vincent*), “the Constitutions of the Institute” (*constitutions... de notre Institut*), or “the rules of our institute” (*règles de notre Institut*). Gradually, the sense of Charter or Institute was lost, being absorbed into another term, “institution.”

Jean-Baptiste Etienne, however, had the correct sense of the word, using it in the meaning of Charter or Institute in his *Notice*.⁴

The Charter or Institute

What, therefore, is the Charter (or Institute) of the Congregation? The Charter contains the essential elements of the identity of the Congregation, the nucleus of all the other rules, constitutions, statutes and other legislation deriving from it. As such, it is the single most important statement of the identity of the Congregation. The primacy of the Charter is clear from several documents, among which is the response from the Holy See concerning the Constitutions submitted to Rome for approval, what was eventually called the “*Constitutiones selectae*.” The document declares that the

⁴ “On n’avait aucunement la pensée de charger notre Congrégation de ces œuvres, attendu que son Institut l’attachait spécialement aux Missions des campagnes et à la direction des Séminaires” (*Notice sur le Rétablissement de la Congrégation de la Mission après la Révolution de 1789* [Paris 1870]), p. 5; also p. 9.

changes inserted in the original document by the Holy See are confirmed concerning "the Institute of the aforesaid Congregation, its constitutions, rules and functions (*munia*)."⁵

The Charter itself is found within the bull of erection of the Congregation, *Salvatoris nostri*, 12 January 1633,⁶ a document addressed not to Vincent de Paul but to the archbishop of Paris, Jean-François de Gondi. The setting of the Charter makes it difficult to distinguish it from the rest of the bull.⁷ The standard procedure was that the petitioner, in this case Vincent de Paul, presented his final petition for papal approval. Following that, the Holy See examined the petition and, in fact, changed or improved some of its elements.⁸ These can be seen in the table below.

Urban VIII began the bull, containing the Charter, with a pontifical and historical preamble. As pope, his desire is to fulfill his pastoral office, which is helped by congregations, and in particular by this new congregation, whose history he sketches. An important sentence for our purpose introduces the Charter: "... and he [Vincent] prescribed that they observe the precepts and Rules written below."

The text then lays out in general terms the identity and purpose of the Congregation of the Mission. This is its Charter, or Institute. The Latin text begins with the important word: *videlicet*, "namely,"⁹ introducing the details of the Charter. The English translation begins: "The principal purpose and special goal of this Congregation and its members is, by the grace of God, along with their own salvation, to dedicate themselves to the salvation of those who live on the estates, in the countryside, on farms, in hamlets, and in insignificant places." It concludes with a paragraph on the election of superiors general and their basic rights. The papal document continues with further historical observations: "And so, from the very beginning of this same Congregation of the Mission, its priests have been engaged with untiring energy of mind and body...."

⁵ "Mutationes circa supra scriptas constitutiones factae à Praelatis quibus SS N.P. earum remissionem mandavit" (1669), manuscript in Archives of the Congregation of the Mission, Paris. Text available electronically, http://via.library.depaul.edu/cm_clsg/.

⁶ *Salvatoris Nostri*, Doc. 84a, CCD, 13a, 298-300.

⁷ Letter 94a, CCD, 1, 140-44. See also ANGELO COPPO, "Documenti inediti per la storia della Congregazione della Missione, presso l'archivio della S.C. 'De Propaganda Fide'," *Annali della Missione*, 79:3-4 (July-December 1972), 222-246; also ANGELO COPPO, "San Vincenzo e i suoi rapporti con la S. Congregazione 'de Propaganda Fide,'" *Vincentiana* 16:4-5 (1972), 173-177.

⁸ See the details in the untitled presentation on the bull *Salvatoris nostri*, *Annales CM* 106-107 (1941-1942), 32-40.

⁹ Doc. 81, CCD 13:260.

Even here, in this most solemn and important document, the Latin text uses *institutum* ambiguously. It appears more than once in the sense of “institution,” or “Congregation.” For example, the pope praises the Congregation as: *hoc pium institutum Deo acceptissimum*, “this devoted Institute... very acceptable to God.” At the same time, the term appears as Charter or Institute, as in the two following passages: *quatenus congregationem Missionis hujusmodi illiusque institutum et regulas* (“approve and confirm forever this Congregation of the Mission; its Institute and Rules...”); also, *qui institutum praefatum omniaque in praedictis regulis et capitulis contenta observare et adimplere teneantur* (“bound to observe and fulfill the Institute and all that is contained in its Rules and Statutes...”).

Contents of the Charter

A comparison of Vincent’s final petition and the Charter or Institute will show the care that the Holy See took in clarifying the founder’s main ideas.¹⁰

“ P E T I T I O N ”	“ I N S T I T U T E ”	TOPICS
	[1] The principal purpose and special goal of this Congregation and its members is, by the grace of God, along with their own salvation, to dedicate themselves to the salvation of those who live on the estates, in the countryside, on farms, in hamlets, and in insignificant places.	Purpose and Goal
1. First, the principal purpose of the said Congregation is to venerate the Most Holy Trinity and the Sacred mystery of the Incarnation.	[2] repeated from below ... these priests also foster in them special devotion to the Most Holy Trinity, to the sacred mystery of the Incarnation, and to the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God.	Devotions

¹⁰ The numbers in square brackets [-] have been added to facilitate comparison with the numbered paragraphs in Saint Vincent’s original petition.

<p style="text-align: center;">“ P E T I T I O N ”</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">“ I N S T I T U T E ”</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">TOPICS</p>
<p>2. The priests of the said Congregation are sent by the local Ordinaries – to whom the Congregation submits itself in this matter only, and to whom it wishes and intends, now and in the future, to show a perfect obedience – to the cities and towns and other places of the Kingdom of France which are subject to the rule of the Most Christian King, except those which have the title of Parlement or Bailiffship, where there is no lack of priests, either secular or regular, or other ecclesiastical ministers.</p>	<p>[2] In cities and towns, however, that are endowed with titles of archbishoprics, bishoprics, Parlements, and courts of assizes, the clerics and priests of this Congregation perform no public functions of their Institute; privately, they may, nevertheless, instruct those who are to be promoted to Orders and have been sent to them for a two-week period before ordination. So that these Orders may be received worthily, they make a spiritual retreat and a general confession of their whole lives; these priests also foster in them special devotion to the Most Holy Trinity, to the sacred mystery of the Incarnation, and to the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Rural Areas</p>
<p><i>[2, repeated from above]</i> – to whom the Congregation submits itself in this matter only, and to whom it wishes and intends, now and in the future, to show a perfect obedience –</p>	<p>[3] Although the members of this Congregation are subject to the Superior General and other Superiors in matters pertaining to discipline and direction, they are also subject to the local Ordinaries, but only in matters pertaining to the missions, insofar as the Ordinaries can send those designated by the Superiors to those parts of their dioceses that seem best to them.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Local Ordinaries</p>
<p>(2, cont.) They are sent to them to teach the Commandments of God to those who do not know them and to instruct them in the rudiments of Christian doctrine, to hear their confessions, to ad-</p>	<p>[4] In those places to which they are sent, they teach the uninstructed the commandments of God and the rudiments of Catholic doctrine, hear general confessions, administer the Most</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Missions</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">“ P E T I T I O N ”</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">“ I N S T I T U T E ”</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">TOPICS</p>
<p>minister to them the Sacraments of the Church, and to carry on among them the office of teaching catechism and preaching. However, they first obtain the permission of the pastors, without which they never go in to perform these functions, nor do they wish to be able to do so.</p>	<p>Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist, preach simple sermons that are easily understood by the people, and teach catechism. Beforehand, however, they obtain the permission of the Pastors, without which they may not become involved in the aforementioned ministries.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Missions</p>
<p>3. In places where they have preached, they establish, by authority of the Ordinaries, Confraternities of Charity, as they are called, if these are needed in order to help the sick poor, and they themselves contribute something to this holy work out of their own goods.</p>	<p>[5] In places where they exercise the function of catechizing and preaching, they foster, under the authority of the Ordinary, the establishment of what are known as Confraternities of Charity to aid the sick poor.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Charities</p>
<p>4. With the greatest possible charity they try to settle and calm lawsuits and quarrels in which the country people in particular are sometimes involved all through their life.</p>	<p>[6] They also try with the greatest charity to settle and resolve quarrels, enmities, and divisions.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Enmities</p>
<p>5. They welcome into their houses parish priests who wish to make spiritual retreats and receive instruction about the administration of their parishes. They make an effort to assemble these parish priests once a month to deal with cases of conscience and the administration of the Sacraments, whenever this can be done conveniently for the local vicinity and is without detriment to their churches.</p>	<p>[7] They receive into the houses of the aforesaid Congregation the Rectors of parish churches who wish to be helped in making their retreats and in governing their churches. Lastly, they do their best to have these Rectors meet together once a month, when this can be done conveniently by reason of proximity and without detriment to their responsibilities, to treat of cases of conscience and administration of the sacraments.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Clergy Retreats</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">“ P E T I T I O N ”</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">“ I N S T I T U T E ”</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">TOPICS</p>
<p>6. At ordination times they welcome into their houses those who wish to receive Orders so as to teach them how they are to exercise these Orders and receive them worthily.</p>	<p>[2, repeated from above] privately, they may, nevertheless, instruct those who are to be promoted to Orders and have been sent to them for a two-week period before ordination. So that these Orders may be received worthily, they make a spiritual retreat and a general confession of their whole lives;</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Ordination Retreats</p>
<p>7. The aforesaid Congregation does all these things without charge and without any expectation of compensation, and promises to do the same in time to come.</p>	<p>[8] They offer all these services free of charge and with no hope of any human recompense, expecting only a divine reward.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Gratuity</p>
<p>As time went on, lifting up their minds more and more to heavenly things, the aforesaid priests decided upon the following ordinances:</p>	<p>[9] Furthermore...</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Ordinances</p>
<p>1) The Congregation shall consist of laymen, clerics, and priests who shall have all things in common.</p>	<p>... the Congregation shall consist of laymen, clerics, and priests.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Lay and Clergy</p>
<p>2) The laymen shall be content with the service of Martha and take care of domestic matters.</p>	<p>[10] The laymen, restricted to the duties of Martha, shall take care of household affairs.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Duties of Lay Members</p>
<p>3) Clerics shall have to be seventeen or eighteen years old before they can be admitted into the Congregation, and shall become members of the Congregation after a year of probation.</p>	<p>[11] Clerics shall be received no younger than seventeen or eighteen years of age. If, after completing a year of probation, they have been judged suitable and intend to remain in the Congregation...</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Admission</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">“ P E T I T I O N ”</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">“ I N S T I T U T E ”</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">TOPICS</p>
	<p>gation for the rest of their lives, they can be incorporated into the Congregation and admitted as members.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Admission</p>
	<p>[12] They will participate daily in the Most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, frequent the sacrament of Penance, and receive the sacrament of the Eucharist weekly. The priests, however, shall celebrate Mass daily. But everyone, priests as well as the others, shall meditate for an entire hour and also make use of the examination of conscience.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Spiritual Exercises</p>
<p>4) The above-mentioned Vincent de Paul shall remain Superior of the said house of Paris, and after the other houses of the Congregation have been founded, he shall be elected for his lifetime as Superior General of the Congregation.</p>		<p style="text-align: center;">[Vincent de Paul]</p>
<p>5) After the death of the said Vincent de Paul, the Superior General of the Congregation at any given time shall be elected every three years, and may be maintained in office for no more than one other term of three years.</p>	<p>[13] After the death of the aforesaid Vincent, another Superior General shall be elected from the body of the Congregation by this same Congregation.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Elections, Superior General</p>
<p>6) The Superior General shall appoint Superiors and other lesser ministers and remove them at his discretion. He shall visit each house of the Congregation, the property and members, correct, and have other authority</p>	<p>[14] This Superior General shall then have complete authority and superiority to appoint all other Superiors as well as lesser officials, in any of the houses of the Congregation; to remove and transfer them; and to visit and</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Duties of Superior General</p>

“ P E T I T I O N ”	“ I N S T I T U T E ”	TOPICS
and superiority which the Superiors General of similar or other Congregations have, may have, or will have in the future.	correct houses, affairs, and persons of this Congregation, which Superiors General of other similar Congregations have, can have, or will be able to have, over the houses, affairs, and persons of their Congregations.	Duties of Superior General

In the same document, following the text of the Charter (or Institute), the pope answered other requests for approval, privileges, etc. (The second and third blocks of the text of the bull have been rearranged to follow the text of the petition.)

“ P E T I T I O N ”	B U L L : S A L V A T O R I S N O S T R I	TOPICS
[A] Moreover, since experience has proven that this pious institute has brought forth abundant fruits, and since it may be hoped that such happy beginnings will have even happier progress, and since those things which are strengthened by the protection of the Apostolic See are more lasting, Vincent, the Superior of the said house and the other priests of the Congregation [of the Mission] humbly beseech the said Congregation [of bishops and regulars] to show itself especially gracious to the aforesaid Congregation, and through it to each of its members, and to approve and confirm by apostolic authority everything that has been done so far, strengthen it by apostolic recognition,	[A] Since, however, as this petition adds, experience has shown that the greatest results have come from this Institute, and it is hoped that these very happy beginnings will bring about even happier progress in the future, and since those Institutes that are strengthened by the protection of the aforesaid See are more firmly established, it was humbly asked of us, on behalf of Vincent and the aforesaid clerics, priests, and members, that we deign by apostolic kindness to approve the Congregation and to respond appropriately to the other matters mentioned in the petition.	Introduction

<p style="text-align: center;">“ P E T I T I O N ”</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">B U L L : S A L V A T O R I S N O S T R I</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">TOPICS</p>
<p>[B] ... and allow the Superior General of the aforesaid Congregation and his successors, for the greater progress of this Congregation, to enact any other statutes, beyond the aforesaid ordinances, provided they are licit and proper and in no way contrary to the sacred canons and decrees of the Council of Trent. May they also be allowed, according to the nature of circumstances and times, and as often as it shall seem appropriate, to change, alter, modify, limit, and correct them, and have the power to issue new norms freely and unrestrictedly, provided the aforesaid statutes, their changes, alterations, modifications, limitations, corrections, and the new ones to be issued are first approved by the Ordinary.</p>	<p>[C] In like manner, we also impart in perpetuity to the said Vincent, and to the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission in office at the time, the permission and faculty to be able and empowered to issue and establish any Statutes and Ordinances concerning the successful rule, government, direction, and organization of the Congregation of the Mission and of its houses, persons, and goods, as often as it seems expedient to them, provided however that these are lawful and morally good and in no way contrary to the sacred Canons, apostolic Constitutions, the decrees of the Council of Trent,¹¹ the Institute, and the rules of the aforementioned Congregation of the Mission, and are approved by the Archbishop of Paris, as well as to revoke, alter, change, and modify them and establish anew, with, however, similar preliminary examination and approval.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">New Legislation</p>
<p>[C] May the Congregation itself and each one of the present and future members enjoy all and each one of the privileges, immunities, freedoms, exemptions, faculties, favors and graces, indulgences and other concessions which other Congregations use, have, and enjoy, or</p>	<p>[B] If, in virtue of these present letters, you confirm, approve, erect, establish, apply, and appropriate, and do all the other things mentioned above, then we, by the aforesaid apostolic authority, according to these present letters, grant and approve in perpetuity for this Con-</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Privileges</p>

¹¹ Corrected English translation.

<p style="text-align: center;">“ P E T I T I O N ”</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">B U L L : S A L V A T O R I S N O S T R I</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">T O P I C S</p>
<p>may or will be able to use, have, and enjoy in the future. May they use, have, and enjoy them in the same way and to the same extent and without any difference, as if they had been specifically and expressly granted to the said Congregation, its Superiors, and other members. May you be pleased to grant and permit this and to declare null and void [everything to the contrary].</p>	<p>gregation of the Mission, its houses, Superior General, other Superiors and persons, and all its goods and affairs, that they may be able and empowered freely and lawfully to use, take advantage of, possess, and enjoy each and every one of the privileges, prerogatives, advantages, benefits, indults, indulgences, and favors, which any other similar or dissimilar Congregations, their houses, their Superiors General and other Superiors, ministers and persons, and their affairs, properties, and whatsoever of their goods use, take advantage of, possess, and enjoy, and are able and will be able to use, take advantage of, possess, and enjoy them in an equal degree and in the same manner and with no difference whatsoever, provided, nonetheless, that these be in use, not revoked or included in some revocation, and are not in opposition to the sacred Canons, the decrees of the Council of Trent, other apostolic Constitutions, or the particular Statutes of the Congregation of the Mission, just as if they had been granted specifically and particularly to them.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">P r i v i l e g e s</p>

Conclusion

The term “institute” has elicited various understandings within the history of the Congregation. Because of its ambiguous meaning, it has been applied both to the Charter of the Congregation as embedded in its bull of erection, *Salvatoris nostri*, and to the

Congregation itself. This happened even in the earliest days of the Congregation of the Mission. A close examination of its meaning leads us to conclude that the Charter (or Institute) is the nucleus or fundamental statement of Vincentian identity as approved by the Church in the Congregation's earliest days.¹² In the majority of its elements, the Charter has not been changed. It is the author's hope that others will study further the development of this basic document.

¹² Since the Daughters of Charity did not petition papal approval during Vincent's lifetime, there is no Charter from that period. But see a similar document: Doc. 146, CCD 13b, 133-138.

Bertrand Ducournau

by Robert P. Maloney, C.M.¹

with Justin Blanc and Rubén Villareal

Who knew Vincent de Paul best of all? Most, I suspect, would name Louise de Marillac, the co-founder of the Daughters of Charity, with whom Vincent collaborated so closely for 30 years and exchanged hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of notes and letters. Others might propose Antoine Portail, since he was one of the original members of the Congregation of the Mission, was often second in command, served frequently as Vincent's emissary to the Daughters of Charity, and remained at the founder's side until 1660, when he died shortly before Vincent.

Let me suggest, however, that the person who knew him best was Brother Bertrand Ducournau. He and Brother Louis Robineau served as Vincent's secretaries from 1645 and 1647, respectively, until his death. We owe to these two brothers a large part of the oral and written tradition that we possess about St. Vincent. They prepared the materials which Abelly, St. Vincent's first biographer, used in writing his work. Since Abelly knew St. Vincent less intimately than did the two brothers and surely lacked their familiarity with his letters and discourses, it seems clear that the bulk of the biography emanated from them.

Vincent often asked Ducournau and Robineau for information and counsel. Brother Ducournau accompanied St. Vincent on trips, most notably on a six-month tour of western France in 1649. Ducournau's own biographer stated that "M. Vincent loved, cherished and esteemed him."² Vincent, in fact, laments Ducournau's absence

¹ I am very grateful to Justin Blanc for his help in researching and drafting this article and to Ruben Villareal for his assistance in finding and translating French texts. Though I accept responsibility for the final product, I acknowledge, with deep appreciation, their significant contribution to it. Without their aid, I would not have been able to publish it.

² *Notices sur les prêtres, clercs et frères défunts de la Congrégation de la Mission*, 1^{ère} Série, Compagnons de Saint Vincent, Tome I^{er}, Paris, Pillet et

whenever the latter was sick³ and, in his letters, urges others to pray for Ducournau on those occasions. Since there was no “separation” of priests and brothers in those days, Brother Robineau lived right next door to St. Vincent and Ducournau was nearby. Being strategically located and having daily contact with Vincent, they jotted down many of the things that they saw and heard. Fr. Alméras, Vincent’s successor, asked that these recollections be gathered in a manuscript entitled *Remarques*, which was finally published in 1991 by André Dodin.⁴ Interestingly, in the process for St. Vincent’s canonization, the best of the documents submitted to the Holy See was written by another of Ducournau’s close collaborators in the secretariat, Brother Pierre Chollier, who succeeded Ducournau as secretary to later Superiors General and was the author of the biographical notice published upon Bertrand’s death.

Since Brothers Ducournau and Robineau were St. Vincent’s frequent companions and his secretaries for the last decade and a half of his life, we might ask: how did they function in their role as secretaries? The response to that question is complex. At times, undoubtedly, they merely wrote down what St. Vincent dictated. But, pursuing the question, we may further ask: on other occasions, did Vincent simply say to them, “Brother, would you please write a letter to Fr. Blatiron saying ‘Yes.’ Thank him for all the news he sent and give him a little information about what has been happening around here over the past few days?” In some letters, that is almost certainly the case. In Vincent’s later years, did they read the mail as it came in? It seems clear that they did. Did they then draft responses and bring them to him to be signed? In other words, were they so in tune with his thinking that they wrote a number of letters, to which he then merely affixed his signature? That seems to be the case. In fact, occasionally Ducournau himself wrote to Louise de Marillac⁵ and others,⁶ forwarding messages and information from Vincent.

Dumoulin, 1881, p. 433. This long biography was written by Brother Pierre Chollier.

³ Cf. SV V, 177, 181, 183, 206, 219; VIII, 185.

⁴ ANDRÉ DODIN, *Monsieur Vincent, Raconté par son secrétaire: Remarques sur les actes et paroles de feu Monsieur Vincent de Paul, notre Très Honoré Père Fondateur* (Paris: O.E.I.L., 1991). In his introduction, Dodin gives some brief bibliographical data about Ducournau and Robineau. He points out that much of the material in the book was gathered by Robineau.

⁵ Cf. SV V, 645, “Appendices,” letter of November 29, 1655; cf. also, SV VI, 641; VII, 628, 629.

⁶ Cf. SV VIII, 513.

Given Ducournau's important role, in this article I wish to offer a brief description of the life, contribution and character of this remarkable brother, who was the founder's closest collaborator in his later years.⁷

His Background

Bertrand Ducournau spoke with the same accent as Vincent de Paul. A Gascon like Vincent, he came from Amou, not far from the founder's birthplace, where he was born in 1614. The youngest child of a poor family and the son of illiterate parents, he learned to read and write at age six, when his father sent him to study under a teacher from Paris who had recently moved to the region to found a school. This early opportunity to become literate would prove a providential step for the young Gascon. On his own initiative, Bertrand also began to learn math and quickly proved a capable, versatile pupil. While his father's original intention was for the boy to be educated in order to assist in family business affairs, word of Bertrand's intelligence and graceful handwriting soon spread throughout the region so that, by the age of 10 or 11, he was carrying out important secretarial tasks for his teacher and others in the region.

After the death of his father, the 15-year-old Bertrand was left with only a meager inheritance; soon, however, he attracted the attention of a notary and began to earn a good living, moving up quickly. After only three months, his employer realized that he did not have enough work to keep the young man busy. The notary introduced Bertrand to a friend in Bayonne, and soon thereafter he accepted a job as secretary to one of the most important families in the city. If the previous position failed to provide enough work to keep Bertrand busy, his new employer proved demanding and difficult to please. Nevertheless, Bertrand served him well for three years, functioning practically as master of the house. When his

⁷ There is considerable biographical information about Bertrand Ducournau. Perhaps most important is the lengthy account of his life and death, written by Brother Pierre Chollier and later published in *Notices sur le prêtres, clercs et frères défunts de la Congrégation de la Mission*, 1^{ère} Série, Compagnons de Saint Vincent, Tome I^{er}, Paris, Pillet et Dumoulin, 1881, pp. 377-451. One can also find abundant information in PIERRE COSTE, *La Congrégation de la Mission* (Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1927), chapter V on "Les Frères Coadjuteurs," 115 ff., and in STAFFORD POOLE, "Brother Bertrand Ducournau," *Vincentian Heritage* VI (#2, 1985), 247-256, which offers a clear, brief presentation of Ducournau's life which was very helpful in the preparation of this article.

employer died, Ducournau was courted by numerous other families of Bayonne. Despite these offers, however, he remained with the family of his former employee and continued to work for them for another six years.

Then the Bishop of Bayonne, François Fouquet, upon seeing Bertrand's gifts as a writer, hired him and brought him to the episcopal palace, but Doucournau quickly became disillusioned there because he found himself a "hotel manager." He left the job after only a year, but his time in the service of the Bishop had brought him some useful contacts. It was through Fouquet that Ducournau first met a number of priests who were members of Vincent de Paul's Tuesday Conferences, including Louis Abelly, with whom he was later to collaborate in writing the first biography of St. Vincent.

The following six years were a turbulent time in his life. He was thinking about marriage and eventually signed a formal proposal to wed a young woman, but, despite the pressures of the girl's mother, he kept putting the marriage off. Receiving a convenient job offer in Paris, he accepted it and escaped there. While in the city, he came to know Jean Duvergier de Hauranne, the famous "Abbé de Saint Cyran," a friend of Vincent's and soon the center of controversy for his Jansenist tendencies. The Abbé liked Bertrand and helped him get a job as secretary to Urbain de Maillé, Marshall de Brezé, who had just been assigned to represent the king of France in Catalonia, which at that time had come under French control. Ducournau accompanied him there. Upon their arrival in Catalonia political conditions changed unexpectedly, so they returned to Montpellier.

While traveling with his employer in Languedoc, he went to confession one day to a Recollect Father, who told him that he should change his life completely and dedicate himself to God's service through a religious vocation. He was stunned. He raised the question of his promise to marry, but the priest simply replied: "That was then. What God wants of you now is to give him your life." Ducournau began to pray about the matter and decided to seek the counsel of Saint Cyran. Returning to Paris, however, he learned of the death of Saint Cyran, the timing of which he later considered providential, as Saint Cyran would likely have directed him away from the Congregation of the Mission. Ducournau consulted a theologian, who supported what the Recollect Father had said and told him not to let his signed marriage proposal deter him. He encouraged him to join a new community that had not yet lost its first fervor. Not convinced, Ducournau consulted another theologian, who reaffirmed what the others had said.

A young friend suggested that he make a retreat at St. Lazare and offered to accompany him. On the day they were to go, the friend

failed to show up, so Ducournau went alone. During the retreat, he asked the priest who was directing him if the Congregation of the Mission accepted laymen who wanted to leave the world and serve God. The priest said that the Congregation did receive such people, but only if the superiors judged them fit. He promised to talk with the founder, Vincent de Paul. Vincent met with Ducournau and agreed to receive him into the community. Bertrand was a tiny, bright man of 30 years of age when he met the founder, who was then 63.

When he returned to his job, he told his employer the whole story. The employer encouraged him, but asked him to stay on for a while, so that he could complete various business affairs. Ducournau went back to Vincent and asked him what he thought. Vincent, who was on retreat at the time, gave him this evangelical response through Monsieur Alméras: "Let the dead bury their dead" (Mt 8:22; Lk 9:59). Ducournau went home, packed his bags, came back and entered the Congregation on July 28, 1644.

For the first three weeks, he worked in the kitchen, but it was soon apparent to his superiors that his skills were more secretarial than culinary. They proposed that he be Vincent's secretary. This seemed all the more urgent because it was evident that, with his entrance onto the Council of Conscience in mid-1643, Vincent was becoming over-burdened. Vincent's next circular letter to the superiors of the Congregation of the Mission is written in Ducournau's handwriting. The first of St. Vincent's letters to a confrere that shows Ducournau's hand was addressed to Jacques Chiroye on May 3, 1645.

As mentioned above, from January 14 to June 7, 1649, he accompanied Vincent on a trip to western France. It included an audience with the queen, a tense conversation with Cardinal Mazarin, and visits to the houses of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity. Vincent got sick a couple of times during that journey. It was toward the end of the trip, when once again Vincent visited the court, that the Duchesse of Aiguillon sent Vincent a carriage to use, which he called his "ignominy."

Basically, Ducournau was Vincent's right-hand man from there on. He received the mail, wrote letters for Vincent to sign, and sent them out. Vincent also entrusted money to him and asked him to investigate delicate matters. He was often the intermediary between Vincent and Louise de Marillac, carrying messages back and forth. When, in 1660, it became evident that Vincent was approaching death, confreres and others began to write directly to his secretary. Ducournau was there at his side, as he had been for years, when Vincent died.

Ducournau then served until the end of his life as secretary to Vincent's successors, Fr. Alméras and Jolly, and as archivist for the Congregation.

His Interventions to Preserve Vincent's Conferences and Letters

As time went on, Ducournau grew in his conviction of the importance of Vincent's role in the Church, his position as founder, and his holiness. Sensing that he was serving at the side of a saint, Ducournau felt a responsibility to preserve Vincent's words for posterity. In fact, Pierre Coste states that no one understood Vincent's holiness and genius better than Ducournau.⁸ This is illustrated by a memo which he wrote, dated August 15, 1657,⁹ encouraging the preservation of Vincent's addresses to the priests and brothers of the Mission. As one might expect from someone who was an extraordinary secretary, the memo presents a well-organized case for documenting Vincent's discourses. He states that "the best legacy of fathers is the good instruction they leave to their children." He argues that, since Vincent is the common father of the priests and brothers of the Mission, it would be an act of injustice if his words were not passed on and shared among his children. Furthermore, Ducournau adds, Vincent's works seem to be from God, and, as such, his teachings ought to be gathered up like manna from heaven and preserved "for our absent and future confreres, who will someday have an ardent desire for this food of the soul."

Replying to the objection that Vincent usually said only ordinary things, Ducournau points out that there are many who need guidance in commonplace matters and that even ordinary things, when spoken by Vincent, took on extraordinary force. His teachings need not be novel in order to be of importance, for "the best food for babies is their own mother's milk, and the loving instruction of their father makes a greater impression on their mind than their teachers do."

The members of the Congregation of the Mission knew that Vincent rarely put his own teaching into writing and that he also discouraged his Missioners from publishing books, lest they be distracted from their work, so Ducournau realized that Vincent would not agree to have his words written down. Consequently, he recognized that they had to proceed discreetly with the project. He suggested that two or more priests be assigned to remembering the content of Vincent's conferences. These men would meet later

⁸ COSTE, *op. cit.*, 118.

⁹ SV XII, 445.

and compose a document based on what was said, or, ideally, one person with a quick mind and hand would write down Vincent's words verbatim as he spoke them. Despite his already busy schedule as Vincent's secretary, Ducournau himself ended up being commissioned to undertake the task he had suggested and, offering his free time to this project, compiled three large volumes of material from Vincent's talks.¹⁰

Ducournau intervened again in 1658, when he helped to preserve copies of the two letters, dated 1607 and 1608, in which Vincent describes his captivity in Tunisia. An old friend of Vincent, the Canon de Saint-Martin, rediscovered the letters and sent copies along to Vincent, thinking that he would enjoy having them. Vincent destroyed the copies immediately and would have done the same with the originals had not Ducournau secretly sent a warning to Saint-Martin that he should preserve these extraordinary accounts. In a letter to Saint-Martin, Ducournau marvels that Vincent had never spoken of his adventures in Barbary or told the Congregation of his success in converting his captors and ministering to oppressed Christians. Comparing Vincent's work in Tunisia and Algiers to alchemy, Ducournau says that Vincent was more successful than those who undertake to change the nature of metals, for he turned evil into good, the sinner into the just, slavery and hell into freedom and paradise. Continuing the analogy he writes, "[Vincent] found the philosopher's stone. His charity, inflamed with a divine fire, converted all into pure gold."¹¹

His Character

Clearly, Ducournau deeply admired Vincent. His peers tell of his removing his hat out of respect at the mention of the founder's name. While his literary talent sometimes lent itself to poetic presentations of Vincent's character, he had a sober understanding of Vincent's holiness. He defended Vincent's humble, practical virtues against those whose idea of holiness demanded miraculous events. He insisted that, while Vincent may not have announced new truths, his faith and works were deeply rooted in the Gospel, and his love for God and neighbor had borne abundant fruit. Ducournau responded firmly in writing to what he saw as the libels of Jansenists who attacked Vincent publicly.

¹⁰ The Daughters of Charity had been quicker to find a way to preserve Vincent's talks. They took some initial steps toward jotting down his conferences in 1634 and did so continuously from 1640 on.

¹¹ SV VIII, 514.

Accounts of Ducournau's life and work reveal a deep love for his vocation as a brother. He united zeal for his secretarial duties with an interior love of God. He spoke of the grace attached to the office of brother, which he described as a life of humility and service of Christ. In fact, he felt that the brothers of the Mission were in a preferential position to be united to the life of the Lord. He encouraged brothers in their vocation, stating that their state of life, which was often considered "the least of all," was like a sacrament, in which abundant grace is disguised as something lowly. He spoke of a brother's vows as a treasure, saying that each renewal of a brother's vows is as valuable as the first time he made them, just as a sin is a sin as many times as it is repeated.

Ducournau's desire to embrace a life of service and imitate Vincent's virtues was recognized by his peers. They saw him as a man conformed to the will of God. Like the founder, he was convinced of the importance of mortification of body and mind. In addition to fasting and uniting his suffering to the Cross, he strove to eliminate in his life whatever would be a distraction to his memory, intellect, and will. But despite his rigor toward himself, he was affable among his brothers. He valued gentleness, believing that it flowed from the warmth of God's love.

He had great devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and longed for the happiness of the early centuries of the Church, when the faithful received communion every day. Without frequent communion, which was not a common practice in 17th century France, he considered his soul a dry land without water. Being filled with the Lord's love in the Eucharist, he said, produces peace.

His biographer, Brother Chollier, states that Ducournau understood his radical dependence on God. He once shared with a colleague his satisfaction in knowing that "God is everything and everything outside of God is nothing."¹² He went on to exclaim, "Ah! It is good to be lost in God!" He added, "My plan is to put all my obedience, my humility, my patience, my resignation and virtue, and all my hope in God." He expressed his fear of displeasing God and used this fear as a stimulus to love.

In addition to gentleness, other qualities flowed from Ducournau's love of God. Among the traits noted by his peers was a love of silence. This complemented his natural eloquence, since he understood the value of language and was able to express his faith clearly. In addition to helping him listen for the voice of God, his love

¹² *Notices sur le prêtres*, cit., 388.

of silence aided him as a secretary, since he could be trusted with private affairs.

Ducournau was also an avid reader of spiritual texts. In order to benefit from spiritual reading, he would reread a book until he felt he had absorbed its contents. Once he consoled a colleague who complained that his spiritual reading went in one ear and out the other. He told him that the Spirit acts in the memory even if one does not seem to be retaining much, and assured his brother that lifting up one's mind and heart to God in spiritual reading provides food for the soul even when we seem distracted.

Prominent in his spiritual reading were books on the lives of the saints. He would celebrate their feast days and meditate on the saints' teachings, striving to imitate them as masters of the art of living and dying. He took notes on their lives and kept a list of their virtues on his desk in order to incorporate them into his own life.

First in his devotion to the saints was his relationship with Mary. While vocal prayer did not especially appeal to him, he had learned by heart a number of prayers in honor of the Blessed Mother, whose picture he kept pasted on his desk. He attributed his advancement in virtue, especially humility and chastity, to his imitation of Mary, and he spoke joyfully and enthusiastically in her praise.

Chollier reports that, as his death approached, Ducournau was free of anxiety and resigned to the will of God. He died on January 3, 1677, at sixty-three years of age. The reaction to the news is telling. He was mourned by his brothers in the Congregation and also by the Daughters of Charity, many of whom wept when they heard of his death. The day after Ducournau's burial, Fr. Jolly, the Superior General, wrote of the community's loss. He described Ducournau as a man of prayer who was filled with the spirit of God. He listed Bertrand's virtues, especially humility and obedience. Ducournau's death, Jolly said, was like his life, "having endured his sickness in constant union with God and our Lord crucified." Indeed, he added, the motherhouse was "still perfumed with the fragrance of his virtues, especially his great kindness and charity to everyone."¹³

In his vocation as a brother and as secretary to Vincent de Paul, Ducournau did not merely live in the shadow of the saint, but actively acquired many of his virtues. A government worker who had collaborated with Ducournau described him as "a ray of the great man" whom Bertrand admired so dearly and served so faithfully.¹⁴

¹³ *Notices sur le prêtres*, cit., 448.

¹⁴ *Notices sur le prêtres*, cit., 438.

Father Antoine Portail, C.M.

by José Vega Herrera, C.M.

Anthropologists and psychologists maintain that the human person develops especially through relations and encounters with other persons. The web of vital relationships forms and sustains the human personality.

Antoine Portail met Vincent de Paul when he was pastor at Clichy and they walked together and supported one another for forty-five years. The personal relationship between Vincent and Portail did not stop there: the both of them lived an intense relationship with God who took the initiative in their lives and led them along unexpected paths. Portail cannot be understood without Vincent. So also Vincent cannot be understood with his collaborators and Portail is the first among those collaborators. Very quickly he became Vincent's confidant and Portail placed all his trust in Vincent. Many years later he expressed the motive of his admiration and support: he says that *Saint Vincent was one of the most perfect images of Jesus Christ that he had ever known on earth.*¹

Interiorly Saint Vincent is in the midst of a decisive process of conversion that radically changes the course of his life. This process divides his life in a "before" and an "after" and results in seeing Christ and the poor and himself in a new way. He would always maintain that it was God who through the events of his life led him to develop his charism and moved him toward the poor.

Portail unites himself to Vincent in this on-going adventure. The two begin to discover in these events the ways in which God is united with the poor. Clichy, Chatillón, Folleville... these events impel them to the encounter with God-in-the-poor and with the poor-in-God,

Antoine Portail was born in Beaucaire, in the Diocese of Arles, on November 22, 1590. He studied at the Sorbonne until 1612 and entered a group of aspirants to the priesthood that was led by Vincent who at that time was in Clichy. Their two lives would develop along parallel lines and only death would separate them.

The parish in Clichy could be considered as a rehearsal for the rest of Vincent's life. In Clichy the embryo of all future Vincentian

¹ ABELLY, *Vida del venerable siervo de Dios, Vicente de Paúl*, CEME, p. 608.

undertakings was developed. The year 1617 is key for the whole Vincentian movement. Vincent was totally dedicated to the missions but on January 25th he feels himself transformed because of the experience of Folleville: he would say that it was the birth of the Congregation of the Mission. In May he was pastor in Chatillón and discovers the potential of organized charity. At the end of the year he returns to the de Gondi family and makes a commitment to give missions on their lands.

Vincent begins to involve Portail, even before his ordination to the priesthood, in his own apostolic activities. When Vincent returns from Chatillón, Portail becomes his assistant in educating the de Gondi children. Portail lives in the area called Saint Honoré, in a house that was rehabilitated as a hostel and a prison for the galley slaves. Thus the beginning of his apostolate is undertaken with these rude men who were condemned to the galleys. Alongside Vincent he alleviates and evangelizes these men. In 1622, Vincent goes to Marseilles as the royal chaplain of the galley slaves and leaves Portail in Paris as his representative. Portail is ordained a priest in 1622 and continues his ministry with the galley slaves until he is transferred to the Bons-Enfants in 1624.

We went, gladly and in a simple way, to evangelize the poor like Our Lord

Saint Vincent and Portail are the roots of the Vincentian Family tree. The two, with a diocesan priest, form the first triad of the missions. Something new is being born in the Church and they are absolutely convinced that this something is from God. Later, with a certain nostalgia, Vincent will remember this: *Sent by the bishops, we went, gladly and in a simple way, to evangelize the poor like Our Lord. This is what we did and God did what he had foreseen from the beginning of time. He blessed our works. On seeing this some other good ecclesiastics joined us and asked us to receive them.... Oh Savior! Who would have thought that things would develop in this way? If someone would have told me this I would have thought they were mocking me. Nevertheless this is how God wanted to begin the Company. Can we call a work that no one thought of... can we call this a human work? Neither I nor poor Father Portail had thought of it... we were far from thinking about such a thing!*²

² *Notices sur les pretres, clercs et freres defunts de la Congrégation de la Mission, I Les premiers compagnons de S. Vincent: Antonio Portail, p. 5 (hereafter cited as: Notices I: p. xx).*

Portail was in charge of catechesis during the missions: he was a shy man. In 1630, during the mission at Croissy, he preached for the first time: he was forty years old and had been at Vincent's side for eighteen years. Vincent congratulates him: (even though *you have begun late*) and asks the Lord to bless all his preaching and thus enable him to fulfill the desire that Portail revealed to him, namely, that of being an example to the Company.³

We are able to follow Portail's journey through his correspondence with Saint Vincent. For example we find him on the mission as a companion to and perhaps a counter-balance to Father Antoine Lucas, young and impetuous to the extreme of prudence. Portail also has his own temperament and Saint Vincent writes him: *I am hoping for much fruit from on high through the goodness of Our Lord, if union, cordiality, and support exist between you two.... Because you are the older, the second in the Company, and the Superior, bear with everything, I say, everything, on the part of good M. Lucas. I repeat, everything, so that, laying aside your superiority, you may adapt yourself to him in charity. That is the way Our Lord won over and directed the Apostles, and that is how you shall succeed with M. Lucas.*⁴

Later in 1635 Vincent's confidence in Portail and the intemperance of Antoine Lucas gives rise perhaps to one of Vincent's most beautiful letters. It is addressed to Portail and Lucas is reprimanded: *Remember, Monsieur, we live in Jesus Christ through the death of Jesus Christ, and we must die in Jesus Christ through the life of Jesus Christ, and in order to die as Jesus Christ, we must live as Jesus Christ.*⁵ From a life in Christ he points out the personal attitudes that the missionaries must clothe themselves with in order to be credible and in order for the missions to produce fruit (and thus not be mere noise and fanfare).

At this time Portail is strongly committed to giving missions in different places and maintains frequent correspondence with Vincent. Portail writes him about the fruits of the missions and Vincent gives him instructions about his own actions telling him *to take care of directing the group.*⁶ In the same way Portail is informed about the events at Saint-Lazare and other news about the Company.⁷

³ CCD I: 82-83.

⁴ CCD I: 110.

⁵ CCD I: 276.

⁶ CCD I: 178.

⁷ CCD I: 331-332; II: 217.

In 1631 preparation of the ordinands began in Saint-Lazare and the following year the doors were opened to priests and lay persons who desired to make a retreat. Vincent finds in Portail a teacher: in him shine forth solid and pious teaching and the example of priestly virtue. Portail translates the meditations of Bosée into French and uses these meditations in his ministry with the ordinands. He enhances this work with the addition of new themes and adds notes for retreatants and directors. His *Introduction* is a masterful work.⁸

Collet says that Portail was a good student at the Sorbonne and that he wrote very well but was outstanding in the practice of humility.⁹ In 1643, Saint Vincent gave a conference to the students at the time of the beginning of their courses. The author of the “Notices” about Portail believes that without mentioning him, all those listening recognized the characteristics of the humble and wise missionary, Portail.¹⁰ *Although all priests are obliged to be knowledgeable, yet we are especially obliged to be so because of the ministries and exercises to which the Providence of God has called us, such as our work with the ordinands, the direction of ecclesiastical seminaries and missions... those who were both learned and humble were the treasure of the Company, just as good, devout theologians were the treasure of the Church.*¹¹ For Saint Vincent, Portail is one of those treasures, his right arm in all the important works that he undertakes.

I do not know how all of this came about

*Had we ever imagined the ministries the Company now has, with the ordinands, for example, who are the richest and most precious deposit the Church could entrust to us? That had never entered our minds. Did we ever think of the Confraternity of Charity? How did we happen to undertake the rescue of poor foundlings? I do not know how all this came about; for my part, I could not tell you. M. Portail over there can attest that nothing was further from our thought than all that.*¹²

On April 17, 1625 the Congregation of the Mission is officially born under the shadow and protection of the de Gondy family:

⁸ *Notices* I: pp. 10, 13-15.

⁹ *Notices* I: pp. 10, 13-15.

¹⁰ *Notices* I: p. 9.

¹¹ CCD XI: 115.

¹² CCD XII: 8.

the Congregation is composed of two people who sign the act of foundation, Vincent de Paul and Antoine Portail. Very soon two others join them and their missionary activity becomes more intensive and extensive. The mission is sustained by preaching and the confraternities of charity are established as a permanent fruit of these same missions. Then will come the work with the ordinands, retreats, the Tuesday conferences, the great gestures of charity in the regions devastated by war....

Very soon Vincent proposes assuring the stability of the Congregation and is confronted with three great challenges: approval of the Congregation, approval of the vows, and approval of the Rules and Constitutions. Three long distance obstacle races that are entwined, upsetting and yet complimentary. The Vincentian concept of community and the vows breaks with traditional schemas and brings about opposition, small advances, and some rejections. But Vincent is firmly convinced that his intuition comes from God: very important because he is going to need much strength to confront the internal and external difficulties that he will encounter during the next thirty years. It is incredible to see the unwavering position of Vincent and his followers while they await pontifical approval. During this time the Company is modeling its internal, spiritual and juridical structure and is also beginning to expand.

In harmony with Saint Vincent, Portail is found on the front lines in these three questions. The biographers of Saint Vincent point out that Portail *had been Vincent's right arm from the time of Clichy and would continue in this role until his death in 1660. This was especially true in those matters concerning the Company and the Daughters of Charity* (Corera). Portail *was the first to join Vincent on the missions, the first priest of his Congregation; he was secretary and first Assistant' he was the one who was most helpful in governing the Congregation and the one whom Vincent most trusted* (Abelly). Román presents Portail *as the first of Vincent's spiritual sons and his friend through thick and thin during all the vicissitudes of the history of the Mission... he was Vincent's confidant, sharing his every concern and counseling him in his doubts.*¹³

The most fruitful period for Portail begins in 1642. His name often appears in the documents of the Congregation and in Vincentian correspondence. Saint Vincent convokes the first General Assembly and resigns from the position of Superior General but is re-elected.

¹³ J. COREA, *Vida del Señor Vicente de Paúl*, CEME, p. 129; ABELLY, *Vida del venerable siervo de Dios, Vicente de Paúl*, CEME, p. 218; J.M. ROMÁN, *St. Vincent de Paul*, Melisende, London 1999, p. 654.

Portail is appointed first Assistant and secretary to the Superior General. The objective of the Assembly was to study the Rules and the Constitutions of the Congregation. After eighteen sessions and many amendments and observations a commission of four members is appointed to redact a final document (Portail is named the head of this commission). He shows himself to be an intelligent and prepared man, one who works diligently and who is willing to engage in dialogue.

The commission does not hand over their task to a secretary and thus their Rules and Constitutions will not be the preconceived product of a laboratory. Rather they will be the expression of the life of the missionaries as lived during the thirty years of the Company's growth. In 1651 the second General Assembly returns to the theme of the Rules and Constitutions and in 1655 the Holy See approves the Rules. But some details must still be resolved and the Rules are not distributed until 1658. It had been a slow process but Saint Vincent could say that *with the help of God's grace, delaying like this has saved us from such a risk. It has also made it possible for the Congregation gradually and smoothly to get used to living the Rules before having them in print. You will not find anything in them which you have not been doing for a long time, and I must say how pleased I am that you do live by them and that they have enabled you all to help one another.*¹⁴

"The practice and approval of the vows came about after a long process similar to that followed by the development of the rules. In some way it was more difficult and more controversial."¹⁵ The Vincentian intuition breaks with juridical molds and traditions: the struggle for a Congregation of secular priests who form a community and who take vows that bind them to the community but do not make them religious and they are exempt from the Ordinary. He encounters opposition within and outside the Congregation and some of his attempts to gain approval of the vows will meet with rejection.

The Assembly of 1651 was dedicated to the study of the vows and the discussion unfolded in some arduous sessions. Portail intervened and offered a compromise which affirmed the fact that the vows were made voluntarily, but finally adhered to the opinion of Saint Vincent. It was agreed that the Holy See must approve all of this and Portail was entrusted with this task.

In 1655 at the same time that the Rules are approved, the taking of simple vows is also approved. Saint Vincent announces this fact on December 31. On January 25, 1656 Portail writes three documents:

¹⁴ CCD X: 430-431.

¹⁵ J.M. ROMÁN, *op. cit.*, p. 317.

first, the act of taking vow which had just been approved and which he signs after Saint Vincent; second, the vow formula; third, the explanation of the vow of poverty.

A zealous and wise visitor¹⁶

In 1642, seventeen years after its foundation, the Congregation had ten houses. In the following three years a great expansion took place: eleven new houses were established. In 1646 Saint Vincent believed it necessary to unify the communities with the order and spirit that governed Saint-Lazare and sent Portail to visit the houses as his representative.¹⁷ He himself had lived and experienced the birth and the development of the charism. He lived his vocation in a profound manner and his life and actions were animated by more than just words.

He left Paris at the beginning of March, 1646 and did not return there until three and a half years later, in September, 1649. Saint Vincent gave him an authentic renewal program¹⁸ and the two of them frequently exchanged communication concerning the results, the orientations and the animation. Some visits lasted three months. Portail participated in the missions and activities of the communities. He lived with the missionaries. On several occasions Saint Vincent congratulated the Visitor for his wise management and for the blessings that he receives as a result of organizing the communities. He also followed the rhythm of the visits and reminded Portail that it is not good to prolong these visits:¹⁹ *I cannot tell you what [a consolation this is to me] be[cause you]are awaited patiently elsewhere, and are needed, especially in Rome. I ask Our Lord Jesus Christ to conduct you there, and continue to grant you the same grace to restore things to the point He desires, in what remains for you to do, as in what you have done.* On another occasion he opens his heart to him: *May God preserve you, Monsieur, for whom His Divine Goodness has given me extraordinary sentiments of affection and esteem.*²⁰

A letter of Saint Vincent, dated July 1646, gives us an idea of Portail's role and prestige in the Company as he carried out the responsibilities that were entrusted to him. Portail informs Vincent about his travels and shares with him news about the houses he is

¹⁶ *Notices* I: p. 54.

¹⁷ *Notices* I: p. 10.

¹⁸ *Notices* I: pp. 30-31.

¹⁹ CCD III: 124-125.

²⁰ CCD III: 133, 137-138.

visiting. Vincent tells Portail that he agrees with him in certain details concerning the Daughters of Charity: *It will be good for you to have them moderate this.* More significantly he says: *My opinion is that you should still put off receiving the vows of Messierus Gobert and Lucas. As for what you ask about how to act with regard to M. du Coudray, I cannot tell you a better way than that of gentleness and humility. But I beg you to fear nothing with these virtues. Our Lord will bless whatever you do there, and I hope you will have the same facility as elsewhere to introduce the practices of the Company and banish those that are not proper to it. You will also be able to moderate his authority with regard to the change of officers, just as for other Superiors. In short everything should be as uniform as possible.*²¹

When Portail returned to Saint-Lazare after a prolonged absence, the community received him warmly, a sign of the way in which he was esteemed and loved by the confreres: Father de la Fosse dedicated a lengthy poem (written in Latin and more than eighty verses) to him.²²

We are able to see that from the beginning his relationship with Saint Vincent was decisive in the formation of his personality. But it did not remain static. He enriched and expanded his better qualities. Saint Louise told the Sisters that Saint Vincent had a special gift from God that enabled him to know and lead people on the path that God desired. This made him different from other directors who gave their own advice and not that of God.²³ Saint Louise is a good example of this and so is Portail — the two looked toward God and sought to know the will of God and Saint Vincent made them give the best of themselves.

The perfection that God asks of the entire Company requires your advice and your guidance

A whole chapter could be dedicated to Father Portail as the first Director of the Daughters of Charity, a ministry which he began in 1642. Portail appears as a man who had matured spiritually, who walked forever between two saints committed to God and the poor and who seems to have walked with the same rhythm as they. He walked with confidence and humble obedience to the saints and was valued and trusted by the both Louise and Vincent. He is

²¹ CCD II: 675-676.

²² *Notices* I: pp. 69-75.

²³ Cf. *Vincentiana*, September-October 2009, p. 398 (“La Compagnie des Filles de la Charité aux origines,” *Document* 822, p. 946).

consulted and consults with them. In them he sees the revelation of the will of God as the supreme norm. The Superior General gives advice and weekly conferences to the Daughters of Charity: Portail assists him and is asked his opinion, and when Saint Vincent is late or absent, Portail, in a very natural way, takes charge of the situation. He is so imbued with the spirit of Vincent that he presents the same fundamental doctrinal elements.

Saint Vincent maintained the general direction of the Daughters while Portail seemed to have maintained a more personal relationship with them. During a long absence of three and a half years while Portail was visiting the houses of the Congregation, Louise writes him frequently revealing *the need which your poor Daughters of Charity have of your return.... It seems that the perfection that God asks of the entire Company depends on your charitable advice and guidance. It is true that your very lengthy absence has been painful for us.... Return quickly, Monsieur, to help us acquire this perfection.*²⁴ *I must tell you, in all truth, that your absence is costing the entire Company dearly; every day we experience it more and more.*²⁵

At a given time there arose a misunderstanding between Portail and Louise. This explains the intention of the letter she wrote to him.²⁶ Portail assures her and affirms that she has worked well. On occasions, he tells her, the saints are able to disagree but this in no way breaks the bond of charity and love.²⁷

In their frequent correspondence Portail and Saint Louise reveal a mutual appreciation, confidence and respect for one another. During his prolonged absence from Paris, Portail made numerous visits to the Sisters and gave detailed reports of his visits to Saint Louise. In her own name and in the name of the Sisters she thanks Portail for his letters that *were a great joy and consolation to us... tears were shed. It was the hope of seeing you soon which comforted us, although we have awaited this happiness for a long time.*²⁸ Portail responds saying that *I truly believe that your Institute is a work of God and is governed by God's hand in the same way that a good father would care for his beloved children.*²⁹

In Angers he leaves the Sisters extensive regulations, twenty-three points that he encourages them *to read and listen to each month*

²⁴ SWLM: pp. 202-203.

²⁵ SWLM: p. 148.

²⁶ SWLM: pp. 538-539.

²⁷ *Notices I*: p. 69.

²⁸ SWLM: pp. 286-287.

²⁹ *Notices I*: p. 69.

*and also to practice them and to use them as themes for prayer.*³⁰ He frequently promises Saint Louise that he offers Mass for the Daughters of Charity: *so that God will preserve them, fill them with courage, strengthen and sanctify them more and more in the exercises of their holy vocation.*³¹ He continues directing many Daughters... even six months before his death he directs them with lengthy letters.³² After counseling one of the Daughters he tells her that he will offer Mass *so that the Lord might be your guide, your consolation, your strength, your courage and thus one day after having combated worthily and suffered for his love you will be rewarded in heaven.*³³

He will be more useful to us in Heaven

At the beginning of 1660 he felt fatigued. He suspended his regular visits to the Daughters. On February 14th, after an illness of nine days, Portail proceeded Saint Louise and Saint Vincent in the journey to heaven. Collet writes: *Saint Vincent has lost Antoine Portail, a priest of true value, of profound humility, of exemplary charity who was united with our saint from the time they lived in the de Gondi house, that is, for more than forty-five years. He had provided essential services to the Congregation; he was secretary and first assistant, Director of the Daughters of Charity, filled with the spirit of his good father, willing to relieve him on an infinite number of occasions and thus we see that a trusted man is a great resource.*³⁴

On March 5th, Saint Vincent communicated the death of Father Portail to Father Desdames in Warsaw. We are left with this last homage to the first companion, the best disciple and close friend: *Father, God has been pleased to take from us good M. Portail. He died on Saturday, the fourteenth of this month. It was the ninth day of his illness, which began with a sort of lethargy that developed into a constant fever and other complications. Throughout it, his mind and speech remained quite clear. He had always been apprehensive about death but, on seeing it approach, he faced it with peace and resignation, saying to me on several occasions when I visited him that he no longer felt any trace of his past fear. He died as he had lived, in the good use of suffering, the practice of virtue, and the desire to honor God and to end his days, like O[ur] L[ord], in the accomplishment of His Will.*

³⁰ Notices I: pp. 42-47.

³¹ Notices I: p. 61.

³² Notices I: pp. 89-92.

³³ Notices I: p. 91.

³⁴ Notices I: pp. 92-93.

He was one of the first two men engaged in the missions, and he always contributed to the other works of the Company, in which he rendered important services. Consequently, were it not that God disposes all things for the best and causes us to find our good where we think we will receive harm, the Company would have lost a great deal in losing him. There is reason to hope that this good servant of His will be more useful to us in heaven than he might have been on earth. Please offer the customary prayers for him, Monsieur.³⁵

Epilogue

Antoine Portail, Louise de Marillac and Vincent de Paul, three intertwined lives: intertwined among themselves, intertwined with God and the poor. In 1660 the three hear directly from Christ, the call, *Come, blessed of my Father...* This year 2010 millions of men and women in heaven and earth, co-disciples and poor, celebrate the 350th anniversary of glory of these three individuals.

Translation: CHARLES T. PLOCK, C.M.

³⁵ CCD VIII: 288.

The Eucharist, Manifestation of Dialogue and Communion: as Demonstrated in St. Justin de Jacobis

by Antonio Furioli, M.C.C.J.

Introduction

Abuna Yaqob Maryam, “*the name by which I am known in this country,*”¹ lovingly attended by his Ethiopian priests, died on July 31, 1860, died in the hot and desolate valley of Aligadé,² not far from today’s Hebo, Eritrea. The continued deprivation, the difficult imprisonment and fierce persecution of the harsh Abuna Selama, the supreme religious authority of the Orthodox Church of Abyssinia, finally got the better of the tenacious will and stamina of Abuna Yaqob, who was weakened by 21 long years of bitter and continuous apostolic efforts.

1. A “Eucharistic piety” along traditional lines

In 1809, in the ancient parish church of Santa Maria della Quercia in San Fele (Potenza),³ the newly-nine-year-old Justin de Jacobis received his first communion at the hands of Bishop Gianfilippo Ferrone, Bishop of Muro-Lucano. This event left an indelible mark in

¹ *Scritti*, vol. II, *Epistolario*, C.L.V.-Edizioni Vincenziane, Rome 2003, 557, 567 and 1473. Edited in their entirety for the first time: the *Diario* in 2000, and the *Epistolario* in 2003, totaling 2,730 pages, they constitute a true and properly imposing *corpus* of the writings of St. Justin de Jacobis. Other writings, however, have been completely lost: “... *In Rome I had thrown all my writings into the fire...*” (*Epistolario*, 889).

² Justin often makes reference in his writings to the difficulties of the Ethiopian climate: “*The hot season is killing, the hot winds are intolerable... the poisonous snakes who instantly kill a traveling man on his journey... one can die from thirst...*” (*Epistolario*, 784).

³ Construction in the form of a Greek cross from the 15th century. The interior was repeatedly redecorated in the following centuries. The church was made more striking by an impressive baptistry and a cupola from the school of Luigi Vanvitelli (1700-1773).

the rugged piety of the preadolescent Justin, who in the future was markedly Eucharistic.

San Vincent de Paul (1581-1660),⁴ had insistently urged the students of the Congregation of the Mission which he founded (January 25, 1617), to keep elevated the fervor of their consecration to the poor⁵ by pious exercises, first of all by Eucharistic adoration.⁶ The most authoritative evidence of Justin de Jacobis' Eucharistic piety comes to us from the affidavits of his fellow Vincentians and from simple lay people at the "Informational Diocesan Processes," at the end of the long and complex canonical process that would culminate first in his beatification and finally in his canonization.⁷ The witnesses are unanimous in reporting that Justin, before ascending the pulpit for missions to the people, a special ministry of his congregation intimately linked to the charism of the founder, used to spend much time in deep contemplation before the tabernacle.⁸ The goal of deeper contemplation is always intimate communion with the Father, which is concretized most profoundly through Christ in the Eucharist. In contemplation, in fact, more than knowing God one experiences Him in the depths of oneself, while in preaching God is communicated to the faithful.⁹ No wonder, then, that his preaching had such a wide following and popularity among the faithful of the various Church communities he visited in southern Italy.¹⁰

The two years that Justin spent in Lecce as Superior of the Vincentian community (1834-1836), are full of lively anecdotes that testify to his simple but solid Eucharistic piety. In the beautiful chapel he had built with so many sacrifices, including those that

⁴ St. Justin de Jacobis died exactly two centuries after his founder.

⁵ The official motto of the Congregation of the Mission is: "*Evangelizare pauperibus misit me*" (Lk. 4:18; cf. SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL, *Correspondance, entretiens, documents*, éd. P. Coste, 14 voll., Paris 1920-1925, vol. XII, 84-85).

⁶ In the 17th century the Eucharist was referred to as "*the sun of the sacraments*" and also as "*the center of religion*."

⁷ Just four months after his election to the throne of Peter, Pius XII beatified him on June 25, 1939. Paul VI inscribed his name in the roll of the saints on October 26, 1975.

⁸ Cf. S. PANE, *Blessed Justin de Jacobis of the Congregation of the Mission, Titular Bishop of Nilopoli, First Vicar Apostolic of Abyssinia. Critical History of his Surroundings and his Writings*, Editrice Vincenziana, Napoli 1949, p. 83.

⁹ Cf. the well-noted "*Contemplata aliis tradere*" (cf. ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, II.2 II.2, q. 188, a. 6).

¹⁰ For 15 years, from 1824 (the year of his ordination on June 12) to 1839, the year of his departure for Ethiopia (on May 24), he ministered for the most part in Puglia and Campania.

came to him from criticisms by his confreres and from official rebukes by superiors who worried about the excessive costs, one can see him frequently during the day spending time in adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament. For Justin it revealed an intense form of communion, of a true symbiosis with the Lord, an “*eat with your eyes*,” which means to make one’s own, to immerse oneself in, and to become completely one with Him. To “*eat with your eyes*” is a looking deeply not only within oneself but also above and beyond the mystery, with that same faith that both precedes and accompanies the *eating* (*manducatio*) and the *looking* (*contemplatio*); that faith capable of *recognizing* and of desiring the Word to the point of *eating* it (cf. Ez. 3:1-15). To *watch* and to *eat with the eyes* are no longer distinct, they are two interdependent moments that together make contemplation possible. To *watch* does not only speak of the power of the eyes. It is a unique look: it intensely communicates, expresses a relationship, says that one is for others, it knows how to grasp the essence of the mystery. It is a process of a transforming union: an exodus from one’s own will, a giving up of oneself to enter into intimate union with God’s will, to be enriched by Him. Whoever inexorably holds on to himself loses himself, while he who gives himself, at the end finds himself (cf. Jn. 12:25, Mt. 10:39, Mk. 8:35, Lk. 9:24). The Eucharist is the mystical center of Christianity in which God, in some mysterious way, continually goes out of Himself and draws us in his embrace of communion.

The Vincentian confreres tell that the coadjutor brother in charge of ringing the rising bell, was asked by De Jacobis if the bell for going to bed had already rung. The brother, with confusion mixed with admiration, responded that what Justin had just heard was the signal for rising for a new day. De Jacobis, without realizing it, had passed the whole night in Eucharistic adoration.¹¹

However, the most extraordinary episode that happened in Abuna Yaqob Maryam’s life comes from the time of his first trip to Africa. On May 24, 1839, Justin, in the company of Fr. Luigi Montuori and three other Vincentian missionaries heading to Syria,¹² raised anchor at the port of Civitavecchia heading for Alexandria, Egypt, from where he would continue for Massawa, along the broken and treacherous coastlines of the Red Sea. After two days’ navigation, the ship docked at Valletta, Malta, the first leg of a voyage that would be longer and more difficult than foreseen. The day after, early in the

¹¹ Cf. S. PANE, *o.c.*, 87-88.

¹² These were two priests, Fr. Poussou, the Prefect Apostolic, Fr. Reygasse and the coadjutor brother Martin, all three of French nationality.

morning, de Jacobis went to the cathedral of St. John to celebrate the Eucharist. It was the first Mass he would say during the voyage to reach his mission on the African continent. Justin celebrated with his usual devotion, remaining at the altar for about an hour. The eyewitnesses referred to it in this way: *"We assisted at his Mass, and we saw the Baby Jesus on his head from the time of the elevation until the time of communion."*¹³

These episodes, told with a disarming Franciscan simplicity, are an authoritative witness to the well-formed Eucharistic spirituality of St. Justin de Jacobis, from which he knew how to draw forth a secret strength for a fruitful and effective ministry, which would be his later on in Ethiopia.

2. The Eucharist, the Heart of Ecumenical Dialogue

An event that is crucial for understanding the missionary methodology that St. Justin de Jacobis would use in his life is found in his encounter with the German Lutheran Dr. Wilhelm Schimper. In 1832, Dr. Schimper had arrived in Ethiopia for a special scientific mission, his task from a society of naturalists from Wüttemberg (Germany). Having given himself with enthusiasm to the study of the flora of Tigrāy, over time he put together precious collections which later enriched the best naturalistic museums of Europe, including the Vatican museums.

His meeting with de Jacobis matured his decision to become Catholic: *"... all that I saw in you has convinced me that Jesus Christ is in you... it is as if I had become reacquainted with the life of Christ which you imitate, and this created such confidence in me."*¹⁴

Dr. Schimper, accustomed to accepting only irrefutable data that is the result of a serious scientific method, found it very hard to accept the mystery of the Real Presence of the Eucharist: *"I had to... clarify those points on which my reason could not agree with my faith."*¹⁵ And continuing in his thoughts, he declares without doubt: *"... what I want to embrace is the truth."*¹⁶

In Europe the 17th and the 18th centuries, which are those during which the Congregation of the Mission was founded and grew, represent a historical opening that is quite interesting, because they

¹³ Cf. *Summarium*, n. VI, 191.

¹⁴ *Diario*, part II, C.L.V.-Edizioni Vincenziane, Roma 2000, 448-449.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 425-426. This request of De Jacobis will constitute an interminable **litany**: *... I want at least to be enlightened...* (*ibid.*, 425, 426, 451, etc...).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 427.

take place at a crossroads. To the new questions which are posed, during a period in which *fides et ratio* are located in uncompromising positions, two different responses are given: that of ultramontaniam, concerned with *touching* something through esthetics, and that of the "Lumi,"¹⁷ who want to *convince* someone by means of ethics.

It was precisely for helping someone rationalistic¹⁸ like Dr. Schimper in his very difficult research but yet determined to find the truth, that de Jacobis wrote expressly for him a short but dense text on the Eucharist, a kind of "*little Summa of Eucharistic theology.*" Commenting on the request of the sincere Dr. Schimper, Justin expressed himself as follows: "... *he only needed... the gift of faith,*"¹⁹ words that suggest a flattering assessment of the character of the man in question. That the quest for "*truth*" was the priority and the main concern of both, bursts forth with vigor from the texts: nine times in the two letters of Schimper²⁰ and six times in the text from Justin²¹ where in reference to their search, they speak of a work carried forward by "*lovers of truth.*"²² Theirs was a joint mission, in which the passionate worship of Truth empowered them to a differentiated but complementary ministry within the community of believers: "*With so many reasons to be forever separated, the good Lord had given to our souls such a character that when we met we no longer could stand apart, but we mutually opened up our hearts to discover the mandate that He has given to us by sending us to Abyssinia and that we must fulfill.... We both have been privileged to implement the plan of the true loving Friend of Mankind.... O Lord, this is the purpose of our vocation for which God has sent us to Abyssinia.*"²³ The strength of love intensified the quality and the commitment to do research. He experienced this ardent love whenever, with effort and tenacity, he succeeded at the happiness of coming to know the truth,²⁴ the satisfying bliss of the vision indicated by the Master: "*The truth will make you free*" (Jn. 8:32).

¹⁷ Justin adds one more of them to the group: ... *Robespierre Gran Sacerdote della Ragione...* (*Robespierre, High Priest of Reason...*) (*ibid.*, 434).

¹⁸ Commenting on this Protestant peculiarity, Justin expressed himself this way: "... *men so rationalistic among whom are found many Protestants*" (*ibid.*, 436).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, part III, 619.

²⁰ Cf. February 24, 1843, in *Diario*, part II, 424-428; cf. April 8, 1843, *ibid.*, 448-453.

²¹ Cf. March 18, 1843, *ibid.*, 428-442.

²² *Ibid.*, 431.

²³ *Ibid.*, 428-430; cf. *Epistolario*, 931.

²⁴ Cf. ST. AUGUSTINE, *Confessions*, bk. 7, 10, 18; 10, 27, in C.S.E.L., 33, 157-163, 255.

The request of Dr. Schimper could not be more explicit and concrete than this: “*Because your love can assist me almost as a means of enlightenment, please... give me some small and simple observation about... what concerns Communion, so that... I can remake... the certainty that the Real Presence of Christ is in the host and the wine, which are his body and blood. I do not lack this to become a Catholic, and to declare myself as such.... I do not dare think of being a true Catholic if I do not possess a full evidence or certainty that in Communion there is the Real Presence of Christ.*”²⁵ Making himself available with pastoral charity to accept the request of the German scientist, de Jacobis anticipated the sensitivity and the contents of the document on Ecumenism, even in its verbal formulation: “... *the time has come where the good Lord wants to give a beautiful proof to **our separated brethren** of the ineffable mystery of the Real Presence of Jesus Christ... **our brothers** no longer have great difficulty to join their beloved brothers in the great house of our common Father.*”²⁶ This is sign that the saints, under the illuminating action of the Holy Spirit, anticipate as intuitions and values, what we can only gather up gradually and at great personal expense over a longer period of time.

Surprisingly, even before penetrating to the heart of the theological debate and without waiting to take stock of his arguments on the Eucharist, St. Justin de Jacobis makes a declaration of love towards his “**separated brethren**”: “... *these Protestants, whom I love.*”²⁷ In him, before he establishes the truth,

²⁵ *Diario*, part II, 426-427. The scholastic concept of *transubstantiation* is refuted by Luther, who did believe in the *real* presence, but in a way different from Catholics. Fidelity to the Word of God leads him to deny the validity of some of the more recent pious practices of his time. To celebrate *The Lord's Supper* implied the need for Christians to communicate. Communion under two species, *l'utraquismo*, had its origin in the institution of the Lord's Supper by Christ Himself. It is on this terrain that dissent among the reformers arose. After Karlstadt, even Zwingli separated himself from Luther, because the Lord's Supper was the symbolic representation of the sacrifice of Calvary, where for Calvin Christ gives Himself at the very moment of communion. God has no need of bread and wine to communicate His grace, but He does so independently through the work of the Spirit.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 429; cf. *Epistolario*, 739, 777 and 905; cf. *Unitatis redintegratio*, cap. I, 3; ch. II, p. 12. The pregnant expression “*the good God*,” repeated many times by Justin, evokes the mystical sense of analogous expressions in St. Therese of the Child Jesus: “*If you find me dead one morning, do not be distressed; the **good God** has simply come to seek and find me*” (*Novissima verba*, 28).

²⁷ *Diario*, part II, 430. The expressions of esteem for Protestants are numerous: “... *I have a most favorable opinion of the knowledge and the spirit of*

it is important that he seek that which promotes unity and concord, because *"In the evening of our lives we will be judged by how we have loved."*²⁸ The new commandment of love has the Eucharist as its summit and its ever-flowing font. *"Above everything there is love, which is the bond of perfection"* (Col. 3:14). It is love that characterizes the followers of Christ: *"You will be my disciples if you have love one for the other"* (Jn. 13:35), love that is the foundation of community among mankind, love that is the indispensable condition for lasting and authentic communication with God and among themselves: *"... those who are united in love will be united perpetually and inseparably."*²⁹

The way the thought is expressed, its content and intimate expression of the heart of Justin de Jacobis, is in perfect harmony with the ecumenical spirit of Blessed John XXIII, of Vatican II, and of the ordinary magisterium of the Church: *"What unites us is stronger than what divides us."*³⁰

3. "We are dealing with rendering justice into truth"³¹

*"... you are also more enlightened by common sense, because you are animated by a keen desire for truth about the main difficulties.... The force of truth has infinite power over souls made like yours...."*³² These recognized and undeniable inner dispositions of the German naturalist, make de Jacobis particularly bold and at the same time demanding in proposing new and ever more difficult goals to achieve, but only at the price of dedication and perseverance out of the ordinary: *"But since Christian love towards one's friends draws us closer to Jesus Christ and love for Jesus Christ draws us closer to friends, I satisfy both duties, truly great duties of my soul, giving in writing some reasoning that you seek."*³³ And as "sources" of study,

the nations of the North..." (ibid., 433) *"... a nation as enlightened as are the Christians of the North..."* (ibid., 436) *"among Protestants there are persons who are truly learned"* (ibid.).

²⁸ ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS, *Words of Light and Love*, n. 57.

²⁹ *Diario*, part II, 428.

³⁰ JOHN XXIII, *Ad Petri Cathedram*, 29/VI/1959, in A.A.S., 51 (1959), 513; *Gaudium et Spes*, 92; JOHN PAUL II, *Ut unum sint*, 25/V/1995, I, p. 20.

³¹ *Diario*, part II, 430; for the Pauline tones, cf. Ef. 4:15.24.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, 430-431. The language used is *French*, sometimes difficult to understand because neither of the speakers knows it well. *"I greatly ask your pardon for the mistakes of my writing. I do not have a dictionary of the language that I do not know well, and yet I would like to speak every time I have the*

research and personal reflection, St Justin offered to Dr. Schimper *five fundamental means*: 1) The deposit of faith of the Church: "... we must believe what the Church has always believed; the Church has always believed in the Real Presence."³⁴ And he adds with the meticulous precision of someone who understands the great responsibility that falls to one who is to convey the truth, as if to warn Schimper: "... individual impressions are not a good guide in our faith; we need to make reference to the interpretations of the Church presided over by its natural Head who has competence over questions of this nature."³⁵ 2) The Sacred Scripture in general, and the Gospels in particular: "... a book where the Spirit of God who wrote it can be seen everywhere,"³⁶ "... the great Fathers of the Church have said that the Word in the Scripture is full of great fruit."³⁷ "Let us take the Gospel in this sense and let us read this more-than-human book without comment...."³⁸ "... then, as you continue your reading, enter into the spirit of the sixth chapter of St. John, and there you will find the story of the multiplication of the loaves; of the need for faith; and finally of the scandal of the people of Capharnaum because of the clear and repeated manner with which Jesus Christ says it is necessary to eat His flesh and drink His blood so as to enter into eternal life."³⁹ In Lutheranism, Eucharistic piety is based essentially on the Word of God, because the sacrament is lived out as a "word in act," at the base of which the faithful are justified by faith and not through the power of the works of his own devotion.⁴⁰ 3) The books of the Ge'ez liturgy: "... the Ritual Book of this Church comes from the time of St. Frumentius, of Athanasius, of the golden era of the Christian faith. Now, from the moment that in this book one finds expressed the Catholic belief in the Real Presence with formulas more alive, perhaps, than we have in our Latin Ritual.... I put in your hand the words of the liturgy in its original language with a translation; refer to the

pleasure... of writing to you" (*Epistolario*, 738); "in my so bad and barbarian French..." (*ibid.*, 1075).

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 431.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 431-432.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 438.

³⁸ "*Evangelium sine glossa*," these were the usual counsels of St. Francis and of a full chorus of other spiritual masters.

³⁹ *Diario*, part II, 431-432.

⁴⁰ Lutheranism, faithful to the *Confessions* of Augustine (530), teaches a lesson that nothing has lost its reality and that all the Churches should remember more frequently: participation in the Eucharist, as in the other sacraments, has value only in faith, and arrives at a true spiritual profit only through faith.

texts yourself, ask the doctors..."⁴¹ 4) The Fathers of the Church: "... I can assure you that in the reading of the Fathers of the Church, which was one of my almost continuing tasks, I found confirmation of this truth everywhere."⁴² 5) The solemn magisterium of the Church and the history of dogma: "... I find it also in the most ancient Councils."⁴³ It is that which the Council of Florence says to us when, speaking of the offerings of communion, it speaks to us of the "conforming of man to Christ."⁴⁴ Here St. Justin conveniently recalls to mind the intimate connection between *gathering and Eucharist*, where gathering together signifies "being reconciled" with men and with God. And it is in exactly this context of faithfulness and of interior assent to the magisterium of the Church, and thus of authentic *common-union* that Justin locates the special charism of the Petrine ministry: "The Catholic wishes to hear the voice of God Himself through Him to whom Jesus Christ said: whoever accepts you, receives me."⁴⁵

Unity pertains to the very nature of the Church in her essential characteristics and in her fundamental attributes: one, holy, Catholic, and apostolic. Unity as a fundamental motive establishes her credibility in the world: "As you, Father, are in me, and I in you, so may they be one in us, that the world believe that you sent me" (Jn. 17:21).

4. Eucharist, the source of mission

The missionary duty to evangelize all people: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Mt. 28:19), is based on Baptism which confers the indelible character of *God's children*, it involves a Christian lifestyle centered on the Gospel of Christ and the proposal on the fulfillment of the laws, of which the Eucharist is the summit and supreme example. The proclamation of the Gospel has its core in the Eucharist as the sacrament of communion with God and with men-as-brothers. Today more than ever, the mission is

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 429-430. The printing of the *liturgical books* for the Orthodox has represented what the Council of Trent was for Catholicism. The printing of liturgical texts put an end to the fruitful creativity and exuberance of the Orthodox liturgy.

⁴² *Diario*, part II, 433.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 439. The Council of Florence (1439-1442) is important because it sanctioned the union with the Greek Orthodox Church.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 435. Justin makes reference to Lk 10:16: "He who hears you hears me," or to Mt. 10:40: "He who welcomes you, welcomes me."

communication of this experience of communion, sharing with others the fruits of a demanding commitment of communion and solidarity, especially for the poorest. All the baptized are involved in it, each according to his calling within the ecclesial community. It is interesting to note the intimate link that St. Justin establishes between the Eucharist and the mystery of the Incarnation, as the reiterated will of God to communicate with man, to establish relations ever more personal and lasting with him. In the Incarnation, God in Christ came down and took on Himself the precariousness, the limitations, the fragility of the human being: *"For us who believe that the communication has been established between the finite and the infinite, between weakness and strength, between God and man, in the great work of the Incarnation, a completely different communication must not seem impossible to us to be able to take place between them...."* *"To all who believe in the mystery of the Incarnation, there should be no difficulty in believing in all the other mysterious means that God has used to communicate to man, and above all, I would add here, through the means of Communion.... That is why he has joined humanity to God with such close ties which are precisely the links of the Incarnation.... All the other Sacraments, therefore, that more or less put us in this happy and noble communication, do no more than finalize this great communication, which gives us eternal life according to the assurance of Jesus Christ."*⁴⁶ The Eucharist represents the summit to which all the evangelizing activity of the Church points, the Church which has as its absolute priority the bringing of men into perfect communion with God through Christ, who is the universal sacrament of salvation, who enters into men's lives in order to transform them. The Eucharist is a *foretaste* of a new world where solidarity and peace will put an end to sins against unity, perpetrated for centuries by men against men (cf. Gn. 4:8 ff.). In this Eucharistic perspective, as *the sacrament of unity and of love*, it represents the final goal of ecumenism, committed to the search for unity of faith. That faith is the dynamic principle of the origin of mission, through which the world becomes a living sacrifice pleasing to God.

Other than the aspects we have already considered, for Justin De Jacobis there exists a very strict relationship between the Eucharist and moral commitment, the formation of consciences, and an evangelical life style. The Eucharist is a perennial font of moral

⁴⁶ *Diario*, part II, 436 and 439-440. According to a genuine saying of de Jacobis, it is by God's *condescension* and his *gift of self* that we receive the sacrament of the Eucharist.

force, which necessarily leads the believer to witnessing evangelical values in the society in which he lives: "... the dogmas of religion... inspire a kind of religious cult for the bodies which have received or are preparing to receive a food that is completely divine. It is necessary to read St. Paul to be aware of the victorious use that he made of it to block the disorders of incontinence and adultery, which are the principal sources and the most deplorable of all social ills. For he orders us to honor the bodies which have become members of Christ not only through a mystical and metaphysical communication, which provide almost no stimulus to a natural heart, but also for a true, just, continuous and even material communication. May it be so strong among the faithful that it prevents all the abuses of flesh destined to rise again through a right it has acquired because of its admission to communion."⁴⁷

Through the centuries the Eucharist has always given new energies to unpopular choices and to the countercultural moral conduct that Christians have been called to take up, even if, unhappily, we must admit that Christians have not always distinguished themselves from other men in resisting the temptation of corruption. It is important to remember, in this regard, what Vatican II affirms: "*The Church is holy, and is always on the path of being redeemed.*"⁴⁸ In the fulfillment of the missionary mandate of the Church, the witness of Christians is of primary importance. John Paul II has authoritatively given example, and has taught that "*there is no witness without witnesses, just as there is no mission without missionaries.*"⁴⁹

Conclusion

The shining example of St. Justin de Jacobis should lead us Christians to witness with more strength, conviction, and clarity the presence of God in our society, and not to be afraid to speak of Him, to follow the truth personally, and to teach others to do so. From the Eucharist came his daring in professing his faith in Christ during the hard times of persecution in Ethiopia: "*The mystery which makes us look at all individuals of the great human family as true parts of the*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 441. For Justin, the *eros* of the creature is assumed and transformed by the *agape* of Christ, thus becoming a transforming and sanctifying embrace in sacramental communion.

⁴⁸ *Lumen Gentium*, 8.

⁴⁹ *Redemptoris missio*, in A.A.S., 83 (1991), 309-310.

body of Christ: he inspires in us a great desire to do good to others and to comfort suffering humanity."⁵⁰

Having had the experience, innumerable times, of our frailty, and of our discontinuity in following through on the unity of the Church, we need to pray that Christ conquer our resistances and transform each of us who are timid disciples into credible witnesses of his love in the world, so that dialogue, respect for persons, and an unlimited trust in the mercy of God, manifest in the Paschal Mystery of His only Son, prevail in the world.

The Church must never cease to pray for the return of the happy days of communion and of full unity of believers in Christ:

*"Lord, remember what you have promised.
Make us one sheep and one shepherd!
Do not let your net be torn,
and help us to be servants of unity!"*⁵¹

That secret strength will spread from the Eucharist that will overcome the frontiers of division, and will transform them into a world capable of communion through *service* and through *selfless love*, above all in favor of those who have borne the consequences through the wounds of discord and division.

Translation: ROBERT J. STONE, C.M.

⁵⁰ *Diario*, part II, 441-442.

⁵¹ BENEDETTO XVI, *Homily of April 24, 2005*, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, April 25, 2005, p. 5. St. Justin also speaks of the happy times of unity, but with a tender Marian accent: "*That the Immaculate Heart of Mary, with her intercession make flower that day when... such joy will fill the whole Church!*"

41st General Assembly (2010)

Creative Fidelity to the Mission

Consultation Document

Organization:

1. A Look at the Past: Evaluation of the Journey from the 2004 General Assembly to Today
2. A Look at the Present: The “Signs of the Times” which Challenge the Congregation of the Mission Today
3. A Look at the Future: Fidelity to the Mission
 - a) Creative Ministries
 - b) Methodology of Systemic Change
 - c) Ongoing Formation
 - d) Reconfiguration
 - e) Dialogue with the Poor and the Vincentian Family

Presentation:

The Preparatory Commission for the 2010 General Assembly composed the present document from the responses to the “Reflection Questions” which were sent to every province of the Congregation of the Mission. These responses were developed by the Provinces during their Assemblies.

The current document is not a *Documentum laboris* but a *Consultation Document* sent to all the participants in the General Assembly, which will take place in Paris from 28 of June to 16 of July 2010, so that they can adequately prepare themselves for the conversation of the Assembly.

The Assembly will certainly involve moments of a juridical character, such as the revision of the Statutes and the voting on the Postulata, but over all it will be an occasion for the participants to dialogue and to exchange experiences on the themes of the Assembly itself.

The present Consultation Document does not contain a list of all the things that have been sent from the Provincial Assemblies, but a synthesis of the central ideas gathered together around some foci that will be expanded upon during the General Assembly using various methodologies: presentations, round tables, discussion groups, and discussions in the aula. This document is not intended to say everything but only wishes to stimulate the reflection, the research, and the study which each member of the Assembly is called to make before and during the Assembly itself.

The General Assembly of 2010 will unfold in three logically connected movements. The first will be a *look at the past* and will consist of an evaluation of the journey made from the 2004 General Assembly to today. An entire day is dedicated to this movement with discussions in groups and in the aula. The second movement will be a *look at the present*. The members of the Assembly are invited to focus their attention on the “signs of the times” and on their challenges. A round table presentation will be followed by discussion in groups and in the aula. The third movement will be a *look at the future* to solidify that which is the theme of the Assembly itself: creative fidelity to the mission. The members of the Assembly will speak, always with a round table presentation and discussions in groups and in the aula, on the questions that have been at the center of attention for the domestic and provincial assemblies: creative ministries, ongoing formation, reconfiguration (among the provinces and within a province itself), the Vincentian Family, and the poor. The star to which we must look continually, so as not to be led astray in long discussions, will be creative fidelity to the mission.

On the occasion of the 350th Anniversary of the death of St. Vincent and St. Louise, we commend ourselves to their intercession so that the Spirit of Christ, which animated their hearts giving them an eternal youthfulness, may pour out on us in this year of grace, the light, the wisdom, and the strength to be faithful to the past, creative in the present, and prophetic witnesses for the future.

We entrust the success of the 41st General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission to the maternal and supportive care of the Virgin Mary, our mother and queen of the world.

1. A Look at the Past: Evaluation of Journey from 2004 General Assembly to Today

Context:

The responses made by the Provinces indicate that the commitments given by the 2004 General Assembly have been received quite well by the confreres, local communities and Provinces, but these did not produce a significant change of mentality and action.

As we bring out those more significant elements that were indicated as a source of revitalization of our vocation, of strengthening our apostolic life and of renewing our community life, we also put side by side the shadows that still persist.

Synthesis of Provincial Assemblies

The Revitalization of our Vocation:

- through the encounter with God in personal and community prayer;
- through living faithfully the vows and Vincentian virtues;
- through the effort to live the graced moments of our vocation through confession, spiritual accompaniment, retreats;
- through fraternal relations and mutual support especially during difficult moments and generous interprovincial collaboration;
- through active participation in celebrations, anniversaries and moments of permanent formation.

However, the Provinces have also indicated some shadows:

- caused by individualism;
- caused by a routine and mechanical life;
- caused by a lack of enthusiasm in living one's own vocation;
- caused by a weak missionary and Vincentian character in living one's vocation.

Strengthening our Apostolic Life:

- through a greater resolve and decision to do direct ministry to the poor;
- through the revival of a more missionary spirit in our works;
- through a greater emphasis on the theological, pastoral, spiritual and human preparation for our apostolate;
- through fidelity to the local community project and openness to the pastoral projects and directions of the Church;

- through a closer collaboration with the laity and with the Vincentian Family;
- through a greater community discernment and revision of our ministries and a clearer option in opening works in poorer sectors which are not evangelized;
- through the inclusion of the laity and young people in the initial formation for the apostolic and missionary activities.

In spite of these lights the Provinces have also indicated some shadows:

- caused by a lack of vigor in the revision of works in accordance with the actual criteria;
- caused by a certain resistance in the elaboration of vigorous and audacious programs in favor of the poor;
- caused by an insufficient appreciation of the laity.

Renewal of Community Life:

- through the cultivation of friendship and fraternity in spite of individual differences;
- through the strengthening of the spirit of service and enthusiasm in the participation at intercommunity and interprovincial gatherings;
- through attentiveness to the old, the sick, and confreres in difficult situations;
- through the transition from an authoritarian community model to a model in which more dialogue has opened new forms of co-responsibility and mutual assistance;
- through the strengthening of moments of interchange and dialogue in the human, spiritual, pastoral and cultural spheres;
- through a greater attention to the details/particulars of fraternal life (birthdays, feast days, anniversaries, etc.);
- through a greater recourse to the human sciences for the personal and professional formation of the confreres.

In spite of the lights, however, the Provinces also indicated some shadows:

- caused by the impoverishment of community due to individualism;
- caused by destructive criticism that destroys community life;
- caused by the case of confreres and communities who for reasons of the apostolate live alone/apart and do not participate regularly in the life of the Province.

2. A Look at the Present: The “Signs of the Times” which Challenge the Congregation of the Mission Today

Context:

There are varied *Signs of the Times* at the different national and international levels of our world. Every Continent, has its own challenges and difficulties to face. The same can be said about the challenges and opportunities of the worldwide Catholic Church. The world in its turn is divided, generally speaking, into two: developed and developing countries. It is difficult, if not impossible, to find common challenges and possible solution for both at the same time. Following the lead of the provinces, some of the challenges and opportunities for each “world” are mentioned below.

Synthesis of Provincial Assemblies

The positive and negative “signs of times” of the developed countries:

- The positive “signs of the times” are:
 - globalization and very fast communication;
 - solidarity;
 - a generous welcome of refugees;
 - a call for cultural understanding and religious pluralism due to the rapid spread of non-Christian religions and sects.
- The negative “signs of the times” are:
 - consumerism;
 - relativism;
 - silent secularism;
 - loss of meaning (that is, the meaninglessness of life);
 - lack of vocations;
 - mass immigration as a matter of concern in some countries.

The positive and negative “signs of times” in the developing countries:

- The positive “signs of the times” are:
 - the Catholic Church is experiencing rapid growth with a good number of vocations to the priesthood and to consecrated life (Africa-Asia and Latin America);
 - people are much more interested in faith and thirsty for the Word of God;
 - an eager longing for peace, justice and evangelical freedom.

- The negative “sign of the times” are:
 - youth are forced to flee their countries and illegally immigrate with appalling consequences of exhaustion, death, hiding out, stress and uncertainty of every kind; the refugee crises is a major phenomenon today;
 - an unclear political life, lawlessness, human rights’ abuses, and the reality of so many prisoners, tortures, mass killings, and disappearance of citizens;
 - the rapid spread of sects especially in Africa and Latin America;
 - in some places, no peace or security, no legal recourse; only corruption, bribery, and nepotism;
 - weak social services especially in the areas of education and health care;
 - people come to know ethnic and tribal violence, religious fundamentalism (Islamic, Hindu, Christian), cultural and linguistic clashes and superstition.

Meeting these challenges and difficulties in a creative and innovative way demands that the Congregation of the Mission acts:

- to ensure a sound and solid formation for its incoming candidates, and, through ongoing formation programs, updates its member and encourages them to be skilled evangelizers;
- to provide an effective and creative response to the refugee crises;
- to be creative in building upon the good of the past which remains effective in the present — some of our ministries and institutions are powerful resources which must be properly valued and employed and re-oriented;
- to develop concrete national and international networks of cooperation among the CM Provinces — internal and inter-provincial reconfiguration is one form of this exercise;
- to respond as a 21st Century community to the needs of the poor while avoiding the over-structured reality of the Congregation which can discourage creativity;
- to promote alternative education which emphasizes character building;
- to promote creative leadership wherever it can be found;
- this leadership can, for example, collaborate effectively with NGO’s to eradicate diseases such as tuberculosis, malaria, HIV, etc;

- to be open, sensitive, and responsive to new contexts and situations, and to plan, execute, evaluate and celebrate with people whom we serve and collaborate with;
- to make “organized charity” the target of an effective and creative ministry to promote justice, peace, and the integrity of all creation;
- to empower the poor as masters of their own destiny.

3. A Look at the Future: Fidelity to the Mission

a) Creative Ministries

Context:

Vincent reminded us that “love is creative unto infinity.” The ministries which we carry out for love of God and one another invite us to be creative. Everything changes and so must the Congregation and the confreres in responding to the needs of the Church and world of our time. To be creative is to be life-giving — our ministries should be life-giving for ourselves as well as for the people whom we serve.

Synthesis of Provincial Assemblies

Characteristics of our Ministry:

- focusing upon those who are not served;
- developing a people-based strategic pastoral program which empowers the people to take responsibility and give direction for any “service”;
- sharing our Vincentian charism with our co-workers in the mission through mutual formation and collaboration in all areas of the mission at the local and international levels;
- developing diversified forms of community life and prayer appropriate to the current apostolate; for example, establishing prayer groups in our ministries, integrating spirituality into our programs;
- encouraging Vincentian Spirituality;
- collaborating with the Vincentian Family.

Whom should we serve with creativity:

- the immigrant populations;
- the marginalized persons: prisoners, migrants, etc.;

- the “new poor”: refugees, displaced persons, those suffering from psychological trauma as a result of violence and armed conflict, street children, etc.;
- those of other religious backgrounds, particularly the Muslims; there is a need to promote dialogue with Islam.

How should we minister creatively:

- making reflection a motivating and empowering element in ministry:
 - use the “pastoral cycle” (“pastoral discernment”) as a methodology in renewing pastoral ministries: situation analysis, theological reflection, judgment, response;
- using information and communication technology as effective means of mission;
- developing new forms of apostolate through audiovisual means for evangelization and catechesis; for example, making short films on the persons and passages of the Gospel;
- learning the language of those to/with whom we minister;
- dealing creatively and well with the process of moving on from certain works and ministries;
- developing dynamic apostolates;
- reinventing traditional pastoral engagements, for example with migrants, the elderly, differently-abled, poor students, slum dwellers;
- asking ourselves: where do we put our most energetic men;
- exploring new works of evangelization, such as interreligious dialogue, care for the environment, disaster intervention, human rights, etc;
- valuing the past but letting go of what holds us back;
- developing creative leadership both in the Congregation and in lay leadership;
- establishing lay missionary programs;
- maintaining safe environments for children;
- using new means of evangelization and catechesis which respond to the contexts and are inventive; creating ministry on behalf of the poor adjusted to the current time and place as St. Vincent did;
- collaborating with organizations which, in some areas, have the same goal as we do (for example, faith-based groups, UN, EU, NGO’s, GO’s);
- learning from successful organizations both within the Congregation and outside the Congregation.

b) *Methodology of Systemic Change*

Context:

“Systemic change focuses on assisting the needy to change the overall structures within which they live and helps them develop strategies by which they can emerge from poverty.... Systemic change aims at transforming a complete series of interacting elements, rather than just an individual element. It also inevitably involves changing attitudes that have caused the problems which a group hopes to solve.... It provides tools focusing on the relationship among a system’s elements, interprets a group’s experience of that system, and promotes structural changes within it” (ROBERT P. MALONEY et alii, *Seeds of Hope*, p. 3).

The concept of “social sin” recognizes that some situations in which people are oppressed arise not from personal wrongdoing but from the very structuring of a society. Systemic change is a way to respond to this sinful condition. In the description above one can discern three elements which promote effective systemic change: first, that it empowers the needy in changing the structures which oppress them; second, that it involves a changing of attitudes which cause the problem; and third, that it emerges from an understanding of the system itself. To bring about systemic change, all these elements need to be addressed by collaboration. Our Provinces have recognized this reality in many ways.

Synthesis of Provincial Assemblies

- A holistic and inclusive approach should be sought in our social and developmental activities. Community animation, awareness building, formation of critical consciousness of the people, legal literacy, mediations and community based organizations are proven tools of development of the marginalized.
- Priority should be given to works that promote a structural change in the society: strengthening of local self governments, formation of self-help groups, indigenous micro credit schemes, etc.
- Collaboration with governments and other developmental agencies can be very effective in seeking to eradicate some diseases which oppress the poor, such as tuberculosis, malaria, chickenpox, HIV, etc.
- Attention to social-economic realities, to means of giving social structures a gospel orientation, and to focusing the attention of governments/political parties on the plight of the poor is very

much in keeping with the style of Vincent de Paul in his time and place.

- Establishing linkages with non-governmental organizations (NGO's), governmental organizations (GO's), and other organizations working for the poor can consolidate initiatives and have a greater impact bringing about systemic change.

One can also work with the United Nations and the European Union for change. There is a Vincentian Mission at the UN.

- Cooperating with the Vincentian Family in the focused service of the poor is a natural strength for us since we share a common vision and spirituality of action. A more institutional movement in confronting poverty can be carried out by organizing conferences of the SSVP, the AIC, and other Vincentian groups.
- Working with church-based organizations, with advocacy groups, and even with corporations on matters of our common cause multiplies the effort in the bringing about of systemic change.
- The call is for the Congregation to be courageous and inventive in the defense of the poor: train confreres with the different skills which are necessary for the service of the poor; provide legal recourse for the defense of the poor and the promotion of justice.
- Should we establish (at the Congregation level or that of the Vincentian Family) an **“Observatoire de la Charité”** which takes an international and contemporary Vincentian point-of-view? This organization would be charged with studying the problems of the world (particularly where Vincentians are present) with the eyes and method of St. Vincent. One would proceed to resolve these issues using a systemic change approach.
- Cooperation with “Project Dream” in dealing with the problem of AIDS in Africa is a powerful means of bringing about systemic change in cooperation with the Daughters of Charity, the Vincentian Family, and other organizations (for example, the Sant Egidio Community). The same could be said regarding the 350th Anniversary Pilot Project in Haiti which involves exploring the context of the country, identifying possible partnerships, and including the poor in the process.
- Areas in which the Congregation can use a systemic change approach to the problems of our world and society are numerous: the promotion of life, the care of the environment, the plight of women, the rights of immigrants, the enslavement of children, violence against the defenseless, and many more.

c) *Ongoing Formation*

Context:

No creative ministry remains such for a long time without ongoing formation of the confreres and of the communities. The necessity of an ongoing formation is indispensable for assuring creative fidelity to our mission in the Church and in the world.

Synthesis of Provincial Assemblies

The Normative Texts:

The normative texts (the Constitutions, Statutes, Provincial Norms, etc.) are fundamental resources for our Vincentian identity and indispensable instruments for our formation.

- Such texts have value:
 - both at the community level and the personal level;
 - as a guide for the development of community projects and pastoral plans.
- These texts, however, are sometimes used inappropriately:
 - they are used as texts to provide simple answers, without a personal and deep knowledge of them;
 - they are transformed into juridical instruments, in place of being a rule of life;
 - they are not embodied in projects for which we are responsible.

How to establish a process of ongoing formation:

To establish a personal process of ongoing formation, one must have a passion for formation and one must find the time to do it.

- Such a process requires:
 - knowledge and love for the Christian and Vincentian way of life and of holiness;
 - continued updating at the biblical, theological, magisterial, and Vincentian level, as envisioned in the various *Rationes formationis*;
 - preparation for and acquisition of specific competencies in the various ministries;
 - openness to the great cultural changes of the present world which is characterized by an intercultural milieu;

- contact and solidarity with the poor;
- collaboration with the laity (Vincentian and non-Vincentian).
- The realization of a process of ongoing formation in our life has to be measured against some circumstances which represent for us true and appropriate challenges:
 - the lack of preparation for some ministries that also make up part of our activities (finance, education, formation of our own, etc.);
 - the risk that ongoing formation should be left to personal initiative and not included in the community or provincial plan that makes it more concrete;
 - the risk of succumbing to the complexity of the world in which we live, submitting to changes without having the strength and the capacity to exert some influence over them;
 - the risk of taking upon ourselves such a great burden of apostolic work, that we do not find time and energy for an effective formation of our own life.

Ideas and Suggestions:

The imagination and inventiveness for sustaining and strengthening the ongoing formation in the confreres and in the communities are not lacking. This truth suggest a deep desire for formation in the confreres and a great expectation of those who have the responsibility to provide for it. Ideas and suggestions lead to occasions and means which are continually being adapted to diverse circumstances and local necessity.

- At the personal level:
 - biblical and Vincentian readings;
 - personal study.
- At the Community level:
 - opportunities for formation conversation;
 - creativity in prayer.
- At the intercommunity level:
 - seminars or days of formation, also with the help of experts, on specific themes (such as, the dynamics of the fraternal life, the documents of the Church, new forms of proclamation and of charity, and so on).
- At the Provincial Level:
 - a provincial plan for ongoing formation;
 - formation projects for those at particular generational stages;

- formation opportunities for young confreres in the first year of ministry;
- formation courses for specific needs on the pastoral order (missions and charity);
- specialized programs for some confreres in various types of activity.
- At the Interprovincial Level:
 - interprovincial collaboration for the internal seminary and for the major seminary;
 - creation of a center for ongoing formation;
 - sharing confreres.
- At the Congregational Level:
 - CIF;
 - Vincentian Heritage;
 - creation at the Curia of a Secretariat for Vincentian Spirituality;
 - revision and updating of the various *Rationes formationis*;
 - creation of a *Practical Guide for Formation*.

Today, a major creativity in the formation field is sought at the level of methodology. Systemic change does not apply only to external structures, but also to our mental structures. We have available today some formidable instruments of communication and formation, but we are not always able to adopt them, though some do. Among the new methodologies:

- utilization of some modern information technologies (computers, the web, etc.) for the spread of ideas and experiences;
- a dynamic and creative approach to the Vincentian sources;
- creation of some mechanisms for the analysis of ongoing formation.

d) *Reconfiguration*

Context:

“No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak. If he does, its fullness pulls away, the new from the old, and the tear gets worse. Likewise, no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the skins are ruined. Rather, new wine is poured into fresh wineskins” (Mk 2:21-22).

The resources of the Congregation are the patrimony of the poor, and the Congregation has an obligation to make sure that these resources are used well and wisely in their service. The Congregation, living in the midst of billions of marginalized people, is challenged urgently to reconfigure itself in order to give an “effective and affective” response. The theme of “reconfiguration” invites the confreres to think about the ways in which we organize ourselves for this effort of responding to the spiritual and material needs of the poor. Are we making the best use of our manpower? Are we unnecessarily duplicating structures? Are we clinging to old ministries when we are being summoned to new ones? Are we making the best decisions with our (limited) financial resources? Are we sharing with one another in providing the best ministry?

In the Provincial Assemblies, the question of reconfiguration was considered on several levels: the reorganization within a province; the collaboration of several provinces around a particular work; the shared responsibility of the Conferences; the unification of several provinces into one; the Congregation as an international entity.

Synthesis from the Provincial Assemblies

At the Provincial level, reconfiguration has been experienced as:

- reorganization;
- strategic planning, re-defining priorities, re-alignment of administrative tasks and responsibilities, rotation of confreres into different ministries;
- greater transparency in making known the reality of the province clearly;
- the creation of new ministries and structures;
- better communication;
- inviting confreres from other Provinces to aid with a ministry;
- greater participation and collaboration with laity, Vincentian Family & Dioceses.

At the Interprovincial level, reconfiguration has been experienced as a notable increase of collaboration in:

- formation (a common internal seminary, cooperating in formation of formators);
- sharing of resources (personnel, institutions, expertise, and finances);

- common pastoral action (e.g., care of migrants, popular missions, new missions);
- joint meetings of Provincial Councils.

At the Conference level (APVC, CEVIM, CLAPVI, COVIAM, NCV), reconfiguration has resulted in:

- common projects in a country (e.g., Solomon Islands, Bolivia, Amazonia);
- common formation (e.g., seminary formators, novices, centers of formation);
- coordination of ministries (e.g., education, parishes, human promotion);
- common apostolates.

At the Level of the Unification of Several Provinces into one:

Several Provinces, faced with ageing and a dwindling number of confreres, have voluntarily chosen to unite themselves into one Province in order to strengthen their mission of evangelization and the service to the poor. With their sight on Christ as the evangelizer of the poor, with great courage and humility, with no certainties of the future, they embarked on the difficult path of making the best use of their combined resources. This process of reconfiguration was made possible by:

- intensive consultation and dialogue;
- transparency in the presentation of the provinces;
- trust in the goodwill of others;
- letting go of agendas;
- participation and ownership of all the confreres.

At the International level, reconfiguration has been seen in:

- undertaking numerous international missions, upon the invitation of the local churches, with the participation of Conferences and Provinces;
- the efforts of the Vincentian Solidarity Office (VSO) which has increased the number and the amount of its assistance to the different Provinces.

On this international level, recommendations have been made for a further reconfiguration that the Congregation may respond faster and more effectively to the situations on different continents:

- that a more efficient financial system at the international level be established so that it would respond to the great economic needs of the international missions;
- that the Congregation sets clear and dynamic priorities for the next 6 years;
- that the different conferences be represented in the general Council.

At the end of his life, St. Vincent had one big regret, “that he had not done enough for the poor!” We are indeed very happy to note that substantial reconfigurations have transpired since the last General Assembly. But, at the end of the day, in the midst of the sea of suffering humanity, the question that keeps coming back again and again is, “have we really done enough?” Have we used our resources wisely and organized ourselves well for action?

e) *Dialogue with the Poor and the Vincentian Family*

Context:

A sincere dialogue and concrete pastoral plan is very important and useful among the members of the worldwide Vincentian Family. This dialogue helps to identify the real need of the poor and to make plans to serve them with respect and love. The poor are often powerless and without hope. Frequently, they are the victims of unjust social structures and the bad policies of government. Since a Vincentian is a friend of the poor, he needs to have a personal encounter with the poor, even as he is identified with them. This can be done by a true dialogue:

- An essential element of the dialogue is ***Listening***. We listen to each other to learn from each other, to unite our hearts and “***Be with the poor***” who are our “***lords and masters***” (St. Vincent).
- The poor want to be the ***subjects not objects*** of our ministry. For this to happen, a personal conversion is needed. We need to listen humbly and carefully with a willingness to learn and be converted. Our emphasis should be not on “***doing more***” but on “***doing with.***”

*Synthesis of the Provincial Assemblies**LISTEN TO AND BE WITH THE POOR!*

What do the poor tell us about themselves?

- that they want to be accepted as they are, and visited where they are, at their own homes;
- that they want their economic and social status to be improved;
- that they want education and health care for their children;
- that their lives depend on others;
- that they are deprived of their own land;
- that they sometimes lose their dignity and self-esteem;
- that they suffer silently due to political injustices.

*We are called **to be with and share** the destiny of the poor who:*

- reveal to us authentic human and Christian life and value;
- teach us the importance of time, life and suffering with dignity;
- invite us to learn from them fidelity, generosity, and authenticity;
- look for our gentle and caring love;
- ask from us a sincere, loving and caring dialogue with them and a deep knowledge of the causes of their poverty;
- expect a new, creative and lasting solution for their problems;
- want to exert some control over their own destiny.

To work for and promote the causes of the poor, the Congregation of the Mission needs:

- to prepare its men humanly and spiritually to be faithful to St. Vincent and the Vincentian charism;
- to respond to the needs of the poor in an appropriate and effective way;
- to nourish confreres who know how to be with the poor in their circumstances;
- to form confreres who are able to accompany the poor in their promotional projects;
- to train confreres who remember that we are among the poor: "No one is so poor as to have nothing to offer, and no one is so rich as to have no needs."

Recommendations:

- The poor should be the best friends of the Vincentians: those who suffer physically, psychologically and spiritually should be at the center of the Vincentian Family's attention and mission.
- The Congregation of the Mission should be aware of changing cultural situations and should adopt, through a thorough and sincere dialogue among the Vincentian Family, new methods of being with and working for the poor. Cooperation with and collaboration among the members of the Vincentian Family is a key to the success of our evangelization.

DIALOGUE AMONG THE MEMBERS OF THE
VINCENTIAN FAMILY

- The concept of "*family*" is inspiring for us as Vincentians. The Vincentian Family, as a family, needs to grow together and have a basic common formation.
- At Folleville and Chatillon, Vincent entered into a true dialogue of how to help the poor and he ended by establishing an "***organized charity***". Today's dialogue among the members of the Vincentian Family must have such a constructive and practical goal.
- Shared experiences in serving the poor unite the Vincentian Family's efforts; we enrich each other and serve the poor more effectively. We have a lot to learn from each other. As family members, we develop a "common spirit" which helps the dialogue and improves our cooperation.
- The whole of the Vincentian Family is called to trust in Divine Providence.
- The Vincentian Family offers hope to the poor because we love and serve them with consistency and constancy.
- The Congregation works with and learns from the rest of the Family.

International Meeting of the Brothers: Challenges and Recommendations

Paris, 3 June 2010 – Feast of Corpus Christi

350 Years and the Vocation of the Brother Continues

1. In October, 2007, in Santo Domingo, there was a meeting of brothers of the Congregation. This meeting was organized by the Latin American Conference of the Vincentian Provinces and the participants reflected on the formation and the mission-vocation of the brother. The fruit of this meeting was approved in a document entitled: *Conclusiones y desafíos del 1^{er} encuentro de Hermanos vicentinos de América Latina (CLAPVI)* [Conclusions and Challenges of the First Meeting of the Vincentian Brothers in Latin America (CLAPVI)]. As a result of this meeting CIF organized a meeting of the brothers on the international level.
2. From April 9 - June 4, 2010, the International Center of Formation, Saint Vincent de Paul (Paris), sponsored the First Session for Brothers of the Congregation of the Mission. On this occasion twenty-six brothers representing fifteen nationalities gathered together and attempted to renew and up-date their vocation by means of an integral formation. Taking advantage of this opportunity we reflected on the challenges that are placed before the Congregation of the Mission with regard to the mission-vocation of the brother in the present world.
3. Beginning with our own reality within the Congregation, it should be noted that *the number of brothers in the Congregation has decreased. In 1960 there were 510 brothers; in 2009 there were 159. This is a reflection of what is happening in the Church at large. The reason: questions about the role of the brother in the Church.... In Saint Vincent's time the brothers constituted 31% of the members of the Congregation.... In general the brothers in Saint Vincent's era were educated and not simply assistants (servants) to the priests. The greater number of them entered the community*

*because they wanted to live a simple life in the midst of a community of prayer in order to serve the Lord and the poor.*¹

4. Within the present framework of Vatican II the brothers are called to a fuller participation in the evangelizing mission of the Church, especially in following Jesus Christ evangelizing the poor. For this reason the brothers ought to have an integral formation in all areas: human, professional, intellectual, and spiritual. In light of Vatican II the presence of the brothers in the community takes on a new light with regard to their responsibility to build the Kingdom of God and to discover and up-date their role in the Congregation of the Mission.
5. Basing ourselves on the CLAPVI document we have formulated this document in order to share the challenges that we encounter with regard to the mission-vocation of the brother in the Congregation of the Mission. We also offer our recommendations to all our confreres and all the Provinces, taking advantage of the proximity of the 2010 General Assembly so that our reflections might be appraised.

Identity and Mission

6. Following the ideal of Saint Vincent, our Constitutions present our vocation: to follow Jesus Christ evangelizing the poor.² Therefore we are clerics and lay persons, Vincentian missionaries.³
7. In the majority of countries we are known by the name “Vincentian Fathers.” This expression excludes the reality of the brothers and as a consequence, the very nature of the Congregation. We wish to be known as “Vincentian Missionaries.”⁴
8. The lay Vincentian missionary has been traditionally called a coadjutor brother. The word “coadjutor” does not appear in our Constitutions. Rather this word stems from a mentality that views the brother as a second-class missionary whose only purpose is to help the priest. We wish to eliminate said word from the vocabulary of the Congregation, and more importantly,

¹ Cf. ROBERT P. MALONEY, *Conference: The Brothers in the Congregation, Yesterday and Today*, CIF, Paris 2010.

² Cf. *Constitutions*, 1.

³ *Constitutions*, 4.

⁴ *Constitutions*, 52 & 1.

we wish to eliminate said mentality. We would like to be known as “Vincentian brothers.”⁵

9. The brother, as a lay person consecrated for the mission, is different from the lay person. This difference is derived from the vows, especially the vow of stability by which the brother commits himself to evangelize the poor for the rest of his life as a member of the Congregation.
10. The brother, as a lay person consecrated for the mission, is different from the consecrated religious in that his vows are not pronounced for the purpose of sanctification but rather are a means to achieve the end of the Congregation.
11. As Vincentian missionaries, clerics and lay persons, we participate in the same mission-vocation. The brother, different than the cleric, ought to live his mission-vocation from the perspective of his consecration as a lay person.

Profile and Formation

12. In accord with the directives of our Constitutions: missionary candidates in the Congregation have to have an integral formation⁶ that takes into account the following vital dimensions of being Vincentian: human, spiritual, intellectual, apostolic and community. It is urgent to rework the two *Ratio Formationis*⁷ for the Congregation of the Mission, taking into account the mission-vocation of the brother in all its dimensions. A brother should participate in this Commission.
13. We believe that it would be good for the integration and the formation of Vincentian missionaries to have the priest and brother candidates reside together in the same house during the time of initial formation. It would also be good if during this time a brother could actively participate in the

⁵ *Constitutions*, 52 & 1,2.

⁶ *Constitutions*, 91 & 1.

⁷ There was a great debate with regard to formulating a *Guide for the Formation of Brothers* and a *Ratio Formationis*. At the end of the discussion the results of the voting were as follows:

14 votes to reformulate the *Ratios* of initial formation that exist in the Congregation;

10 votes to write the Guide;

0 votes to formulate a *Ratio Formationis* exclusively for brothers.

formation process, living in the same house or going there on a regular basis.

14. **Vincentian Dimension:** We believe that Vincentian formation is fundamental in order to form ourselves as Vincentian missionaries. We recognize that we have had little formation in this area because it was not a dimension of our formation and therefore it is necessary to deepen ourselves in this area. It would be good to know about the exemplary life of the brothers in the Congregation, especially those who ministered with Saint Vincent.
15. **Human Dimension:** Historically, and even at the present time, in some provinces the brother is not considered in a serious manner and therefore has low self-esteem. The role of the brother in the Congregation is being recognized but this recognition ought to be increased so that there is a level of equality among all Vincentian missionaries. Brothers, for their part, ought to be aware of this reality and form themselves in order to achieve emotional balance and affective maturity. They should be given motivation and support and should also be open to assistance.
16. **Spiritual Dimension:** Generally our prayer has become a monotonous activity and does not allow us to have a good experience of God. We are attached to the Liturgy of Hours and when this disappears or when work overwhelms us, prayer disappears. In our formation we are lacking a school of Vincentian prayer that introduces us to the need for prayer and that has as its starting point the reality of the poor.
17. **Intellectual Dimension:** In order to achieve the end of the Congregation it would be good to form ourselves adequately:

General Criteria: As we have mentioned in #12, it is necessary to have an initial formation that is equal to that of the clerics. We believe this is necessary:

- to deepen ourselves in the spiritual life and to know better Christ evangelizing the poor;
- the poor need the best in order to be evangelized and served;
- it is basic for pastoral ministry;
- the formation of the laity is a priority and an urgent need in the Church. People are better prepared and we must be on a par with them in order to provide them with a qualitative formation;

- it is necessary if we are going to work with the Vincentian Family;
- it will allow the brother to participate in the theological dialogue of the community and in pastoral planning;
- it will help self-esteem and allow us to feel equal to the clerics.

Particular Criteria: In special circumstances the formation should be adapted to the ability of the candidate.

18. The Statutes⁸ indicate that the missionaries need a special and professional formation that is in accord with the individual's abilities and the need of the mission. In order to better fulfill the end of the Congregation, the brothers are in urgent need of this specialization.
19. **Apostolic Dimension:** Today it is clear that the brother has many and diverse possibilities for apostolic ministry as a Vincentian missionary.
- **In the Congregation:** This has been the traditional environment for the brother's work, providing services in the community. We do not reject simple services, but we believe that now is the time, with adequate preparation, to broaden the horizon of the work to the offices that the clerics have... works that are not dependent on the Sacrament of Orders (treasurer, administrator, formator).
 - **In the Church:** We recognize that the apostolic work of the brother is expanding in this area. We believe that the brother, because of his situation as a lay person and through his encouragement and formation, is able to promote the laity as pastoral agents within the Church. The brother can receive some ministries instituted by the Church (lector and acolyte) without losing his character as a lay vocation.⁹
 - **In the world:** The laity are called to sanctify and evangelize the realities of the world. As a lay person the brother can be the presence of the Church in the midst of these realities (education, health, means of communication...) when this is in accord with the provincial and community plan.
20. **Community Dimension:** Due to the traditional role of the brother, it is possible that the brother has been a passive member in the life of the community, with a tendency to isolate himself.

⁸ *Statutes*, 40 and 48.

⁹ *CIC* 230.

Today we ought to be active agents in the building of community.

21. With this understanding we believe that it is necessary that the clerics understand the need to promote the integration of the brothers into the life of the community. We propose that the themes and conclusions of the First Session of CIF for the brothers be studied in community meditations, in the evaluation of community and provincial plans, in formation houses, and in continual formation sessions.
22. For a greater integration of the brother into the life of the Congregation it would be good to assure their presence in Provincial and General Assemblies. We suggest that the General Assembly assure the presence of at least one brother for each Conference of Vincentian Provinces.

Vocational Promotion

23. As indicated in this document, our Vincentian identity is fundamental and thus vocational promotion ought to present, in the first place, God's call to be a Vincentian missionary.
24. It is necessary to prepare the brothers for the ministry of vocational promotion and also to make available materials that present the vocation of the brothers.
25. Whenever possible the brothers ought to participate in the Commission of Vocational Promotion and in specific actions of vocational promotion (meetings, talks, workshops, retreats, etc.).
26. We think that some basic criteria can help in the process of selecting brother candidates. We suggest that a candidate be between the ages of 18-30, have at least a secondary school education,¹⁰ and good physical and psychological health.
27. As has sometimes happened, we think that we should not "force" the candidates to be clerics. The path would be to promote personal discernment, and for that vocational accompaniment is fundamental.

¹⁰ According to the scholastic program of each country.

Follow-Up on the Meeting

28. We believe that it would be good and necessary for the brothers to maintain an on-going communication in order to follow-up on the challenges and the recommendation of the First Session of CIF for Brothers.
29. It would be helpful to organize meetings of Continual Formation for the brothers on the level of individual Provinces, Conferences of Provinces and the international level.