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## Actualizing "The Mission" Today

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# THE MISSION

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Superior General*

"Congregation of the Mission" is our name. Popular usage, "reflecting Divine Providence," gave it to us, St. Vincent tell us.[fo1] The name makes our vocation clear: we are missionaries.

It is important to note from the start that our name is not "Congregation of the Missions." In other words, "the mission" is not to be identified with "the popular missions." St. Vincent, while always emphasizing the place of the popular missions,[fo2] makes it very clear that "the mission" can be carried out in a variety of other ways.[fo3]

Basically, Vincent was convinced that the Company is called, on its deepest level, to continue the mission of Jesus. Christ, the Evangelizer of the Poor, was, for him, the foundation for who we are, what we do, and how we do it. The Lord's words, "he sent me to preach the good news to the poor,"[fo4] were repeatedly on Vincent's lips.

*Are we not then most happy to belong to the Mission, which has for its end the very thing that induced God to become man? And if a missionary were questioned, would it not be a great honor for him to be able to say with the Lord: "He sent me to preach the good news to the poor. I am here in this world to catechize, instruct, confess, and help the poor."[fo5]*

He tells the Company in another place: "How happy will they be who can say at the hour of their death these beautiful words of Our Lord: `God sent me to preach the good news to the poor!'"[fo6]

Recently, I wrote at some length about "Being a Missionary Today." [fo7] In this article, I want to focus on the *mission itself today*. I will proceed in three steps: 1) its characteristics, 2) some contemporary ways of actualizing it, 3) some consequences in the life of the missionary.

## I. Characteristics of "The Mission"

I offer here four characteristics, though I am very conscious that there are many others. I choose these four not only because they are fundamental historically, but also because they seem to me particularly urgent in our present-day context.

### 1. *It is mobile.*

Hardly anything could be clearer in the New Testament. Jesus comes from the Father and returns to the Father,[fo8] the source of all mission. He engages in an itinerant ministry. He gives his followers a mandate: "Go into the whole world and preach the gospel to every creature." [fo9] Mission is part of the very being of Jesus himself and of the being of the Church.

St. Vincent is eloquent on the need for missionary mobility: "Let us imagine that He says to us: `Go forth, missionaries, go forth. What, are you still here? Look at the poor souls who are awaiting you, whose salvation perhaps depends upon your preaching and catechesis!'"[fo10] He holds up before the eyes of the Company the great missionaries of other communities who had gone to the Indies, to Japan, to Canada "to complete the work which Jesus Christ began on earth and never abandoned from the moment he was called." [fo11]

He was, of course, very aware that some things would hold the missionaries back, particularly the desire to have material goods, pleasure, honor.[fo12] For that reason he saw the vows as a liberating force in the life of the missionary. Those who committed their whole lives to the service of the poor in chastity, poverty, and obedience were truly free! They were mobile!

*Those who become detached from the desire for worldly goods, from the longing for pleasure, and from their own will become children of God. They enjoy perfect freedom. For it is only in the love of God that real freedom is found. They are people who are free, my brothers, who know no law, who fly, who go left and right, who fly still more. No one can hold them back. They are never slaves of the devil nor of their own passions. O, how happy is the freedom of the children of God! [fo13]*

## 2. *It is global.*

As Karl Rahner often pointed out, it is only in the 20th century that Catholicism has truly become a "world-Church".[fo14] Living here in Rome I experience this dramatically, since we have rapid communication with almost all of the provinces throughout the world. One sees striking differences and varied "faces" in the worldwide Congregation; e.g., the diminishing number of vocations to the priesthood in Western Europe and the United States; the increasing number of vocations in Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America. At the same time, with the opening of new missions in remote places like Tanzania, the Solomon Islands, Albania, the Altiplano of Bolivia, Mozambique, China, Charkib in the Ukraine, and Siberia, the Congregation is becoming even more international.

Whereas in the period immediately after Vatican II there was significant emphasis on *provincial* identity, government, and norms, today there is a revitalized awareness within the Congregation of our global missionary nature. This is very much the way St. Vincent envisioned the Congregation. In an era when travel was difficult and most people died within a few miles of their birthplace, he sent missionaries to Poland, Italy, Algeria, Madagascar, Ireland, Scotland, the Hebrides, and the Orkneys. He himself in his old age longed to set out for the Indies.[fo15]

## 3. *It is evangelizing.*

The core of our mission is evangelization, which, in the Catholic tradition, has always been a broad, inclusive concept.[fo16] As Paul VI pointed out: "Evangelization is a complex process made up of varied elements: the renewal of humanity, witness, explicit proclamation, inner adherence, entry into the community, acceptance of signs, apostolic initiative. These

elements may appear to be contradictory, indeed mutually exclusive. In fact, they are complementary and mutually enriching. Each one must always be seen in relationship with the others."[fo17]

St. Vincent told us that we must first do and then teach. Evangelization, for him, involves not just preaching but action too. Again and again, therefore, he spoke of evangelization by "word and work." He calls both the Vincentians and Daughters of Charity to serve the poor "spiritually and corporally." When speaking to the members of the Congregation, he warned us:[fo18]

*If there are any among us who think they are in the Congregation of the Mission to preach the good news to the poor but not to comfort them, to supply their spiritual but not their temporal wants, I reply that we ought to assist them and have them assisted in every way, by ourselves and by others... To do this is to preach the gospel by words and by works.*

In a similar way, but coming from the other direction, he tells the Daughters of Charity again and again that their works must be accompanied by words of faith.[fo19]

First, do. Then, teach. That is St. Vincent's rule for "effective" evangelization. In other words, St. Vincent sees human promotion and preaching as complementary to one another, and as integral to the evangelization process.

In light of St. Vincent's teaching, our evangelization will be fully alive when we proclaim the good news:

- a. through the language of works:[fo20] performing the works of justice and mercy which are a sign that the kingdom of God is really alive among us: feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, helping to find the causes of their hunger and thirst and the ways of alleviating it;
- b. through the language of words: announcing with deep conviction the Lord's presence, his love, his offer of forgiveness to all;
- c. through the language of relationships: being *with* the poor, working *with* them, forming a community that shows the Lord's love for all.

4. *It involves organizing and forming others in the service of the poor.*

St. Vincent was adamant about this. The missionaries were to establish the Confraternities of Charity wherever they went.[fo21] Few saints are as concrete as Vincent de Paul. He realized that effective evangelization of the poor would require organization. To accomplish this end, Vincent founded two communities and formed numerous lay groups.

He brought the same organizational skills to the formation of the clergy, which St. Vincent depicted sometimes as "almost equal"[fo22] and sometimes as "equal"[fo23] to that of the mission. He felt that the poor would be served well only if there were good priests to minister to them, and, to that end, he organized retreats for ordinands and priests, as well as the Tuesday Conferences, besides founding 20 seminaries.

Nor he did not stop there. He marshalled all of the resources he could find in the service of the poor: clergy and lay, young and old, men and women, the rich and the poor themselves. The seeds of his organizational gifts continued to spread even after his death.

A recent study[fo24] points out that over 165 groups share in the Vincentian charism. At present there are 250,000 members of AIC (Ladies of Charity), 900,000 members of the Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul, 200,000 members of various Vincentian Marian Youth groups, with 46,000 in Spain alone and 7,000 in Mexico.

## II. Actualizing the Mission today

The mission of every group must be "actualized" in every era;[fo25] otherwise, the group remains static, and eventually it withers and dies.[fo26]

Changing circumstances in society make it necessary for the Church to adjust its missionary vision and practices continually. Recent popes, particularly Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio*, have reminded us of the new challenges that face those engaged in an evangelizing mission. They speak of:

- the "new areopagi";[fo27] that is, new sectors in which the gospel must be proclaimed – such as the world of communication, science, and international relations – particularly as the Church seeks to promote peace, human development, and the liberation of peoples.[fo28]
- new means of communication which are available to the evangelizer in catechizing, preaching, and teaching, but which also form part of a new "information culture" which is itself badly in need of evangelization.[fo29]
- new forms of poverty, different from those of other eras, which challenge missionaries as they attempt to give flesh to the Church's preferential option for the poor.[fo30]
- a new evangelization, new in its ardor, its methods, and its expression.[fo31]

St. Vincent himself provides us with the key for actualizing our own mission. In fact, he repeats it again and again: *he sent me to preach the good news to the poor.*[fo32] Our Constitutions state the same foundational principle with utter clarity: "The purpose of the Congregation is to follow Christ, the Evangelizer of the Poor." [fo33] Whatever we do must be done in this light. All actualizations, directly or indirectly, should be expressions of that basic constitutional statement.

Article 12 of our Constitutions, the Lines of Action of the General Assembly of 1986, and

the document, "The Visitors in Service of the Mission" (n. 16), propose to us a very demanding pastoral methodology as we preach the good news to the poor:

- to work within the world of the poor, not just with isolated persons (Lines of Action, 4 and 11);
- to work on the level of structures, not just in responding to particular situations (Lines of Action, 6 and 11);
- to work to confront injustice, not just to meet the needs of individual poor people (Lines of Action, 4 and 11);
- to work with groups (small communities), so that the poor person is a subject, and not merely an object, of evangelization (Lines of Action, 5 and 11).[fo34]

Let me reflect briefly upon some of the principal contemporary ways of actualizing the mission.

### 1. *Giving popular missions*

Even if, as pointed out above, it is important to avoid the mistake of identifying "the mission" with "the missions," nonetheless St. Vincent regarded the work of the missions as "the primary and most important of our ministries to people." [fo35] Today, in some countries, popular missions have less appeal, and apparently less efficacy, than in former times. In much of the world, however, they are still an effective evangelizing tool. It is therefore important that this work be renewed in the Congregation. There have already been some very creative efforts in this regard within the worldwide Congregation. [fo36] These renewed missions have several distinctive characteristics:

- a) a time of significant preparation (the pre-mission),
- b) the organization and training of a mission team, often involving a large number of priests, deacons, sisters, brothers, and lay men and women,
- c) an extended time period within the area of the mission (the time varies),
- d) catechesis and reflection on the word of God within small groups,
- e) involvement of the *local* clergy and laity in the mission itself,
- f) organization of works of charity within the mission area,
- g) follow-up.

### 2. *Formation of the clergy*

St. Vincent was utterly clear in seeing this as part of our mission. "At the beginning," he told the confreres on December 6, 1658, "the Company was occupied only with itself and the poor, but in the fullness of time he called us to contribute to the making of good priests..." [fo37]

In recent years, with changing circumstances and the diminishing number of vocations in Western Europe and the United States, this work has suffered considerably. Nonetheless, there are still many possibilities for taking part in it:

- a) ministering in diocesan seminaries in one's own country,
- b) forming "national" teams to staff diocesan seminaries in other countries,
- c) forming "international" teams to staff diocesan seminaries in other countries,
- d) providing spiritual directors and confessors for seminaries or for dioceses,
- e) giving retreats for seminarians and for priests,
- f) offering programs of ongoing formation for priests.
- g) offering hospitality

### 3. *Engaging in foreign missions*

There are few topics on which St. Vincent was more eloquent. He told the members of the Congregation of the Mission: "Let us ask God to give the Company this spirit, this heart, this heart which will make us go everywhere, this heart of the Son of God, the heart of Our Lord, the heart of Our Lord, the heart of Our Lord..."[fo38]

Today, within the Congregation, many provinces sponsor a foreign mission or share that responsibility with other provinces.[fo39] There has also been a resurgence of interest in foreign missions, with many confreres volunteering to take part in the new international missions.

One of the major challenges in the missions *Ad Gentes* today is enculturation, which the Daughters of Charity have chosen as the theme of their next General Assembly. Missionaries must seek ways to foster fuller enculturation of the gospel, so that Christianity and local cultures interact with one another at a deeper level, both enriching and purifying each other. This will demand of the missionary the ability to listen and dialogue as he attempts to discern the values resident within various cultures, as well as those cultural tendencies that work against the integral promotion of the human person.

Enculturation will also raise significant questions within our own formation programs. In our foreign missions, where frequently there are numerous vocations, those responsible for formation must, in dialogue with mature Christians within the local culture, concretize how simplicity, humility, gentleness, self-sacrifice, and zeal are expressed in that culture. Formation programs must also come to grips with the ways in which our vows can be presented and lived out within local cultures.

### 4. *Ministering to the Daughters of Charity*

St. Vincent was adamant that this was part of our mission:

*Did not the Son of God come to preach the gospel to the poor, to ordain priests, etc.? Yes. Did he not consent to have women associated with him? Yes. Did he not guide them toward perfection and toward helping the poor? Yes. If then Our Lord, who did all things for our instruction, did that, shall we not think that we are doing what is right by following him?*

The Congregation exercises this ministry especially by providing good Provincial Directors and spiritual directors[fo40] for the Daughters of Charity. We are also frequently

called upon to provide preachers for their retreats. Since the Daughters of Charity are a huge force in the service of the most abandoned, our ministry to them can bear significant fruit in the lives of the poor. Helping in the formation of the Daughters of Charity (and other groups that serve the most abandoned), while an indirect service of the poor, can be a very effective way of multiplying and enriching the energies of those who serve directly the spiritual and corporal needs of the poor.

5. *Organizing groups, especially the young, to serve the poor.*

As mentioned above, St. Vincent had wonderful skills as an organizer. I urge the Congregation to organize as he did.

Ministry to the young is extremely important today. They are the Church of the future. Several recent studies point out that young people seek:[fo41]

- explicit religious goals
- intense community life and solidarity
- explicit and worldwide service to the most needy.

I want to encourage members of the Congregation of the Mission throughout the world to gather young people together in order to share our Vincentian mission in the service of the poor. This can take the form of Vincentian Marian Youth groups, or other forms, depending on the local culture and its possibilities, but I urge all to make this one of the contemporary actualizations of the mission. Just as "the charities" spread throughout France in St. Vincent's time, let Vincentian youth groups of various kinds flourish where the members of the Congregation of the Mission and the Company of the Daughters of Charity serve.

Likewise, we should be among the first to organize local units of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and the International Association of Charity (AIC) wherever we may be, and to offer them the formation and spiritual accompaniment they so often eagerly seek from us.

6. *Organizing basic christian communities among the poor*

St. Vincent recognized the importance of communities of faith. For the various groups that he founded, he was careful to provide a rule, a way of life that under girded their works.

Today, as has been evident since the time of *Evangelii Nuntiandi*,[fo42] and even before,[fo43] basic christian communities have a special place in the evangelizing activity of the Church. They are the beneficiaries of evangelization and, at the same time, evangelizers themselves. Such communities can be a primary locus for hearing and reflecting on the word of God as well as for organizing the means of practical charity that will be of help in confronting the real needs of the poor.

7. *Missionary parishes – some questions*



I trust that the reader will forgive the Superior General's folly in raising significant questions about a work in which so many confreres are engaged.

I have no doubt that there are, within the Congregation, genuinely missionary parishes, which are truly an actualization of "the mission." Nonetheless, Statute 10 lays down a number of conditions for verifying whether parishes are really a manifestation of our mission: a) that the apostolate which we exercise there is in accordance with the purpose and nature of our institute, b) that the small number of pastors in the area requires our presence, c) that the parish consists, for the most part, of the really poor, or, d) that it is attached to a seminary where the confreres give pastoral formation.

A recent study in the United States makes this observation:

*The increasingly widespread insertion of members of religious orders into diocesan and parochial positions, to the point where such commitments take precedence over involvements in the lives of their congregations, is a growing phenomenon in the United States. This trend, which is known as parochial assimilation, has had a dramatic effect on most religious orders.... It easily can lead to a compromise of the prophetic role of members of religious life.[fo44]*

This phenomenon is not restricted to the United States. Our most recent statistics note that 1074 confreres are engaged in parish ministry, a very high percentage (31%) of our total membership. In comparison, the number of Vincentians involved in such foundational works of the community as popular missions and seminaries is small.

This leads me to ask whether it is legitimate for the Congregation of the Mission to be so heavily engaged in parish ministry and whether or not a significant number of our parishes actually do meet the criteria set out in Statute 10.

Let me suggest the following characteristics as a basis for evaluating whether a parish is truly "Vincentian" and "missionary:"

- a. it is among the really poor;
- b. the diocesan clergy lack the resources to staff it;
- c. our commitment there is temporally limited (hopefully, by a clear contract);
- d. we have definite missionary goals to be realized within that time frame;
- e. among these is the preparation of ongoing pastoral care in the future, particularly through training leaders in various ministries;
- f. organized works of practical charity are functioning in the parish in the service of the needy;
- g. Vincentian lay groups are being formed (Vincentian Marian Youth Groups, Society of

- St. Vincent de Paul, AIC, the Miraculous Medal Association, etc.);
- h. systematic instruction on the social teaching of the Church is offered;
  - i. the "style" of ministry is simple and humble;
  - j. it is an *evangelizing* parish, with strong emphasis on the word of God.

### **III. Implications for the Missionary**

Basically, St. Vincent says that our mission is the same as that of Jesus, who "described himself as the Evangelizer of the Poor." [fo45] This involves a whole spirituality in which the evangelizer himself is first evangelized. [fo46] In the introduction to the Common Rules he states: "My idea was that those who are called to continue Christ's mission, which is mainly preaching the good news to the poor, should see things from his point of view and want what he wanted. They should have the same spirit that he had, and follow in his footsteps." [fo47] In other words, he wants us to have Christ's mind and heart.

In one of his letters, St. Vincent writes that Jesus' mind and heart are caught up in two all-consuming directions, "his filial love for the Father and his charity toward the neighbor." [fo48] I was very struck recently as I read a contemporary Christological study. The authors stated: "We have seen that Jesus' relation with his Father was the center of his being. Nothing else competed for his allegiance. The closest thing to a rival for his love of God was his concern to help his fellow human beings, especially those who were suffering." [fo49] This is precisely St. Vincent's insight into the gospel. Let me suggest that these must be the all-consuming directions in the life of the missionary.

#### 1. *A filial relationship with God*

"Let us give ourselves to God," St. Vincent says repeatedly to the Vincentians, as well as to the Daughters of Charity. [fo50] He has deep confidence in a loving God, into whose hands he can place himself and his works. The journal written by Jean Gicquel recounts how Vincent told Frs. Alméras, Berthe, and Gicquel, on June 7, 1660, just four months before his death: "To be consumed for God, to have no goods nor power except for the purpose of consuming them for God. That is what Our Savior did himself, who was consumed for love of his Father." [fo51]

St. Vincent wanted love for God to be all-embracing. He writes to Pierre Escart: "... I greatly hope we may set about stripping ourselves entirely of affection for anything that is not God, be attached to things only for God and according to God, and that we may seek and establish His kingdom first of all in ourselves, and then in others. That is what I entreat you to ask of Him for me...." [fo52]

The missionary's filial relationship with God shows itself in two ways especially:

a. *devotion to providence*

For St. Vincent, God loves us deeply as a Father and as a Mother.[fo53] He exercises a continual providence in our lives. In a letter to Bernard Codoing, Vincent emphasizes the need to abandon ourselves to God's action in our lives: "The rest will come in its time. Grace has its moments. Let us abandon ourselves to the providence of God and be very careful not to run ahead of it. If it pleases God to give me some consolation in our vocation it is this. That I think, so it seems to me, that we have tried to follow his great providence in everything...."[fo54] Likewise he writes to Saint Louise de Marillac: "My God, my daughter, what great hidden treasures there are in holy Providence and how marvelously Our Lord is honored by those who follow it and do not kick against it!"[fo55]

In the life of the missionary, trust in providence shows itself in the ability to see beyond particular events to a larger picture, in patient waiting, in perseverance. But providence is also honored, as St. Vincent pointed out,[fo56] by using the means that God places at our disposal for accomplishing his goals. If a missionary is tempted to interpret St. Vincent's teaching on providence too passively, he might recall the founder's words to Edme Jolly:[fo57] "You are one of the few men who honor the Providence of God very much by the preparation of remedies against foreseen evils. I thank you very humbly for this and pray that Our Lord will continue to enlighten you more and more so that such enlightenment may spread through the Company. He tells Marc Coglée in 1652, that he likes to follow the maxim "that all licit and possible means should be used for the glory of God, as if God were not supposed to help us, provided we expect everything from his divine providence, as though we had no human means."[fo58]

b. *faithful prayer*

St. Vincent also calls his followers to stand constantly before God in prayer. Prayer, for Vincent, is the source of all good that the missionaries do: "Give me a man of prayer and he will be capable of everything."[fo59] Vincent recognized that Jesus, in the midst of his missionary activity, is always united with his Father,[fo60] who is the author of all the good that Jesus does.[fo61] Jesus constantly seeks his will.

In that light, St. Vincent tells the Daughters of Charity, "... Our Lord was, above all, a man of prayer."[fo62] In his Rule for the missionaries, he states: "Although we cannot perfectly imitate Christ our Lord who spent whole nights in prayer to God in addition to his daily meditations, nevertheless we will do so as far as we are able."[fo63]

Vincent is utterly convinced of the importance of the union of action and contemplation that he sees in Christ. He tells his followers that vocational stability and the on-going vitality of their works depends on prayer.[fo64] The missionary spirit therefore involves, in the words of the Constitutions and after the example of St. Vincent himself, being "a contemplative in action and an apostle in prayer." [fo65] For St. Vincent, this is the only path to apostolic effectiveness: "Let us give ourselves fully to the practice of prayer, since through it all good comes to us. If we

persevere in our vocation, it is thanks to prayer. If we succeed in our work, it is thanks to prayer. If we do not fall into sin, it is thanks to prayer. If we remain in charity, if we are saved, all that is thanks to God and thanks to prayer."[fo66]

## 2. *His charity toward the neighbor.*

The love of missionaries is to be both "affective and effective." [fo67] They will minister to the poor "spiritually and corporally." [fo68] Vincent's view of Jesus' evangelizing activity is very broad. [fo69] This is clear in the mandates that he gives to the various groups he founded: the Confraternities of Charity, the Congregation of the Mission, and the Daughters of Charity. Today, the unity between evangelization and human promotion, so much a part of St. Vincent's spirit, is one of the linchpins in the Church's social teaching. [fo70]

But the "Vincentian way" of loving also has its own particular characteristics. In their evangelization and promotion of the poor, the missionaries are to be marked, St. Vincent teaches, by five virtues: [fo71] simplicity, humility, gentleness, self-sacrifice, and zeal.

In his conference of August 22, 1659, St. Vincent tells the members of the Congregation of the Mission that these five virtues are to be "the faculties of the soul of the entire Congregation." [fo72] In his conferences to the Daughters of Charity, he likewise focuses on simplicity and humility, in addition to charity itself. These missionary virtues are so important that one could dedicate an entire article to each. [fo73] Here I will touch on them only briefly, as St. Vincent saw them in Christ and as he held them up before those giving their lives to God in the service of the poor.

### *a. Simplicity*

Jesus, [fo74] the missionary of the Father, is utterly simple. He speaks the truth. [fo75] He says things as they are, [fo76] without concealing or hiding anything. [fo77] He refers things to God alone. [fo78] St. Vincent is so convinced of the importance of simplicity, as he finds it in Jesus, that he calls it "my gospel," [fo79] "the virtue I love most." [fo80] "Do you know where Our Lord dwells?" he asks. "It is among the simple." [fo81]

Today, just as in St. Vincent's time, simplicity means speaking the truth. It is an extremely important quality for a missionary. It is also a difficult discipline, especially when our own convenience is at stake or when the truth is embarrassing. But such genuineness, or transparency, remains very attractive to the modern men and women whom we are called to serve.

Simplicity also has a number of related meanings. It includes witnessing to the truth, or the personal authenticity that makes the missionary's life match his words. It involves seeking the truth as a wayfarer rather than possessing it as an "owner." As in St. Vincent's time, simplicity also means purity of intention, practicing the truth through works of justice and charity, developing a simple life-style, and using simple language, especially in preaching.

### *b. Humility*

Jesus,[fo82] the missionary of the Father, teaches us humility "by word and example."[fo83] Humility entails our recognition that all good comes from God.[fo84] It involves an acknowledgement of our own lowliness and faults,[fo85] accompanied by exuberant confidence in God.[fo86] Vincent urges the missionary to contemplate "that admirable model of humility, Our Lord Jesus Christ."[fo87] He marveled how the Son of God "emptied himself" (Phil 2:7).[fo88]

Today, as in St. Vincent's time, humility means that we recognize our creatureliness and our redeemedness, both being gifts of God's love. It shows itself in our gratitude for gifts, seeing all things as grace. Humility is concretized in the missionary's development of a "servant's attitude," a willingness to undertake even menial tasks in the service of the poor. It is also manifested in our willingness to be evangelized by the poor, "our lords and masters," as St. Vincent put it.

### *c. Gentleness*

Jesus himself tells us that he is gentle, St. Vincent writes.[fo89] This missionary virtue, for St. Vincent, is the ability to handle anger,[fo90] by tempering it and by finding ways of expressing it appropriately,[fo91] in a manner governed by love.[fo92]

Today, as in St. Vincent's time, gentleness enables the missionary to handle anger positively. Since anger is a natural energy that arises spontaneously within us when we perceive something as evil, it can be used well or badly. Those dedicated to the service of the gospel experience the ambiguous power of anger, just as do all other men and women. But St. Vincent assures us that anger can be transformed and expressed well. His own outrage at the plight of the poor was a powerful force in moving him to establish the Confraternities of Charity, the Vincentians, and the Daughters of Charity.

The gentle, St. Vincent is convinced, are approachable and affable.[fo93] They know how to combine love and firmness.[fo94] He writes to St. Louise de Marillac on November 1, 1637: "If the gentleness of your spirit needs a dash of vinegar, borrow a little of it from the spirit of Our Lord. O, Mademoiselle, how very well he knew how to find a bitter-sweet remark when it was needed."[fo95]

Vincent's example also demonstrates that the missionary can grow in developing gentleness and approachability. He confesses that his personal bent was somber, but that "I turned to God and earnestly begged him to change this irritable and forbidding disposition of mine, and to grant me a kindly and benign spirit. And with the grace of Our Lord, by giving a little attention to suppressing the turbulent impulses of my nature, I have been partially cured of my gloomy disposition."[fo96]

### *d. Self-sacrifice*

Jesus is the exemplar of self-sacrifice for the missionary. "Let us never lose sight of the mortification of Our Lord, seeing that, to follow him, we are obliged to mortify ourselves after his example."<sup>[fo97]</sup> Vincent defines mortification, or self-sacrifice, as the subjection of passion to reason.<sup>[fo98]</sup> It finds a very prominent place in his conferences, where he describes it in considerable detail.<sup>[fo99]</sup> To motivate his missionaries to engage in it, he cites many of the New Testament sayings recommending it.<sup>[fo100]</sup>

Today mortification tends to be misunderstood, and is consequently rather unpopular, perhaps because of distortions in the way it was proposed by some spiritual writers. But it is a very important missionary value. Contemporary "functional asceticism"<sup>[fo101]</sup> emphasizes that mortification is the renunciation of one good thing for the sake of another. It involves defining our missionary goals and channeling our limited energies toward them. Concretely, it can involve such things as: responding promptly to the calls of the community, particularly in accepting a mission; being faithful to the demands of the mission and giving them preference when they conflict with other more pleasurable pursuits; working hard in the service of the poor; rising promptly in the morning to support the community in prayer; being sparing in obtaining or accepting material possessions; being moderate in eating and drinking; employing a critical sense in using television, radio, movies, and other media; withholding critical and divisive words; being slow to ask for privileges; seeking to be with those who are less pleasing as well as with those to whom we are more attracted; giving generously of our time in order to take part in contemporary decision-making processes.

#### *e. Zeal*

Zeal is the burning missionary love that fills the heart of Jesus. "Let us ask God to give the Company this spirit, this heart, this heart which will make us go everywhere, this heart of the Son of God, the heart of Our Lord ...."<sup>[fo102]</sup> This fire of love enables the missionary to go anywhere and to do everything.<sup>[fo103]</sup> "The love of Christ drives us on"<sup>[fo104]</sup> is the motto for the mission of the Daughters of Charity.

Zeal is the virtue of missionary action. "If the love of God is the fire, zeal is its flame. If love is the sun, then zeal is its ray."<sup>[fo105]</sup> It aims "at extending the kingdom of God."<sup>[fo106]</sup> It is love in practice. "Let us love God, my brothers," Vincent de Paul cries out to the missionaries, "let us love God, but let it be with the strength of our arms and the sweat of our brows. So very often many acts of love of God, of resting in his presence, of benevolence, and such interior affections and practices, although very good and very desirable, are nevertheless to be suspected if they do not reach the practice of effective love."<sup>[fo107]</sup>

Today missionary zeal shows itself in "disponibility," a willingness to go anywhere in the service of the gospel. It is a love that is "inventive, even to infinity,"<sup>[fo108]</sup> and is therefore creative, persevering, faithful. As a consequence, especially in these rapidly changing times, the zealous missionary is ready to engage in ongoing formation in order to adapt to new works, or to new circumstances, or to new "ages" in life (like a "second career" or "retirement"). Zeal, since it is infectious and spreads, also manifest itself in an eagerness to seek other laborers for the

harvest.

One final word. The mission, if it is to remain fully alive, must on the one hand be firmly rooted in the Vincentian tradition and at the same time be continually renewed and inculturated in each historical era. The concrete forms in which the mission is embodied may, and at times should, vary significantly from age to age. For that reason the Congregation must, by faith-filled meditation on the gospels and creative attentiveness to the needs of the poor and those who serve them, remain in a state of continual renewal.[fo109]

*fo1 - Common Rules XI, 10 (henceforth, CR): "The name Missioners, or Priests of the Mission, clearly indicates that the work of the missions is the primary and most important of all ministries to people."*

*fo2 - Ibid.*

fo3 - SV XI, 135; XII, 85ff.

fo4 - Lk 4:18.

fo5 - SV XI, 108.

fo6 - SV XI, 135.

fo7 - Robert P. Maloney, *He Hears the Cry of the Poor*, (Hyde Park, New York: New City Press, 1995) 118-125.

fo8 - Jn 16:28; cf. Jn 1:1, Jn 14:28.

fo9 - Mk 16:15.

fo10 - SV XI, 134.

*fo11 - Ibid.*

fo12 - SV XII, 367.

fo13 - SV XII, 301.

fo14 - Karl Rahner, "The Abiding Significance of the Second Vatican Council," in *Theological Investigations XX*, 90-102; cf. also "The Future of the Church and the Church of the Future," in *Theological Investigations XX*, 103-14.

fo15 - SV XI, 402.

fo16 - Cf. Avery Dulles, "Seven Essentials of Evangelization," in *Origins* 25 (# 23; November 23, 1995) 397-400.

fo17 - *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 24.

fo18 - SV XII, 87.

fo19 - SV IX, 59; IX, 593; XI, 364; XI, 592.

fo20 - Cf. SV II, 4.

fo21 - CR I, 2.

fo22 - CR XI, 12.

fo23 - SV V, 489; VII, 561.

fo24 - Betty Ann McNeil, *Monograph 1: The Vincentian Family Tree*, to be published by the Vincentian Studies Institute.

fo25 - For an interesting reflection on this matter, cf. A. Sylvestre, "Priest of the Mission for what purpose?" *Vincentiana* XXXIV (# 6; November-December 1995) 363-73.

fo26 - A number of business corporations are learning this lesson the hard way. Even some which were once thriving concerns are now experiencing death pangs because they did not adjust to rapidly changing economic circumstances.

fo27 - *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 57.

fo28 - *Redemptoris Missio*, 37.

fo29 - *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 45; *Redemptoris Missio*, 47.

fo30 - *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 51; *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 42.

fo31 - John Paul II, Discourse at the 19th ordinary assembly of CELAM, Haiti, March 9, 1983; discourse given in Santo Domingo, October 12, 1984; cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 63; *Centesimus Annus*, 5; *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 45.

fo32 - Lk 4:18.

fo33 - Constitutions 1 (henceforth, C).

fo34 - Cf. *Vincentiana* XXXIV, 41.

fo35 - CR XI, 10.

fo36 - In recent times, mission teams with as many as 1000 members have been trained to focus on an entire diocese or even a country, with considerable success. Cf. T. Sendlein, "An experience of the Vincentian Spirit in the Panamanian National Mission," *Vincentiana* XXXIX (1995) 311-24.

fo37 - SV XII, 84.



fo38 - SV XI, 291.

fo39 - For a full listing of the foreign missions of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity, cf. José Ignacio Fernández, "La extensión misionera actual de ambas congregaciones: Congregación de la Misión y Compañía de la Hijas de la Caridad" in *San Vicente Y La Misión Ad Gentes* (Salamanca: CEME, 1995) 253-287.

fo40 - C 17.

fo41 - Cf. Albert di Ianni, "Religious Vocations: New Signs of the Times," *Review for Religious* 52 (# 5; September-October 1993) 745-763. Also, D. Nygren and M. Ukeritis, *The Future of Religious Orders in the United States* (Connecticut: Praeger Press, 1993) 251.

fo42 - *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 58.

fo43 - Medellín, "Conclusions," 6.13, 14; 13.33.

fo44 - D. Nygren and M. Ukeritis, *op. cit.*, 250.

fo45 - SV XI, 32. While a given reader may doubt that this text (calling Christ "the Evangelizer of the Poor"), attributed to St. Vincent by Abelly, his first biographer (1664), convey the *ipsissima verba* of the saint, the idea itself, nonetheless, seems to me indisputable, given St. Vincent's repeated recourse to Luke 4:18.

fo46 - Cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 15.

fo47 - CR, Introduction.

fo48 - SV VI, 393. The French reads: "... religion vers son Père."

fo49 - Denise Lardner Carmody and John Tully Carmody, *In the Path of the Masters* (New York: Paragon House, 1994) 119.

fo50 - For a striking statement of St. Vincent's attitude before God, cf. SV XII, 133-134, 146-147.

fo51 - SV XIII, 179.

fo52 - SV II, 106.

fo53 - SV V, 534; VI, 444; VIII, 55, 256; X, 503.

fo54 - SV II, 453.

fo55 - SV I, 68; cf. III, 197.

fo56 - SV V, 396: "Let us wait patiently, but let us act, and, as it were, let us make haste slowly ...."

fo57 - SV VII, 310.

fo58 - SV IV, 366.

fo59 - SV XI, 83.

fo60 - Cf. Jn 7:29, 7:33, 17:13, 17:21. Jesus' special relationship with his Father is also a Lucan theme; cf. 2:49, 3:22, 9:35, 10:21-22, 23:46.

fo61 - SV XII, 109.

fo62 - SV IX, 415.

fo63 - CR X, 7.

fo64 - SV XI, 83: "Give me a man of prayer and he will be capable of everything. He may say with the apostle, 'I can do all things in him who strengthens me.' The Congregation will last as long as it faithfully carries out the practice of prayer, which is like an impregnable rampart shielding the missionaries from all manner of attack." Cf. also, SV III, 535; IX, 416; X, 583.

fo65 - C 42.

fo66 - SV XI, 407-408.

fo67 - SV IX, 475, 592, 599; XI, 40.

fo68 - SV IX, 59, 593; XI, 364, 592.

fo69 - Cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 30-39; Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede, *Istruzione su "Libertà cristiana e liberazione,"* (March 22, 1986) 99. While Vincent was very aware of the need to meet the social problems of his day with structured, institutionalized solutions (e.g., through the societies he founded), he was, nonetheless, like most of his contemporaries, largely unaware of what today we might call "sinful social structures." For the most part, he accepted the existing political and social order as it was (as did St. Paul, for instance, in regard to slavery). Still, within that context, he saw the need for political action as he addressed the needs of the poor and used his influence in court and on the Council of Conscience to that end. Cf. Luigi Mezzadri, *San Vincenzo de Paul* (Edizioni Paoline: Milan, 1986) 69-79, 83-86.

fo70 - Cf. Synod of Bishops, 1971, *Justice in the World*, in AAS LXIII (1971) 924: "... action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world are integral elements in the preaching of the gospel." Cf. also, *Centesimus Annus*, 5.

fo71 - SV XII, 302: "Look at the force and power of the evangelical maxims, among which, since they are many in number, I have chosen principally those which are more proper to missionaries." Besides looking at the events in the life of Jesus, St. Vincent sees in the New Testament a series of maxims or sayings, of which Jesus is the "author." He asks his followers to do what Jesus did and to practice what he taught, either by direct command or through these maxims.

fo72 - CR II, 14; SV XII, 309.

fo73 - For some interesting information on this same subject, as well as further bibliography, the

reader may wish to consult: J.-P. Renouard, "L'Esprit de la Congrégation: Les Vertus Fondamentales," *Vincentiana* XXVIII (1984) 599-615; cf. also T. Davitt, "The Five Characteristic Virtues," *Colloque XIV* (Autumn 1986) 109-120. Cf. also Christian Sens, "Comme Prêtre Missionnaire," in *Monsieur Vincent, Témoin de L'Évangile* (Toulouse, 1990) 133-151, esp. 140f; R. P. Maloney, "Five Characteristic Virtues: Yesterday and Today," in *The Way of Vincent de Paul* (New York: New City Press, 1992) 37-69. Cf. also, B. Häring, *Timely and Untimely Virtues* (London: St. Paul's, 1993).

fo74 - SV IV, 486.

fo75 - CR II, 4; SV XII, 172.

fo76 - SV I, 144.

fo77 - SV I, 284; V, 464.

fo78 - CR II, 4; SV, 172.

fo79 - SV IX, 606.

fo80 - SV I, 284.

fo81 - SV X, 96.

fo82 - SV XI, 56-57.

fo83 - CR II, 7.

fo84 - SV I, 182; VII, 98-99.

fo85 - CR II, 7.

fo86 - SV III, 279; V, 165.

fo87 - SV XI, 394.

fo88 - SV XII, 109.

fo89 - CR II, 6.

fo90 - SV XII, 186.

fo91 - SV XII, 187.

fo92 - SV XII, 188.

fo93 - SV XII, 189.

fo94 - SV VII, 226.

fo95 - SV I, 393-94.

fo96 - Abelly III, 177-178.

fo97 - SV XII, 227.

fo98 - SV X, 56.

fo99 - SV IX, 23; X, 59, 151, 246, 248, 280, 399; XII, 215.

fo100 - Cf. SV IX, 170; X, 61, 398.

fo101 - K. Rahner, *Theological Investigations* III, 54.

fo102 - SV XI, 291.

fo103 - SV XI, 204: "Yes, the Congregation of the Mission can do all things because we have within us the germ of the omnipotence of Jesus Christ...."

fo104 - 2 Cor 5:14.

fo105 - SV XII, 262, 307-308.

fo106 - SV XII, 307.

fo107 - SV XI, 40.

fo108 - SV XI, 146.

fo109 - C 2.