

FEATURE:

The Vincentian Missions

Presentation

by Julio Suescun Olcoz, C.M.

Editor of "Vincentiana"

Read thus, in the plural, the title of this issue of *Vincentiana* could be deceiving. It is not a question of describing, nor of summarizing or presenting in some more significant areas, the evangelizing activity of the Congregation in various parts of the world. Rather the issue's authors agreed to reflect on the very meaning of the mission today, as an expression of fidelity to following Christ, Evangelizer of the poor, in conformity with the thought and action of Vincent de Paul.

From the west, and more concretely, Europe, older persons feel inclined to recall with nostalgia the spirit of generosity, not exempt from a certain dose of adventure and exoticism, with which the missions stimulated and supported our own vocation in the Congregation. To go to the missions was a gesture of generosity for the one who asked, some said, a kind of second vocation. The missionaries certainly told us of the adventures, the sacrifices, the poverty of the peoples on the mission and the urgency of their salvation, and succeeded in awakening, in childlike and youthful spirits, a longing to leave everything to go to the missions.

Today, the mass media have brought the most distant villages close; far-off events are experienced with immediate proximity; different cultures coexist in common spaces. The facility of communication means that almost everything is familiar to us and often experienced; there is hardly any place for adventure; what we call adventure today is like a reality show, which is prepared more for entertainment than for an authentic life experience.

The Church's own reflection was, already in the second half of the last century, that the missions ceased being the adventurous dream of a few generous Christians, who left their home and people to go evangelize distant peoples, in order to turn into the natural expression of living and acting as Christians in the Church. Pius XII, in *Fidei Donum*, already said that *although formerly "the life of the Church in its visible aspects showed its vigor chiefly in the older parts of Europe from which it began to spread out to the shores that may be called the periphery of the world, now however there is a kind of mutual exchange of life and strength among all the members of the Mystical Body of Christ"* (36). This was confirmed by Paul VI, who presented evangelization as *the grace and vocation proper to the Church (Evangelii Nuntiandi 14)*. The mission is like breathing for the Church, without it she cannot live. This, which has always been thus, is expressed today with particular charity. The *woe to me if I do not preach it [the Gospel]!* of Saint Paul (1 Cor 9:16) is today the Church's common cry. And the Church, considered in some places on earth, until recently, as mission territory, where a portion of the pagan world needed to be evangelized, today experiences, with determination renewed by the Spirit, its missionary awareness and sends its sons and daughters to participate in the noble common task of evangelizing the entire world.

How has the evangelizing urgency been lived in the history of the Church? How did Saint Vincent live it? What will be today the normal expressions of living this evangelizing urgency in the Church and in the Congregation?

In the Superior General's letter, the letter that has become traditional in the month of October each year and which we call "Mission Appeal," are listed the principal urgencies that the Church and the Congregation perceive in the various places of the world. Reading this issue of *Vincentiana* might help us, perhaps, to specify and concretize our response.

(Translation: ANN MARY DOUGHERTY, D.C.)