

FEATURE

Political Charity

Presentation

by Julio Suescun Olcoz, C.M.

Editor of "Vincentiana"

From 1-15 July 2007, the 1st Joint Meeting of CCC and APRF was held in Prigen (Indonesia). The CCC is the Commission of Vincentian Charism and Culture in the Asia-Pacific region that initiated in 2003. The chairman chosen by the Visitors of Asia-Pacific is Father Armada Riyanto, C.M. The APRF is the Asia-Pacific Regional Formators, a gathering of the formators founded by the Asia-Pacific Visitors in 1994. There were 54 Vincentian participants the first week; whereas the second week was particularly for CM formators. As the chronicler notes, for the first time there were participants from all the different countries in the Asia-Pacific region: North and South India, Vietnam, Thailand, Philippines, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Solomon Islands, Australia, and Indonesia. Some members of the Vincentian Family in Indonesia also participated. The topic was: Political Charity and Vincentian Formation. The readers may find abundant information about this meeting on <http://cmglobal.org>.

Vincentiana wants to collect some of the reflections from that meeting in this issue, for two principal motives: first of all, the importance of the topic itself, and secondly, the origin of the reflections.

From the time Saint Vincent wrote, in the *Regulations for the Charity of Women* (Châtillon-les-Dombes), that the poor suffered *more through a lack of organized assistance than from lack of charitable persons* (CCD 13b, 8), Vincentian reflection has not ceased turning to this successful intuition. When the Congregation of the Mission, which was destined to evangelize the poor, was born, it

heard from the lips of its founder that to preach the gospel is *to do what was foretold and prefigured by the prophets to make the gospel effective*. Its members could not be content with preaching from pulpits, but had to *preach by words and by works*, because that is what Our Lord practiced and that is what we have to practice (cf. SV XII, 84, 88).

Later, and in union with the whole Vincentian Family, the Congregation of the Mission tried to make the gospel effective with efficacious works of charity in order to respond to the authentic needs of the poor. It even committed itself to a long campaign to promote Systemic Change. These works demonstrate the genuineness of *God's love poured into our hearts by the Spirit who has been given us* (Rom 5:5). Our Christian and missionary vocation is animated by this Spirit of love and is lived as an expression of a love that liberates and dignifies the poor. We were urged to it by John Paul II who called on the missionaries gathered together in Assembly in 1986: *Search out, more than ever, with boldness, humility and skill, the causes of poverty and encourage short and long term solutions; adaptable and effective concrete solutions. By doing so, you will work for the credibility of the Gospel and of the Church* (Discourse to the 1986 General Assembly). And in 1997, to the Daughters of Charity, he said: *Indeed, love of the poor involves respect for their cultures, which demonstrates the soul of their human communities, as well as the recognition and acceptance of the values which constitute their wealth. Fraternal relations with everyone will develop from this attitude* (Letter to the Mother General at the 1997 General Assembly). Benedict XVI, in his first encyclical, *God is love*, mentioning Saint Vincent and Saint Louise among the saints who exercised charity in an exemplary way, spoke of *social charity for all people* (n. 40).

This issue of *Vincentiana* includes part of the reflection that is being done on the topic in a geographical zone of the world where the Congregation of the Mission is living out the response to its vocation to evangelize the poor with extraordinary strength and enthusiasm. Surely it would do us all well to reflect with these, our Asia-Pacific brothers, about a burning topic in our world today and that they live out with particular intensity. In the midst of the religions and cultures of the peoples they evangelize, they need to reread Saint Vincent in the context in which they live and in which they wish to interpret their Vincentian fidelity. There is not much meaning in asking what Saint Vincent would have done in this situation, because it is a hypothesis that will never be realized. But they are very right when they ask what Vincentians today would do in light of what Saint Vincent did in his time.

The Superior General, Father Gregory Gay, during his visit to Indonesia, spoke about political charity. He thinks that our candidates should not remain indifferent toward what is happening in contemporary society. They should be grounded in their own socio-political situation, be formed to analyze it critically, so that they can respond to its challenges more effectively. The term “political charity” does not appear in sociological and political science dictionaries. But, in the Vincentian tradition, charity can only exist “politically,” that is, in concrete works and social structures.

Finally *Vincentiana* carries on the memory of the Common Rules by reflecting, on this 350th anniversary of their presentation, on some of the values they indicated.

Translation: Sister ANN MARY DOUGHERTY, D.C.



Participants in the gathering at Prigen