

# The Inculturation of the Vincentian Charism in Europe

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In the letter he wrote to the Visitors of the Conference of Visitors of Europe (CEVIM) on 19 April 1999, Father Maloney, Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, described the situation begun in Europe following the fall of the Berlin Wall (linguistic and cultural diversity, and diversity of interests). Then he continued: "Today I suggest to you some points for discussion. I intend them as an encouragement toward common reflection at this meeting and common action in the future and as rallying points around which greater unity can be promoted, while at the same time preserving the rich diversity that has characterized the many provinces that make up the conference."<sup>1</sup> He proposed six points for the Visitors to enlist the Congregation in the building of Europe: a continental formation center, attention toward migrations and associated ministries, a Congregational representation in Brussels, a continent-wide reflection on our patrimony, a renewal of the means of prayer, and a refinement of the juridical structure of CEVIM.

This led me to work through the challenges to the Christian tradition in Europe. Then various readings showed me how the Congregation has participated up to our days in the characteristic dynamisms of Europe. Following on the Council, even showing a great vitality, the Congregation has attempted to restate its charism through looking for ways to accompany the new configuration of Europe. Today, we have to continue to bring the contribution of our identity in terms of three axes.

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<sup>1</sup> "To the members of the European Conference of Visitors (CEVIM)," 12 April 1999, *Vincentiana*, 43:3 (1999) 147.

## The European Christian tradition

Cultural diversity characterizes the associated countries, now numbering 25 and speaking more than 15 different languages, and presenting multiple traditions unified in large measure by varying Christian traditions: Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox, all of which are the fruit of history. Although the past years have revived tensions over the interpretation of history, bringing out contradictory readings, such as religious traditions, philosophical currents, and non-believing traditions, Europe finally rejected the inclusion in the planned European Constitution of “religious roots” and got a note speaking instead of “spiritual traditions.”

The emergence of the presence of the cultures of Islam through the populations who arrived in Europe to sustain economic growth (Turkey and the Maghreb, Asia), and fears about the future have certainly undergirded the reflections that finally ended up by rejecting the text of the Constitution in three countries, thereby putting off until later this common fundament. In the model of this slow construction, the Congregation in Europe is advancing by little steps.

Cardinal Poupard, president of the Pontifical Council for Culture, in a recent colloquium organized in Vienna between Catholic and Orthodox traditions, cited Maurice Schuman as a way of orienting the mission of the Churches in this laborious construction of Europe. “We have to realize that Europe will not be able, in the long run, to limit itself simply to an economic structure. It will have to become also a safeguard for all that makes our Christian civilization great: the dignity of the human person, freedom and responsibility for individual and collective initiative, the flourishing of all the moral energies of our peoples. Such a cultural mission will be the indispensable complement and the bringing about of a Europe which until now has been founded on economic cooperation. It will give it a soul, a spiritual nobility and a genuine common conscience. We should not have a narrow concept of Europe, limited to material concerns, if we wish it to resist the assault of racist coalitions and fanaticism of every sort.”<sup>2</sup>

He took up this expression, “to give a soul to Europe,” as the fundament for the churches within Europe. Pastor William Collins, Secretary General of CEC-KEK (Conference of European Churches), during a recent ecumenical meeting between CEC-KEK and the Council of European Episcopal Conferences (CCEE), noted that secularization was beginning to appear as an inescapable element of

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<sup>2</sup> Cardinal Paul Poupard, address at the European meeting on culture, Vienna, 3 May 2006.

the Christian presence in Europe. This will become a challenge for the participants. But it seemed to them that “to build a just and equitable Europe without the Churches has no meaning.” Pastor Thomas Wipf, president of the Protestant Churches of Europe, instead of risking putting a cultural or ideological gloss on “giving a soul to Europe,” suggested “working directly to make a common space of freedom, justice and peace.” He moved this undertaking more into the field of social action to give what he called “a heart” for Europe.<sup>3</sup>

Currently, several initiatives are under way to actualize the care for a European presence for Christians, notably that gathering around the Swiss historian Martin Kluger, who began the “Kairos” group,<sup>4</sup> “... to give new courage to Christians and to help them to influence the development of Europe.” To this end he proposed several ways of responding to the challenges that this new community is offering us. He recalls that: “We are building this project, which is truly ecumenical, on three pillars. The first: the invitation to pray every day, especially around noon, one Our Father for a Europe impregnated with Christian values. This could also mean for Catholics praying the Angelus in the same way. The second: a monthly newsletter on current themes at the crossroads between Christianity and questions of society. The articles are written by well-known personalities.... They intend to present issues to ‘normal’ Christians to help them keep their heads in both small and large discussions. The third pillar is the consequence of the two others and could be described with the concepts of ‘sensitizing,’ ‘courage’ and ‘political and cultural involvement.’ Our sticker with the European fish, visible on thousands of cars and backpacks or bags could be a way of encouragement and of giving a positive impulse to Christians.”<sup>5</sup>

At the heart of this Europe in search of itself, the children of Saint Vincent de Paul are searching for their way.

### **The Congregation in Europe at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

The fall of the Berlin wall, 9 November 1989, which surprised the entire world, was largely supported by Christian communities. The Congregation of the Mission reacted rapidly by opening a mission in the East, following the General Assembly of 1992. The Superior General happily recalled for us: “As you know, the General Assembly of 1992, in its sixth commitment (New Evangelization,

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<sup>3</sup> ELODIE MAUROL, « La Croix, » Tuesday, 20 February 2007.

<sup>4</sup> The site: [www.europe4christ.net](http://www.europe4christ.net)

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Martin Kugler, Zenit, Sunday, 29 January 2006.

N° 6) stated: 'Our Congregation commits itself in Eastern Europe to at least one missionary project as a concrete sign of our Community's participation in new evangelization.' In response to this directive of the Assembly, we began a new mission in Albania in 1993. There are now five confreres working there along with three communities of Daughters of Charity. At Christmas I heard from both the confreres and the sisters. They express great joy in their new life and mission. At the same time, confreres from the Provinces of Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia have begun to work in the Ukraine, Byelorussia, and Lithuania."<sup>6</sup>

Despite the impression of a "European demographic winter that is increasing each year," Cardinal Poupard finished his report by saying: "One of his French compatriots, a spectator engaged, as he was, in defining himself, Raymond Aron, had already in his *Mémoires* (1983) been estimating that Europeans were in the process of committing suicide through a low birthrate. The absence of descendants, regarded in the Bible as a punishment from God, has even become today in some countries an ideal, a refusal of children, being 'children free.' The desire for a child is not being decreed. This absence for a woman is the product of a hedonistic materialist culture that affects our Churches greatly. It is not an ideology, but rather a practical attitude in the face of existence, conceived as a fruit to be picked to enjoy egotistically, by one or two persons, of the same or different sex, without limits or hindrance, in an this-world horizon, where hope for eternal life is swallowed up in time without hope." At the low-point of this demographic winter, the Congregation would enter into this European dynamic by a leap of life.

We should realize, on the other hand, that the Congregation, born in the heart of 17<sup>th</sup>-century Europe, under the impulsion of Saint Vincent, was enlisted in the great movement of the expansion of the continent of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. She participated in the arrival of Christianity in South and North America, in Asia and in Africa by working in influential areas of the various countries that constituted the strength of the European continent. "We can point to the missionary expansion in the different areas of the African continent: the Italian and Dutch area in Abyssinia, the Portuguese area in Mozambique, the Belgian area — together with Polish and Dutch missionaries — in the Congo, the French area in North Africa, Madagascar and Cameroon, the Irish area in Nigeria.... The presence of the Congregation and its work in Asia and the Pacific Islands is due to a great degree to the missionary thrust of the European provinces, especially in the past. Spain, for

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<sup>6</sup> ROBERT P. MALONEY, C.M., "Letter to the members of the Congregation of the Mission, 1 January 1995," *Vincentiana*, 39:1 (1995) 3.

example, carried the mission to the Philippines and India.... The Dutch confreres, supported by missionaries from Italy, carried out mission work in Indonesia.... The Congregation owes its presence in Vietnam to the French and Dutch confreres. And the great mission in mainland China and Taiwan was begun by missionaries from various backgrounds: Italian, Portuguese, French, Dutch, Polish, Hungarian and Irish. The Irish missionaries also brought the Congregation to Australia. The French confreres missioned in the Middle East and established the Congregation in that part of the world, although our presence today is very uneven depending on the country: Lebanon, Syria, Israel, Egypt and Iran. The missionary activity in America followed the same path as in Africa and Asia. The European provinces worked diligently to collaborate in the evangelization of the new continent and establish the presence of the Congregation. In general terms it can be said that the majority of the European provinces sent confreres to do mission work in those places where the Congregation finds itself today.... Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Peru, Ecuador, Columbia and Central America.... Brazil received missionary aid from the Portuguese, Polish and Dutch confreres. The former Pacific province was consolidated thanks to missionaries from very different parts of Europe, among others the province of Barcelona. Central America got missionaries from Holland, while Costa Rica got them from Germany. The Spanish provinces missioned and established the Congregation in a huge area of Latin America: Cuba, Puerto Rico, Peru and Venezuela, not to mention their collaboration in other territories of the new continent.... The mission and the establishment of the Congregation in the United States is due to the combined efforts of missionaries from various European countries: Italians, Spaniards, and later Polish; the latter locating themselves in what is today the New England Province. French and Slovenian confreres attend to the mission in Canada.”<sup>7</sup>

The various changes occasioned by the two world wars, the changes in understanding the concept of mission, the economic development of the 1970s, together with worldwide demographic evolutions, have moved the European population from being about 25% of world population to only about 11% now, and no more than 7% in 2050. Europeans share only a weak destiny with other industrialized countries (with the exception of the United States, which continues to increase in population).<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, in these last years the Congregation has been able to participate in new missionary dynamics by joining in the international missions: Bolivia

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<sup>7</sup> J. IGNACIO FERNÁNDEZ MENDOZA, C.M., “The European Provinces of the C.M. and the Mission ‘Ad Gentes,’” *Vincentiana*, 44:1 (2000) 52-53.

<sup>8</sup> «Repeuplons l’Europe» STÉPHANE BASTANO, L’Expresso, in *Courrier International*, 22 January 2007.



CEVIM: Meeting of Young Priests

by France and Poland, the Solomon Islands by Poland, and Albania by Italy. There is also a continuation of its presence among Muslim populations: Italy helping Austria in Turkey, and France helping in Algeria and Iran. It is also open on the eastern side of Europe, with Polish missionaries in Greece. I should also mention the large-scale economic support from the European provinces of the Congregation toward provinces of different countries where the presence of the spirit of Saint Vincent de Paul is deployed.

On the question of the mission *ad gentes*, profound changes have taken place following the new understandings of mission since Vatican II, lived out as they are in dialogue among cultures concerning the new developments that are taking place. By way of illustration, I point to the welcome of new missionaries to the countries of Africa, Asia and South America working in mission teams from Europe, as also the welcome of structural changes, leading, for example, Belgium to become a region of Congo.

It is exactly here that lay people are emerging to add their contribution to the mission in the service of the poorest. New roads are built in new ways. The members of MISEVI (Lay Vincentian

Missionaries) have developed under the impulse of Spanish Vincentians and Daughters of Charity. They are now present in Spain, for the missions of Bolivia, Honduras and Mozambique; in Italy, for a mission to Congo; in Ireland for a mission to Ethiopia; and in France for missions in Mauritania and Israel. They are a new way of bringing forward together the Vincentian mission. Their International Statutes were published at the end of 2005 at the time of their General Assembly at the Berceau.<sup>9</sup>

### Our charism confronted by the challenges of Europe

Since cultures are more and more marked with a lay or non-clerical stamp, which moves the Church to the fringes of our societies, they place the citizens of Western Europe into agnosticism, and those of Eastern Europe into an attempt to imitate them, thereby weakening their dynamism. The great aggiornamento of the Catholic Church following the Council has contributed in its own way to the displacements to which we have pointed. Our Congregation would go through this crisis full tilt. Rethinking European models and the perception of the place of authority and the sacred would involve the departure of many priests, and the transference of its traditional missions (formation of the clergy and popular missions) into a context that seemed more complex and unattainable.

An article by Father Kevin Rafferty would show that the 20 European provinces, which in 1999 counted 1500 confreres divided into 248 communities, with a median age of 61,<sup>10</sup> had only 148 students (of whom 75 were in Slovakia and Poland). He concluded his reflection on the two missions proper to the C.M. that he set out to rethink. *Parish missions*: we should take care not to dissociate them from theological reflection on the communities of the Church. Spain has committed itself to develop renewed missions in their own way, led by Vincentians, Daughters of Charity, and Vincentian laity. But the area of *priestly formation* and the accompaniment of the students have not perhaps been diversified and have not been rethought. There have not been new types of formation or new types of assistance to priests to respond to the new situations of the diocesan clergy, especially the solitude and isolation in large pastoral settings.<sup>11</sup> Only one initiative of the Irish confreres could be pointed

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.misevi.org/asamblea2005>

<sup>10</sup> There were 1451 members in 227 communities, 157 candidates. "2004 Annual Statistics – Congregation of the Mission," *Vincentiana*, 49:1 (2005) 25-28.

<sup>11</sup> KEVIN RAFFERTY, C.M., "Vincentians in Europe 1999. A Time of Crisis," *Vincentiana*, 44:1 (2000) 23-39.

out: the Intercession for Priests,<sup>12</sup> which seeks to open a temporary accompaniment for priests going through loneliness and going through crises that weaken their ministry and sometimes even their vocation.

The *formation of the laity*: another case of our Congregation with its new Statutes has been developed here or there by the participation of certain confreres in formation programs in the context of a Catholic university or programs of diocesan formation. Only a few of us have been involved in this. Perhaps only a few initiatives have been brought to everyone's attention. We can, however, point out the original experience, now 30 years old, of the Vincentian Weeks held in Salamanca, Spain, which bring together annually some 300 participants, Vincentian laity, Daughters of Charity and Vincentians, to deepen themes of our spirituality. They have given rise to a printing house which continues to emphasize the patrimony bequeathed by our founders.<sup>13</sup>

It was in the new Constitutions coming out of the General Assembly of 1980 that a new way of living the charism was proposed. They dealt with Vincentian identity for today, translating the wish to respond to the signs of the times. The General Assembly of 2004 pursued this same situation by evaluating the way and orienting itself toward the future. The repercussion at the European level was expressed during the meeting of the Visitors in Rio in 1989. During that meeting, three of them laid the foundations for a second continent-wide conference of the Congregation, following in the footsteps of the confreres from Latin America who, since 1971, had been organized into a conference.

Confronting the centripetal dynamics proper to the European continent (multiple language, plurality of Christian traditions, different economic interests), the Conference of Visitors took time to draw up a structure for itself. It drew up statutes and chose to be called CEVIM (Conférence Européenne des Visiteurs de la Mission). It numbers the 19 European provinces, including also the Middle East. Its first choices were to develop some sessions for young confreres, beginning with the Paris meeting of 1990. In 2000, it organized sessions for formators. They greatly appreciated the session and noted, in their closing declaration: "the common identity that characterizes the Congregation."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> KEVIN SCALLON, C.M., "The Intercession for Priests: Ministering to Priests in the Charism of St. Vincent," *Vincentiana*, 41:1 (1997) 35-42.

<sup>13</sup> JOSÉ MARÍA SÁNCHEZ MALLO, C.M., "The Salamanca Vincentian Studies Weeks," *Vincentiana*, 44:1 (2000) 75-84.

<sup>14</sup> ARKADIUSZ ZAKRETA, C.M., "The European Conference of Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission - CEVIM," *Vincentiana* 47:3 (2003) 157-165.



More recently, in January 2007, it brought together Provincial Treasurers, to reflect on the management of the resources of the Mission throughout Europe. It continued this dynamic by a meeting of young missionaries, the establishment of an Internal Seminary in Western Europe, the opening of annual provincial retreats to confreres from other European provinces.

What direction should it take to make this three-fold face of the Vincentian charism allied with the various associations inspired by the same spirit of Saint Vincent de Paul? Father Christian Sens<sup>15</sup> proposed four directions: *the evangelization of the poor* (being careful to live it out in a movement of dialogue and proclamation with a renewed language that takes into account the hope of Christians) through the insertion of *concern for the defense of the poorest* (migrants, victims of violence) into *new proposals for formation, interreligious dialogue, and vocations*. We recognize here the three main lines of our spirituality: the place of God, service of the poor, and confidence in the future of creation. Confreres are already present in initiatives of proclamation of the faith among the migrants to our countries. They have created areas for proclamation adapted to persons from the cultures of Islam by the Justin de Jacobis Foundation in Austria, or they have accompanied catechumens from these cultures in France, particularly one confrere from the province of Paris. Although the attempt to renew popular missions has not had the great successes of the new dynamics in Spain, yet some traveling missions have been opened that bring together lay Vincentians, Daughters of Charity and Vincentians.

### **Deploying our charism in Europe in answer to the call of the Church**

We have to keep following the new trails that have been laid down. The Synod of the Churches of Europe to prepare for the year 2000 closed with an apostolic letter from Pope John Paul II. In it, he invited the churches of Europe to respond to the new evangelization by centering its exhortation in the context of the call of the Apostle to the seven churches in the Book of Revelation, as if to say that we must keep bringing the witness of unity to the heart of diversity while awaiting the return of the Lord. Encouraging each other to be creative amid our differences, to take account of hope: this is the backbone of the message.

Cardinal Tettamanzi, Archbishop of Genoa, did the same during his inauguration of the Synodal Assembly. "Christian realism which

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<sup>15</sup> CHRISTIAN SENS, C.M., "At the Dawn of the Third Millennium. Some Challenges for the Congregation of the Mission in Europe," *Vincentiana*, 44:1 (2000) 41-49.

ought to animate our discernment cannot fail to open itself up to a radical optimism. It is the optimism which is born of faith in the presence of the Lord Jesus who has not abandoned the Church and humanity, and who continues to send his Spirit from the four corners of the earth with the aim of touching Europe and transforming it in its hidden depths. This is what continually happened throughout two thousand years of history. And numerous are the signs of this active and vivifying presence of the Spirit.”<sup>16</sup>

The recent synod of the Churches of Europe pointed out that they must also have “concrete actions to help the poor of Europe, no matter the reason for their poverty. This implies an even greater solidarity toward the poorest countries of our continent. At the same time, we cannot forget the poor in other parts of the world. In other words, we have to be more generous than we are today. We have to remind ourselves strongly that Europe must not turn in on itself.” It continued by insisting on the importance of dialogue with Islam, sensitivity on everyone’s part to questions of poverty, to the formation of the laity and to the urgency of the challenge of vocations.

The European provinces of the Congregation already are offering some works that bring to life our own proper charism, whether the intuitions of our recent General Assembly, or the paths undertaken by CEVIM.

Before entering into the question of the proper area of specific activities, where our presence and our care should be focused, we should return to that which characterizes the heart of our charism: “Love and reverence towards the Father, compassionate and effective love for the poor, and docility to divine providence” (C 6).

### ***“Love and reverence towards the Father”***

In a Europe searching out its way concerning its religious heritage, to remark again the triple intuition of the Constitutions leads us to probe more deeply the demand for the transmission of the faith that could be directly compromised. We should not forget to restore the meaning of the call coming to us. Using the terminology of the “French School” of spirituality, Saint Vincent in his correspondence taught that the psychology of Jesus was aligned in two directions: “Reverence toward his Father and charity toward mankind.”<sup>17</sup> He also placed “devotion” as a ready love, full of desire

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<sup>16</sup> JEAN LANDOUSIES, C.M., “Jesus Christ, Alive in His Church, a Source of Hope for Europe, Reflections about the Special Assembly for Europe of the Synod of Bishops,” *Vincentiana*, 44:1 (2000) 13-22.

<sup>17</sup> Letter of Saint Vincent to a Priest of the Mission, Coste VI, letter 2334.

and action. It is a matter, then, of placing Christian faith once more at the heart of our concerns.

If we give our attention to the suggestions of Bishop Koch for reanimating fundamental human values, we perceive the richness of the Vincentian approach for putting in place the first dimension, "love and reverence toward the Father." He suggested that "... in the lived relationship with God, the best antidote against the danger that threatens to absolutize and 'idolize' finite values... against the 'Twilight of the gods,' is to hold for the divine principle... As a result, the proclamation of a divine reality without price is the only thing that can effectively protect the dignity of the human person; this has never been well protected save in relationship with God. Stated in this way, the human principle acts against merely using a human being and his or her dignity. Those rooted in God, conscious of their unique dignity, are at the same time brought to rely on each other to form a community. They abandon those commercial relationships to which society attaches such a high price and turn rather to authentic social relationships. In this way, the social principle is laid down over against individualism without solidarity."<sup>18</sup>

As the article cited above reminded us, referring to the Synod of Europe, we have to recall that "it is therefore urgent that every Christian, every Christian community, rediscover a missionary spirit to announce the kerygma with the strength that the Spirit already grants to the work. At the same time, we have to seek out new methods to permit us to encounter man where he actually comes into being and expresses himself today. The proclamation of the Gospel is a task that concerns all Christians. This demands authentically believing communities and individuals. Human witnessing represents an absolute necessity. To evangelize, one must be able to spot the lacks in evangelizers and in communities at the level of faith and its expression, as if it were faith founded more on custom than on conviction, a routine religious practice, or a lack of interest in present-day cultural challenges. In a world that barely accepts abstract teachings, the Gospel is often proclaimed with more authenticity and impact only by the individual and communitarian witness of authentic believers, through their presence in daily life and in listening."

We are reminded to pay special attention to the place of formation to help in this task. The conclusions of the session of the formators of our own candidates, the one that recognized our common identity, open the way to more collaborative work of teaching to be practiced by our Congregation in Europe to face the

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<sup>18</sup> KURT KOCH, *Chrétiens en Europe* [Fribourg], Ed. Saint-Augustin, 2004, pp. 116-121.

demands of the society in which we are evolving. CEVIM is solidifying the International Internal Seminary through the drawing up of its Statutes, and it will finish its work in July at the time of its next meeting. The ambitious object of a common European formation for the candidates of the Mission is taking its baby steps.

### ***“Compassionate and effective love for the poor”***

Our European societies are confronted with the birth of new poverty of all sorts: unemployment, unstable working conditions, weakening of systems of social protection, uncertain housing, violence within families, breakdown of family life, mistreatment of children, migration of populations in search of a better future. Our compassionate love is translated into action through walking with those in great difficulty, and this supposes an ongoing formation that is more focused and specialized. We maintain the care for a continuing bond with these new kinds of poverty that bring about answers to new situations. As regards solidarity with migrants, we should take note especially of the support for South American migrants in Spain: “Manos Abiertas” in Zaragoza.<sup>19</sup> Confreres are helping drug addicts in Italy, or Traveling People in Ireland. In France, others have been developing services for people involved in prostitution, through partnership groups; that is, working with men and women in prostitution as their partners in service groups.

In the area of interreligious dialogue, we can point to several initiatives that still remain the choice of the provinces, and which did not develop out of CEVIM. For example, the presence of the missionaries to live out the “dialogue of life” in countries with an Islamic culture, in North Africa, Turkey and Iran. The first meeting of all of them took place in Lebanon in 2001, and it led them to evaluate and enrich long-term contacts that are still developing between the members of the Vincentian Family and these populations. In Europe, our Austrian brothers, through the service of the Justin de Jacobis Foundation, are developing ways adapted for those of Islamic cultures interested in Christianity.

### **“Docility to Divine Providence”**

This dimension lays down a close bond between our inventiveness and its source, the heart of God. Monsieur Vincent only became Saint Vincent de Paul by listening constantly to Providence, inviting others not to tread on its heels. At the time of the last

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<sup>19</sup> JULIÁN ARANA, C.M. - VISITACIÓN SOLA, D.C., “Pastoral Service of ‘Open Hands’: Chaplaincy for Immigrants,” *Vincentiana*, 48:2 (2004) 98-106.

General Assembly, CEVIM proposed to “promote the vocational dimension in all our apostolic activities; promote in the European Provinces a common style in evangelization and in charitable activities; promote collaboration with the Vincentian Family and other organizations which work in Brussels in order to participate in the European Union’s social solidarity projects; promote meetings for study and exchange of views for confreres from the various European Provinces, in order to deal with the phenomenon of immigration and Islam in Europe from a common Vincentian perspective.” The elements not mentioned are already being worked on.

In the context of the vocational crisis, it is still necessary to work through this domain. Some provinces have proposed vocational discernment for young women and young men in a program of annual meetings and short-term participation in the missions of local communities. Some experiences, such as those of “young Europeans,” a year of discernment and missionary service established by the Jesuits, do not yet have an equivalent in the Congregation in Europe.

On the question of working on common horizons, let us note that the interprovincial councils of France, and recently also those in Italy, have brought out their concern for a better programming of common missionary objectives in view of an apostolate overly challenged both in personnel and in economic and pastoral resources. Has the time finally come to respond to the question of the representation of the Congregation at the European Community? This was broached at the time of the last CEVIM meeting in Istanbul, and the next session, which will close the Meeting of the Visitors of the Congregation in Mexico City will give an answer.

I will conclude these reflections on our Vincentian presence in Europe by the vibrant appeal launched by the last General Assembly. “Congregation of the Mission, be who you are! Do not yield to mediocrity! Fan into a flame the fire within! Like St. Vincent, walk passionately in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, Evangelizer of the poor. Give new life to your charism, the gift that the Holy Spirit has entrusted to you. Work tirelessly to go beyond the boundaries of your mission! Full of conviction, give witness to and spread the vitality of your vocation!”<sup>20</sup>

(Translation: DANIEL FRANKLIN PILARIO, C.M.)

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<sup>20</sup> “Our Vincentian Identity Today in Light of the Constitutions: Evaluation and Challenges,” *Vincentiana*, 48:4-5 (2004) 355-364; citation, p. 356.