

## Vincent de Paul's Experience of the Charitable Mission<sup>1</sup>

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### Summary:

The celebration of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the Vincentian charism provides us with an opportunity to reexamine the place of missionary charity in the life of Vincent de Paul. That was one of Vincent's insights and to think anew about this reality means that we briefly enter into a dialogue about his theology of mission and analyze the concrete form in which the mission was developed, that is, the popular mission. We discover that our Founder has given us various insights that continue to strengthen our missionary vocation. Leaving aside for the moment the mission *ad gentes*, it is nevertheless clear that the Vincentian mission expresses a preference for those persons who are poor. Thus, the mission still involves organized charitable activity. The establishment of the Confraternity of Charity was one way to institutionalize such activity. Understood in that manner we see that such a manner of acting was in accord with Jesus' command. Therefore, the Vincentian Family ought to constantly appropriate for themselves this option on behalf of the poor.

*Key words:* popular mission, Confraternity of Charity, poor, evangelization.

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<sup>1</sup> Translator's Note: in this article it is often difficult to understand if the author is referring to "popular mission" or the mission of the church and the mission of the Congregation. . . I have tried to make this clear in my translation but will admit I might actually have given the wrong interpretation in certain instances.

In this article, we will come to see that the mission on behalf of the poor is our congregational seal. In the first section, we will reflect on Vincent's theology of mission. Then we will analyze the concept of the popular mission (which includes the establishment of the Confraternity). I am aware of the fact that these are well-known themes and so I will attempt to give a "fresh interpretation" to the various Vincentian texts. Furthermore, my interpretation will be done from the perspective of moral theology and also from the perspective of Latin American thinking.

### Theology of the Mission<sup>2</sup>

As a result of his pastoral experience, Vincent stated that the poor often lacked basic knowledge with regard to the fundamental truths of Christianity and therefore, did not give witness to the faith nor did they act in accord with Christian principles. The popular missions attempted to address those two great evils. Furthermore, since the faith is concretized in love, Vincent was concerned about the fact that people lacked basic material goods and were often not respected.

*Biblical Foundation:* Vincent understood that the evangelization of the poor is the sign, par excellence, that the Kingdom of God had been made present. To be a missionary is to make effective the exhortation to follow Jesus Christ. In other words, it is to live one's life in a manner that is similar to the way Jesus lived his life: going from place to place, proclaiming the Kingdom of God, thus highlighting the fact that Jesus had no place where he could rest his head (cf. Matthew 8:18-20). *Who lives better the way of life*

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Ibañez, José M., "Misión e identidad de la Congregación de la Misión" in Collection *Misiones vicencianas y evangelización del hombre de hoy*. Salamanca. CEME. 1987. 131-180; Collection *Cuadernos Vicencianos. En tiempos de San Vicente de Paúl... y hoy*. Tomo I. Salamanca. CEME. 1997. 9-14, 83-103.

*Jesus lived on earth than missionaries?*<sup>3</sup> Sacred Scripture revealed to Vincent the urgency of following Jesus, the missionary, and the urgency of living life in accord with the gospel maxims.

To engage in the mission is to continue the activity of Jesus Christ who came to evangelize the poor. It is to prolong Jesus' preferential activity on behalf of the poor. The passage from Luke 4:18 is a pivotal text for those who seek to understand the Congregation of the Mission.

Our vocation means that we live in a manner that is accord with the life of our Lord, Jesus Christ, who entered into our world and made his primary task that of assisting and caring for the poor. *He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. And if we ask Our Lord, "What did you come to do on earth?" "To assist the poor." "Anything else?" "To assist the poor," etc. Now, he had only poor persons in his company and he devoted himself very little to cities, almost always conversing with and instructing village people. So are we not very fortunate to belong to the Mission for the same purpose that caused God to become man (CCD:XI:98).*

*Attitudes of the Missionary:* Individuals never cease to evangelize unless, of course, they fail to commit themselves to that undertaking. Therefore, during the popular missions they ought to practice the five traditional virtues as well as unconditional love; a love that reveals a coherency in their affectiveness and their effectiveness. Generally, Vincent expressed his missionary labor and his integral service toward the poor as an activity that had to be exercised through the cultivation of virtue. Thus his missionary services implied the development of numerous virtues, charity being the primary virtue.

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<sup>3</sup> *Vincent de Paul, Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, translated and edited by Jacqueline Kilar, DC; and Marie Poole, DC; et al; annotated by John W. Carven, CM; New City Press, Brooklyn and Hyde Park, 1985-2014; volume XI, p. 121; future references to this work will be indicated using the initials CCD followed by the volume number, then the page number, for example, CCD:XI:121.

If the Missionaries practiced these virtues then they would be able to [1] draw closer to God and to the neighbor, [2] better their personal and their community activity, [3] minister more effectively with the poor [4] distance themselves from temptations and certain vices which could arise as a result of their ministry.

Vincent frequently pointed out the importance of being mortified during the popular missions (cf. CCD:I:176-180) and mortified in everything.<sup>4</sup> Mortified and humble Missionaries are a blessing. They are needed and they maintain others in their evangelical life. Missionaries, therefore, should avoid those realities that distance them from the Christian life and from the process of evangelization (CCD:I:178-179). Again, the Missionaries are to be careful with regard to seeking comfort or luxury; vices that can lead the confreres to intemperance, to a desire to have everything “just right” at every moment and to reject the mortifications that the process of evangelization demands. The practice of mortification will enable the Missionaries to avoid an excessive love of self, a love that often leads to vanity in preaching. Vincent also exhorted the Missionaries to use moderation when explaining sexual matters.

*Mission and the poor:* Vincent viewed the mission and ministry on behalf of the poor as inseparable. The poor are the beneficiaries of the mission. Furthermore, the missionary element is intimately connected to the social charitable element. Those themes are very characteristic in the writings of Vincent.

What type of popular mission did Vincent propose? It is true that there were Congregations that gave missions in the cities, missions that were directed toward people of a higher social class. That was necessary but such is not the Vincentian charism. The Vincentian charism implies being among the poor. As a result, the members of the Congregation (and hopefully, the members of all the other

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<sup>4</sup> For example, Vincent praises the Missionaries who were giving a mission in the Diocese of Evreux; those confreres slept on straw without complaining (cf. CCD:XI:1)

branches of the Vincentian Family), evangelize in areas that are poor and attempt to have a permanent impact on those areas through organized charitable activity. Mission and charity form a dialectical, mystical, and intimate bond. The mission is extended toward those who are poor in order to proclaim good news to those who have not heard the news as well as those who are not fully aware of that good news. The poor are catechized and the sacraments are administered to them and wherever possible a Confraternity of Charity is established.

Vincent also teaches us how to be evangelized by those persons who are poor. As has occurred so often in the history of the church, so in the 17<sup>th</sup> century the poor made people aware of that which is essential. If our faith is a lively faith, then we are able to see the poor through the eyes of Jesus. The poor are the vicars of Christ and those who are able to view the poor as such, are converted. Vincent was clear about the fact that the primary purpose of the Missionaries was to dedicate themselves to the poor country people. In the seventeenth century, the poor generally lived in the rural areas and those people were poor in every sense of the word (spiritually and materially). Therefore the members of the Congregation of the Mission make a vow in which they dedicate themselves to the salvation of the poor country people.

Let us deepen our understanding of what we have stated. When one is engaged in the mission, one is also evangelizing and promoting those persons who are poor. Therefore, popular missions cannot be used as an excuse to neglect providing assistance to those who are poor and promoting their cause.<sup>5</sup> In fact, the Congregation of the Mission has been praised for the manner in which it integrated both of those elements –praised for instructing the poor and administering the sacraments to them as well as for attending to some of their more urgent needs. One of Vincent's greatest joys was to know that the confreres of a particular house were engaged in the ministry of

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<sup>5</sup> A priest stated that those who are ordained carry out their greatest task when they serve the poor (cf. CCD:I:33).

preaching popular missions as well as providing for the needs of the people of that area.<sup>6</sup> Thus the Missionaries cared for those persons who were sickest, poorest, and sinful.

Generally, the manner in which one is able to touch the lives of the poor country people is through the popular missions. It was for this reason that Vincent preferred to preach popular missions rather than to engage in parish ministry (CCD:I:538-539). I am encouraged to know that Vincent understood that parish ministry was not the only manner in which one was able to evangelize. The popular missions allowed the confreres to accompany the poor. Thus, they did not feel the need to return to “their” parish in order to engage in some other activity there.

*Mission and reconciliation:* Another element that was sought during the time of the popular mission was restitution and reconciliation – reconciliation between individuals who viewed themselves as enemies. There is a saying: small town, large hell and that is somewhat universal. In the various villages if one looks behind the smiles of the country people and beyond the flowers and the livestock, one will often find tension, hatred, suspicion, the desire for revenge. There are so many different realities that separate and divide neighbors and families and which ultimately cause great harm to the life of the community. The Vincentian popular mission seeks to reestablish charity in the community. The mission attempts to eliminate those customs and behaviors that are not in accord with Christian virtue. The Missionaries brought to the people a Christian ethics and the norms of Canon Law. Personal conversion, expressed in confession and the reception of Communion, was not enough. Community conversion was sought, that is, a conversion in which friendship and unity were restored. Such renewal was one of the surprising results of the popular missions.

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<sup>6</sup> Vincent wrote to a superior: *Messieurs du Coudray and Boucher have forty poor people, some sick, some others who are healthy, to whom they minister in their house, although it is small, because they have no hospital. They also attend one hundred fifty outside the city, all of whom they feed and assist with a charity that brings tears to the eyes of those who hear of it* (CCD:I:528).

## Popular Missions

I remember the first time I participated in a popular mission. I was sixteen years old and a student in the Minor Seminary. It involved a long train ride from Buenos Aires to Bariloche and then another journey to Bolsdón. We were collaborating with a parish in that area that was administered by the Franciscans. We, some fifteen seminarians, went to a small village in the midst of the Andes forest. My task was to teach the catechism to the children and to visit the homes of the people who were scattered throughout this area. These persons were very isolated from one another and they lacked many things that would enable them to live their life in a dignified manner. I was surprised by the desire of these people to learn more about the truths of the Christian faith. I also rejoiced when people shared their lives with me during my visits to their homes. I always learned something and was given much material for meditation and reflection. Do you remember the first time you participated in a popular mission? Where was it? How was the mission developed? Such events connect us with Vincent who from 1617 dedicated himself to service on behalf of the poor through the preaching of popular missions. It was through these missions that Vincent attempted to renew the life of the rural parishes. While Vincent engaged in other forms of service on behalf of the poor, he never neglected the popular missions.

The popular mission is an *ad intra* task of the Congregation in as much as it seeks to make the gospel effective in the midst of a Christian community where people have become “indifferent or cold” with regard to God’s plan for them. Vincent greatly valued the work of the popular mission and asked the confreres to send him reports about their ministry in this regard.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> These *mission registries* detail the number of missions that were given, the situation in which such missions were developed, the results of the mission as well as the areas where there was failure. Most of these registries have been lost. Abelly, in his *Life of Vincent de Paul*, presents some interesting facts about these missions, facts that were extracted from those registries.

*The objective of the popular mission:* The time of the popular mission is a time of grace (CCD:XI:1). God bestows his graces upon people during such a special time in their life. The people experienced themselves as being so very blessed during the time of the popular mission that they caused Vincent to blush when they praised him about the manner in which that ministry was developed. The mission had a holistic approach:<sup>8</sup> to support people in the practice of their faith, to educate people with regard to Christian truths, to provide people with the tools that would enable them to live as children of God and people of prayer. The popular mission attempted to encourage people to practice charity and justice and to sensitize them to the needs of their brothers and sisters.

As already pointed out, the popular mission was a charitable activity that was intended to open people to reconciliation. It was a time to unite people and this implied: [1] reconciling people to God and to the Church; [2] reconciling people with one another and even reconciling the pastor with his parishioners.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> In a letter that Vincent wrote to Pope Urban VIII he summarized the activity that was developed during the time of the popular mission. *The Missionaries go from village to village, preaching sermons and exhortations to the people. They teach everyone, catechizing them both publicly and privately, about the mysteries of faith necessary for salvation, of which most of the people are completely ignorant. They prepare them for general confessions of their whole life and hear them. They convert heretics, bring lawsuits to an end, appease hatreds, reconcile quarrels and enmities and establish the Confraternity of charity where it is necessary for the corporal and spiritual relief of the sick poor* (CCD:I:49).

<sup>9</sup> We are told of a mission in which *the inhabitants had a strong aversion to their pastor. On his part, the pastor had good reason to resent being treated badly by his parishioners, and he took them to court over it. He even had three or four of the instigators imprisoned because they had gone so far as to manhandle him in the church, or some of his people. Most of them were unwilling even to hear Mass, and would leave the church when they saw him go to the altar ... they swore they would never go to confession to him and that that they'd rather let Easter go by without receiving Communion* (CCD:XI:4-5). For those who want to know how this story ended, I can tell you that, thanks to God's grace and the Missionaries, it came to a happy ending. The pastor and the parishioners were reconciled and began to interact with one another with cordiality and joy and peace.



*The anatomy of popular missions:* Let us address some specific questions. During what time of the year were they given? Usually the missions were given during autumn. During that season people had more time and the weather was more favorable, and as a result it was easier for people to leave their homes (in other words, during September, October, November and December). Missions, however, were also given at other times during the year. Choosing the right time was very important, and to a certain degree the success of the mission depended on that decision. It was important to take into consideration the timing of the mission as well as activities that people were engaged in: the mission should not interfere with some other important activity and/or celebration. It was also important to avoid scheduling the mission during some extraordinary event that might lessen the impact of the mission, for example, during some military movement or royal visit.

How long did the mission last? This depended on the place and the situation. Vincent wanted the mission to have an impact on the life of the people and he wanted the Missionaries to evangelize in an effective manner. Usually the missions continued for three weeks (CCD:I:404), never less than fifteen days and never more than five or six weeks. In extraordinary situations, such as some serious problem or a very large area populated with many people, the mission might continue for several months. An exact schedule was kept during the missions (CCD:I:246-247) and Vincent was very insistent on this matter. Vincent viewed fidelity to the schedule as a way to honor the faithfulness of Our Lord and was therefore, the source of divine blessings. To act otherwise was to invite problems. During the time of the mission, there was normally one free day, usually Thursday. This day of rest was introduced at the request of Cardinal Richelieu and became a permanent part of every mission.

Who gave the mission? The missions were given by members of the Congregation. At times when there was a lack of personnel or when the area was very extensive or when some ecclesiastical authority requested it, the diocesan clergy (parish priests, vicars, university professors) assisted and helped during the time of the mission (CCD:I:404).

Did the Missionaries charge a fee? This is a question that is often asked. We should remember however, that Vincent was very careful in this regard and wanted the missions to be given free of charge. The people were not to pay anything for the mission. In order for such a plan to be viable, he sought financial support from the royalty, the nobility and the landlords (such help was also sought from other well-positioned individuals).

*The mission, a time to transmit the faith:* Much of the day was spent teaching people through preaching and through catechetics. The concern for those most abandoned implied, among other things, resolving their lack of knowledge. The Missionaries attempted to evangelize the people through means of the Word of God. They attempted to united that which was clear with that which was profound and pleasant. The reflections and teaching of the Missionaries were intended to resolve people's lack of knowledge and bring about a change in people's moral and material situation. Vincent was convinced that the Christian life of the poor country people had to be clarified, purified and renewed and so he attempted to join experience with the understanding of faith; devotion to God with fraternity. All of that required a powerful transmission of the faith.<sup>10</sup>

There have always been people who were remiss in forming themselves. For some twenty-five years I have been teaching at the university and I have had first-hand experience in that regard. During the years 1615-1616 Vincent preached about the importance of learning the catechism: *People will object to me, "What does your catechism have to do with us? We are Christians, for we go*

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<sup>10</sup> In Miguel de Unamuno's novel, *San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, Lazarus speaks to the new pastor and says: *little theology, eh? Little theology; religion, religion.* Even though the meaning of that phrase is complex, we point out that Vincent did not want to fill the people with devotions. Rather he wanted to educate them in the practice of virtue and social charity. Here in Latin America, Cardinal Piroño stated that *this is a continent of baptized people who need to be evangelized.* This ought to be a challenge for all the members of the Vincentian Family, a challenge that leads all of us to organize ourselves in the best possible manner so that we can ultimately communicate the faith.

*to church, hear Mass and Vespers, go to confession at Easter; what else is needed?» Nowhere in all of Holy Scripture have I found that it is sufficient for a Christian to hear Mass and Vespers and go to confession, but I have found in it that anyone who does not believe in all that comes within the scope of faith is not saved. Then, too, what profit is drawn from the Mass by someone who does not know what it is, or from confession by someone who does not know what it involves?» (CCD:XIIIa:35).*

We must distinguish between catechetics and preaching. Catechetics is a methodology that is used to explain the truths of the faith (CCD:I:128). The themes might vary, but generally those themes were focused on the Creed, the Commandments, the Hail Mary, and the Our Father, eschatology, etc. Vincent valued the role of the catechist and wanted them to be well-prepared: *everybody invariably agrees that the fruit of a mission stems from the catechism lesson* (CCD:I:419). Two catechism lessons were given: one for adults and the other for children (usually around 2:00 pm and included games). The catechetical instruction for adolescents and adults was usually given at 6:00 pm and often included edifying stories that made the lesson more interesting. Vincent wanted this instruction to be given in a humble and familiar manner. People were prepared to receive communion and those who had already received the sacraments, were able to deepen their understanding of the faith (today this is referred to as the RCIA or adult formation).

Vincent was convinced about the effectiveness of the catechetical method. It was for that reason that he did not want the time allotted for adult catechetics to be replaced by preaching. He felt that catechetics was the best method for educating people in their faith, for purifying the faith and for helping people persevere in the practice of their faith. Catechetics and preaching were important elements for transmitting the faith, and were important in the preaching of the popular mission (both of which were to be given their proper time and place).

What were the themes that were developed by the preacher? First, all the faithful of the parish and of the neighboring parishes were present for the preaching that took place after the celebration of Mass. The preaching took place very early in the morning, usually at

5:00 am or 6:00 am. We know that the people were very happy to be present for those sermons. People cried, applauded and responded with shouts of joy and praise. At times, the preacher had to pause as people responded to the preaching in various manners. Even though conversion was the objective of the preaching, it is also clear that the preacher often touched the hearts of the people.

The themes of the preaching often focused on truths of the faith (the preaching was often focused on the same theme as the catechetical instruction, but was viewed from a different perspective) as well as devotional and moral themes: the virtues, sin, intemperance, the good use of suffering and poverty, charity, good example, perseverance in the faith, eschatology, charity, the good use of time, prayer, the sacraments. The preaching always involved an exhortation to imitate our Lord and also promoted devotion to the Blessed Mother.

Some “missionary sermons”<sup>11</sup> denounced situations of injustice, for example, the barns of some individuals would be filled with grains at the same time that others were dying of hunger. Sermon #40 dealt with theft and robbery and was very descriptive. No one could remain indifferent to what was being said.

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<sup>11</sup> Another source for obtaining information about the themes of the sermons is *Los Sermones de Saint Vincent de Paul, de ses cooperateurs et successeurs pour los misiones des campagnes* [*The Sermons of Saint Vincent de Paul, his collaborators, and successors for the missions in the countrysides*]. M. Codoing had put together these sermons. He would take advantage of the summer to write and to copy them. He had intended to have this book printed, but it is most probable that he simply copied these sermons by hand. It seems, however, that the book was stolen. Be that as it may, some members of the Congregation of the Mission, the Bishops of Boulogne and Alet, and Abbe Olier, as well as Vincent de Paul, utilized the text of those sermons. Together they continued to write a series of sermons. The subjects were varied. For example, each one wrote about the motives and the reasons for putting aside some particular vice or for embracing some virtue. Definitions were given and various means were provided so that certain goals could be attained. The final editor of this material was Father Portail. These texts were often utilized in preaching and in catechizing. They served as a guide that enhanced one's creativity. We know that this compilation of sermons for the mission, in its current version, has been greatly modified. Even so, it would be interesting to reprint this volume.

How did the Missionaries preach? They preached in accord with the little method. Vincent de Paul continually highlighted the fact that the Missionaries were to preach in a clear and simple manner, a manner that would draw them closer to their listeners. Thus, they would be able to convince people through the power of their arguments and through the goodness that they radiated. In other words, the sacred realities were best revealed through simplicity rather than through ostentation. Therefore, the Missionaries were to use familiar language, colloquial language, revealing in that manner their concern for the people and their desire to touch people's hearts.

Some might object and state that Vincent and the other members of the Congregation produced very little written material. That is true, but it must be understood that in the seventeenth century the vast majority of people were illiterate. Thus, pastoral ministry was focused on the spoken word even though there were some written texts (when the Missionaries visited the homes of the people, they gave the family a book of prayers).

*Popular Missions and the Confraternities of Charity:* It was hoped that the popular mission would reverse the trend of a lack of doctrinal knowledge. Indeed, it was hoped that people would become more knowledgeable about their faith and about the Word of God, that people would frequent the sacraments, and become active participants in the liturgy of the Church. The preaching was done in such a manner so as encourage people in the practice of virtue and in living a moral and Christian life. A mission was viewed as successful if the people agreed to work together so that the poor might have their dignity restored. Thus there was an emphasis on reconciliation and restitution and the settling of law suits. Also, each mission concluded with the establishment of a Confraternity of Charity.

During the mission, and after having obtained the permission of the bishop and the pastor, a Confraternity of Charity was to be established. The ministry of the members of that Confraternity was

to be reviewed and strengthened at the time of the next popular mission.<sup>12</sup>

Using Vincentian vocabulary, the popular mission evangelized the life of the poor through means of the truth (which enlightens people) and charity (which involves people in the Church's very mission). The evangelizing process was initiated by reaching out to the sick poor. Little by little the process was extended to those persons who found themselves in other situations of poverty. Usually, the coordinator of the mission would submit a report about the possibility of establishing a Confraternity of Charity in the parish where the popular mission was being conducted. Before presenting the report, the coordinator would dialogue with individuals known for their charity. Such individuals were invited to visit the infirm. Different possibilities were explored and at the conclusion of the mission, the coordinator preached a sermon on charity and soon thereafter a Confraternity of Charity was established.

It should be noted that after the establishment of the Congregation of the Mission, the Confraternities of Charity multiplied very rapidly. When Vincent de Paul died the Confraternities had been established in many parts of France.<sup>13</sup> Confraternities were also established in other countries where the Congregation was ministering, especially in Italy (in the region of Turin and Genoa).

What were the keys to the success of the missions? Above all else, the grace of God must be highlighted. It was for this reason that Vincent requested prayers for the people in those places where a

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<sup>12</sup> For example, the Confraternity in Quinz-Vingt had a curious name due to the fact that it was established in a hospital founded by King Saint Louis, a hospital for 300 blind poor people. This confraternity was established in 1633 after a mission that was given by the members of the Tuesday Conference.

<sup>13</sup> The Confraternity had been established in fifteen parishes in Paris. Outside of Paris, there were Confraternities in Villejuif, Vanves, Issy, Gentilly, Vincennes, Montreuil, Champigny, La Chapelle, Clichy, Asnières, Auteuil, Saint-Cloud, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, Argenteuil, Sannois, Amiens, Arras, Beauvais, Etampes, Fontainebleau, Joigny, Muret, Neufchâtel-en-Bray, Rethel, Macon, Sedan, etc.

popular mission was being preached and requested prayers for those who were preaching the mission (Cf. CCD:I:23-24). Furthermore, Vincent had developed a mission that seemed to be in harmony with the life of the country poor who willingly participated in such missions and whose faith was deepened as a result of that participation.

**Conclusion:** Before concluding this article, I gazed out the windows of the Pouget Room and I saw that here in Paris we were in the midst of an unusually cold autumn day. Since I did not bring any mate,<sup>14</sup> I drank my third cup of tea. I returned to the keyboard and connected back to the present moment and reviewed the articles that the other members of SIEV will publish in this edition of our journal. Now I must highlight the fact that the gospels and our courageous Pope Francis have placed the mission at the center of the ecclesial scene. Furthermore, the Pope points out that the mission is related to the transformation of the Church. In other words, the mission is the path of conversion that the Church must travel along. Mission involves not only proclaiming the gospel to those persons who do not know it or who have little knowledge of it, but mission also involves a recognition of the fact that now there is an opportunity to engage in ecclesial renewal. The Pope states: *I dream of a “missionary option”, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation* (EG, #27). The Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, which I have just referenced, is not, per se, a missionary document; but, nevertheless, is oriented by a missionary spirit. I believe that, as we celebrate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of our charism, all the members of the Vincentian Family ought to

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<sup>14</sup> Mate is a nation drink in the River Plate region. It is an infusion made using dry mate leaves. The drink is made and served in a small hollow gourd and is drunk through a metal tube called a bombilla.

feel challenged as they listen to Pope Francis extend an invitation to the Church *to go forth from [its] own comfort zone in order to reach all the “peripheries” in need of the light of the gospel* (EG, #20). The Pope wants the church to be more missionary, to reach out to others, to be more of a “street church.” Pope Francis’ call reminds us of the following words of Vincent de Paul: *What reason we have to tremble if we’re stay-at-home people or, if, because of our age or under pretext of some infirmity, we slow down and let our fervor diminish* (CCD:XI:122).

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