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A Vincentian Reflection on Peace

by Robert P. Maloney, C.M.

Superior General

Many eloquent voices are crying out for peace these days. The list is impressive even if I just count the items that cross my desk. On October 31, 2003, the Community of Sant'Egidio wrote inviting me to pray and march for peace on New Year's Day. The November-December 2003 issue of *Religiosi in Italia* featured an article entitled, "Peace: Prophecy of the Eternal."¹ On New Year's Day itself Pope John Paul II synthesized many of his previous statements in a document called, "An Ever-Timely Commitment: Teaching Peace," addressed to leaders of the nations, jurists, teachers of the young, and all those tempted to turn to violence.² On January 20, his talk to the diplomatic corps focused on "Four Convictions on the Building of Peace."³

Such numerous reflections on peace are surely a good sign, but they are also a bad sign. Continued widespread violence has evoked these cries. As a famous revolutionary in my own country once said: "Gentlemen may cry: 'Peace, peace,' but there is no peace!"⁴

I have been asked to write a Vincentian reflection on peace. The topic is very broad, ranging from the quest for interior peace to the promotion of non-violent relationships among the nations. Here in *Vincentiana* I have already written on several occasions about gentleness as a characteristic Vincentian virtue and a foundational attitude for peacemaking.⁵ At the beginning of the Jubilee Year 2000,

¹ MARCO GUZZI, *Religiosi in Italia* 339 (N° 6; Novembre-Dicembre 2003) 241-250.

² JOHN PAUL II, *An Every Timely Commitment: Teaching World Peace*, Message for the celebration of the World Day of Peace, 1 January 2004, Vatican: 8 December 2003.

³ *Origins* February 5, 2004 (Vol. 33, N° 34) 581-586.

⁴ PATRICK HENRY, "The War Inevitable," a speech given in Richmond, Virginia, on March 23, 1775.

⁵ Cf. ROBERT P. MALONEY, "Five Characteristic Virtues: Yesterday and Today," in *The Way of St. Vincent de Paul* (New City Press: New York, 1992) 37-69. An earlier version of this article appeared in *Vincentiana* XXIX (1985) 226-254. Cf., also, "A Further Look at 'Gentleness,'" in *Seasons in Spirituality* (New City Press: Hyde Park, New York, 1998) 81-100. This article also appeared in *Vincentiana* XXXIX (1995) 285-304.

I also sent a letter to the members of the Congregation of the Mission, reflecting on reconciliation and on preaching and teaching justice.⁶ After the events of September 11, 2001, I addressed an Advent letter to all the members of the Vincentian Family,⁷ with peace as its theme.

Having already written about several aspects of this topic, and because of its very broad scope, in this article I will restrict my focus to peace in the sense in which Pope Paul VI once so movingly described it: “No more war! War never again!”⁸

I. St. Vincent and Peace

St. Vincent often speaks about peace and peacemaking, but usually in the context of community life or the giving of missions. In speaking about community he states: “The Spirit of Jesus Christ is a spirit of union and peace. How can you attract people if you are not united with one another in Him?”⁹ In speaking about the missions, he encouraged the members of the Congregation of the Mission to work at healing broken relationships. One of the important goals of missions was reconciliation.¹⁰ Missionaries were to attempt to settle disputes and divisions. In fact, they frequently reported to St. Vincent about their success in doing so.

But Vincent also addressed the question of war. In a repetition of prayer on July 24, 1655, he lamented that war was widespread: in France, Spain, Italy, Germany, Sweden, Poland, Ireland, Scotland, England. “War everywhere, misery everywhere,” he cried out. “So many people suffer!” he said in frustration. It was in this context that St. Vincent made his famous statement that “It is the poor who preserve the true religion, a living faith.”¹¹

Besides his words, Vincent also responded to the devastating war in Lorraine with a massive relief effort. He asked the Ladies of Charity to take charge of the fund-raising. They managed to get large donations from the King, the Queen, and the Duchess d’Aiguillon, but the contributions always fell short of the needs. He sent 12 of his best priests and clerics at Toul to help in the relief efforts and sent brothers who knew about surgery and medicine. In fact, he drew up

⁶ Cf., *Vincentiana* XLIII (1999) 407-414.

⁷ Cf., *Vincentiana* XLV (2001) 479-482.

⁸ Paul VI, Discourse to the United Nations on the occasion of its 20th anniversary, New York, October 4, 1965; cf., *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 57 (1965) 881.

⁹ ABELLY, II, Chapter I, 154.

¹⁰ CR XI, 8.

¹¹ SV XI, 200.

a rule establishing strict standards of conduct and administrative procedures among them. The missionaries distributed relief in seven strategic points: Toul, Metz, Verdun, Nancy, Pont-à-Mousson, St. Mihiel, and Bar-le-Duc. Each center received a monthly allotment. Fr. Jean Dehorgny was named as regional visitor to supervise the relief work in 1640.

José María Román describes the help offered as follows:

Basic aid consisted of food, particularly bread and soup, medicine and clothing. The same method of distribution was followed in every place. Each week the missionaries would go round their districts and with the help of the parish priest they would draw up a list of poor people. Then they would give the priest, or some charitable lady, the flour needed for the week's baking, and after the first distribution of bread they would gather the poor people together for a pious exhortation, catechise the children, and help those who were most seriously ill to prepare well for death.¹²

Brother Mathieu Regnard became Vincent's emissary to Lorraine. He made 54 journeys back and forth, each time carrying with him between 20 and 30 thousand *livres*. He crossed battle lines, worked his way through bands of marauders and, almost as if in a novel, always managed to escape. He later described 18 incidents in which he nearly lost his life (and the money!). On one of his trips in September 1639, besides coming back himself, he brought along 46 girls and 54 boys to the capital.

In the 1650s war ravaged Picardy, Champagne and the Ile de France. This time Brother Jean Parr was Vincent's trusted envoy for Picardy-Champagne. There the Daughters of Charity were tireless in relief work and served as nurses in military hospitals. St. Vincent encouraged them eloquently:

The queen is asking for you to be sent to Calais to look after poor wounded soldiers. How humble this should make you feel; to think that God wants to make use of you in such a marvellous way! Oh Saviour, men go to war to kill each other, and you go to war to repair the damage that is done there! What a blessing from God! Men kill the body, and very often they kill the soul if people die in a state of mortal sin; you go to bring them back to life, or at least to preserve life by the care you give to those who survive, and your efforts to show them,

¹² JOSÉ MARÍA ROMÁN, C.M., *St Vincent De Paul: A Biography*, translated by Sr. Joyce Howard, D.C. (Melisende: London, 1999) 515.

*by your good example and your exhortations, that they should be resigned to God's will.*¹³

With the siege of Paris, the pain of war came to the capital. The sisters distributed food each day to 2,100 people in the St. Denis area and to 5,000 poor people in St. Paul's Parish. At St. Lazare, soup was distributed twice a day to 800 people. The number of those fed daily soon rose to 15,000. "We hear that you've spared nothing to save the lives of all the sick-poor in those places," he rejoiced in a letter to Brother Nicolas Sené.¹⁴ "If you need powder for purging, ask Monsieur Portail [...] If you have to bargain to get provisions everywhere, do so [...] Write to Madame de Herse asking for a little money to help those poor people harvest their grapes [...] And spare nothing to save the life of the souls and bodies of those poor people."

But it is often forgotten that in addition to his vigorous war-relief efforts, Vincent was also engaged in behind-the-scenes peacemaking. On two occasions he intervened personally, going right to the top.

At some time between 1639 and 1642, during the wars in Lorraine, he went to Cardinal Richelieu, knelt before him, described the horrors of war, and pleaded for peace: "Let us have peace. Have pity on us. Give France peace." Richelieu refused, responding diplomatically that peace did not depend on him alone.¹⁵

Collet relates an even more striking episode, which he takes from an account written by Brother Ducournau.¹⁶ In 1649, during the civil war, St. Vincent left Paris quietly, crossed battle lines and forded a flooded river (at almost 70 years of age) to see the queen and to beg her to dismiss Mazarin, whom he regarded as responsible for the war. He also spoke directly to Mazarin himself. But again his pleas went unheeded. Vincent attempted to speak with leaders on both sides and at times felt that a settlement was near, but ambitions and intrigues thwarted his efforts. His attempts at peacemaking earned him the enmity of Mazarin, who, in his secret diary, records him as an enemy. By the time peace finally came, Vincent had been removed from the Council of Conscience.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 580.

¹⁴ SV IV, 530-531.

¹⁵ Cf. P. COSTE, *The Life and Labours of St. Vincent de Paul*, translated by Joseph Leonard (London, 1935) II, 369-370. Cf. also, Abelly, I, XXXV, 169.

¹⁶ P. COLLET, *La Vie de St. Vincent de Paul* (Nancy, 1748) I, 468. Cf. SV III, 402. Cf. also, COSTE, II, 447.

II. Some Horizon Shifts Since the 17th Century

Both the reality of war and societal attitudes toward it have changed significantly since St. Vincent's time. Below, I mention only three of the most significant changes.

1. *While limited conflicts continue to exist, the existence of weapons of mass destruction now makes total war, with the possible annihilation of whole populations, a looming threat.*

While we often speak of peace, widespread violence exists even as I write. The list of places seems endless: Abkhazia, Afghanistan, Algeria, the Basque Provinces, Burundi, Casamance, Chechnya, Colombia, Comores, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, Indonesia, Iraq, Israel, Ivory Coast, Kashmir, Kurdistan, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Myanmar, Nepal, Northern Ireland, Northern Uganda, Palestine, Philippines, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Tajikistan, Western Sahara.

In addition, terrorist attacks are on the increase, leaving large numbers dead and striking fear in the hearts of many. On March 11, as I was doing research for this article, hundreds died in Madrid as bombs exploded on the trains that carried them to work or school. Similar bombings have occurred in Casablanca, Istanbul, Moscow, Paris, Bagdad, Jakarta, Tokyo, and other large cities.

The needs generated by prolonged violence in so many places are dramatic: *a)* hundreds of thousands of orphans, widows, handicapped, hungry, and displaced persons and families; *b)* destruction of homes, factories, workshops, stores, churches, hospitals, schools, and infrastructures; *c)* economic crises, devaluation of national currency, inflation in the cost of living; *d)* collapse of governmental institutions and the absence of public services. War paralyzes nations and their citizens, especially the poor, and often deprives them of even the meager means that they possess for their sustenance.

On top of the "limited" wars listed above, since World War II and the advent of nuclear weapons the threat of all-out war has loomed large. In recent decades, increased sophistication in weapon design has paved the way for "surgical strikes," but the enormous power of nuclear arsenals creates the possibility of massive destruction of populations.

The sale of arms remains one of the major factors in the world economy. In a strikingly forceful statement, the conciliar fathers at Vatican II condemned the arms race: "Therefore, we declare once again: the arms race is one of the greatest curses on the human race

and the harm that it inflicts on the poor is more than can be endured.”¹⁷ But with the widespread diffusion of arms and the frequency of their use, young people often attest to uncertainty about their future because of the possibility of nuclear annihilation.

2. *In modern times there has been a very significant revival of pacifism.*

Gandhi, with his largely peaceful revolution in India, has had an enormous influence in this regard. Likewise, Martin Luther King, in the United States, obtained very significant advances in civil rights by non-violent resistance. James Douglass’ book, *The Non-Violent Cross*,¹⁸ which gained immense circulation, popularized the biblical and philosophical roots of pacifist movements.

In the Catholic tradition, *Gaudium et Spes*¹⁹ took a carefully nuanced, yet positive position in regard to pacifism: “In the same spirit we cannot but express our admiration for all who forgo the use of violence to vindicate their rights and resort to those other means of defense which are available to weaker parties, provided it can be done without harm to the rights and duties of others and of the community.” At the same time Paul VI made stirring appeals for the non-violent solution of conflicts, addressing this theme eloquently at the United Nations headquarters in New York on October 4, 1965, and later coining the phrase, “If you want peace, work for justice.”²⁰ In his book, *Faith and Violence*, Thomas Merton offered a clear presentation of the theory and practice of Christian peace-making.²¹ In 1983 the bishops of the United States, in a carefully prepared document, made a very significant contribution to the theory and the practice of working toward the creation of peace.²²

¹⁷ *Gaudium et Spes*, 81.

¹⁸ JAMES W. DOUGLASS, *The Non-Violent Cross* (New York: Macmillan, 1968).

¹⁹ *Gaudium et Spes*, 78.

²⁰ Paul VI, Message for the celebration of the Day of Peace, January 1, 1972.

²¹ THOMAS MERTON, *Faith and Violence* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968).

²² “The Challenge of Peace,” *Origins* 13 (no. 1; May 19, 1983) 1-32.

3. *In recent times there has been increased consciousness of the need for peacemaking not only on an individual level, but also on a structural level.*

To Paul VI's appeal for a peace that rests on justice as its foundation,²³ John Paul II adds: "Development is the new name for peace."²⁴

The groundwork for the Church's emphasis on the need for structural change is already evident in *Pacem in Terris*²⁵ and in *Gaudium et Spes*.²⁶ Paul VI took the theme up eloquently in *Populorum Progressio*,²⁷ and, in an address to the members of *Cor Unum* given on January 13, 1972, called Christians to commit themselves to enter into "the very heart of social and political action and thus get at the roots of evil and change hearts, as well as the structures of modern society."²⁸

Today we are conscious that sin deeply affects social structures. It becomes embodied in unjust laws, power-based economic relationships, inequitable treaties, artificial boundaries, oppressive governments, and numerous other subtle structural obstacles to harmonious societal relationships. It is only when such structural obstacles are analyzed, understood, and removed that society can establish abiding, peaceful relationships.

There is also a heightened sense of the global community at present. Local conflicts make the international scene quite volatile at times, with the lurking danger that these conflicts will escalate into an "all-out war."

Meanwhile, Pope John Paul II has appealed again and again for peace, emphasizing the need for solidarity among the nations, a just world order, integral human development, respect for human rights, and the guarantee of freedom. The list of themes for his New Year's Day messages is impressive:

1979: *To Reach Peace, Teach Peace*

1980: *Truth, the Power of Peace*

1981: *To Serve Peace, Respect Freedom*

1982: *Peace: A Gift of God Entrusted to Us!*

1983: *Dialogue for Peace, A Challenge for Our Time*

²³ *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 57 (1965) 896.

²⁴ Cf., *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 10; cf. also, *Populorum Progressio*, 77.

²⁵ *Pacem in Terris*, 89, 91.

²⁶ *Gaudium et Spes*, 85.

²⁷ *Populorum Progressio*, 78.

²⁸ *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 64 (1972) 189.

- 1984: *From a New Heart, Peace is Born*
 1985: *Peace and Youth Go Forward Together*
 1986: *Peace is a Value with No Frontiers North-South, East-West: Only One Peace*
 1987: *Development and Solidarity: Two Keys to Peace*
 1988: *Religious Freedom, Condition for Peace*
 1989: *To Build Peace, Respect Minorities*
 1990: *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation*
 1991: *If You Want Peace, Respect the Conscience of Every Person*
 1992: *Believers United in Building Peace*
 1993: *If You Want Peace, Reach Out to the Poor*
 1994: *The Family Creates the Peace of the Human Family*
 1995: *Women: Teachers of Peace*
 1996: *Let Us Give Children a Future of Peace*
 1997: *Offer Forgiveness and Receive Peace*
 1998: *From the Justice of Each Comes Peace for All*
 1999: *Respect for Human Rights: The Secret of True Peace*
 2000: *"Peace on Earth to Those Whom God Loves!"*
 2001: *Dialogue Between Cultures for a Civilization of Love and Peace*
 2002: *No Peace Without Justice, No Justice Without Peace*
 2003: *"Pacem in Terris": A Permanent Commitment*

III. Some Vincentian Reflections on Peace Today

1. *"Passionate gentleness," a virtue in which, "justice and peace shall kiss" (Psalm 85:11).*

Today Jesus' proclamation of a kingdom of peace and the witness of his own gentleness play a very prominent part in the contemporary Church's preaching of the good news. The Church's teaching about peace is intimately bound up with integral human development and the promotion of justice. Pope John Paul II, in *Centesimus Annus*,²⁹ speaks eloquently about this link: "I myself, on the occasion of the recent tragic war in the Persian Gulf, repeated the cry: 'Never again war!' No, never again war, which destroys the lives of innocent people, teaches how to kill, throws into upheaval even

²⁹ *Centesimus Annus*, 52; cf. also, 14, 54.

the lives of those who do the killing and leaves behind a trail of resentment and hatred, thus making it all the more difficult to find a just solution of the very problems which provoked the war. [...] For this reason, another name for peace is *development*. Just as there is a collective responsibility for avoiding war, so too there is a collective responsibility for promoting development.”

Aquinas reminds us that the passion most immediately associated with justice is anger.³⁰ Anger recoils in the face of injustice in order to spring into action and wipe it out. It moves us to lunge toward justice, to hunger and thirst for it. Anger wells up out of love and respect for the human person, whose rights we perceive as being violated. It strains to right wrong, to reestablish an order in which persons can grow and flourish. It will always be aroused, therefore, when we perceive that unjust structures are depriving the poor of the political, social, economic, or personal freedom that their human dignity demands.

Gentleness finds the ways of expressing anger, not in violence, but in “action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world.”³¹ “Passionate” gentleness³² knows how to direct anger to root out injustice, to channel it so that “justice rolls like a river.”³³ W.E.B. DuBois sums up this gentle passion in a lovely prayer:

Give us grace, O God, to dare to do the deed which we well know cries to be done. Let us not hesitate because of ease, or the words of men's mouths, or our own lives. Mighty causes are calling us — the freeing of women, the training of children, the putting down of hate and murder and poverty — all these and more. But they call with voices that mean work and sacrifice and death. Mercifully, grant us, O God, the spirit of Esther, that we say: I will go unto the King and if I perish, I perish. Amen.

2. *Mediation as ministry.*

To borrow a phrase from Karl Rahner, there are many “forgotten truths” in our Christian heritage; something that is very important in one era can slip to the back of Christian consciousness in another

³⁰ Cf. *Summa Theologica I-II.*, 46.2, 4, 6.

³¹ Synod of Bishops, 1971, *Justice in the World*, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 63 (1971) 924.

³² Cf. WALTER BURGHARDT, “A Faith That Does Justice,” Warren Series Lectures, in *Catholic Studies* (# 18; November 17, 1991) 9.

³³ Am 5:24.

historical epoch. The same is true within the Vincentian Family. It is easy to forget that, for St. Vincent, mediation was one of the most important ministries of missionaries.³⁴ It is a delicate ministry. Mediators seek to create a triangular relationship in which communication is reestablished between two conflicting parties, with the aid of the mediator's presence. Of course, for successful reconciliation, both parties must trust the mediator.

The mediator must be careful to

- be an active listener
- be impartial, attentive, and not overly influenced by one party or the other
- respect the rhythm of both parties, accompanying them patiently
- create an atmosphere of confidence, continually encouraging the two parties to find a solution
- pay attention not only to words but also to feelings and non-verbal language
- know how to find the common values and points of interest of both parties
- be creative in formulating and reformulating possible solutions.

Reconciliation, both on a small and large scale, is one of the basic goals of ministry. I am reminded of the role that the Community of Sant'Egidio played in mediating the peace in Mozambique. After 15 years of civil war, "human wisdom" would surely have doubted the ability of a "powerless" Italian Community to accomplish what other much more "powerful" agencies had failed to do. Yet the negotiations were successfully completed in 1992 and peace continues to reign in that country. Could not other groups have similar courage in offering their services as ministers of reconciliation?

Conversation and dialogue will, in the lives of the gentle, be the primary means for settling conflicts, accompanied by suffering love. These are the tools that Jesus himself, who is "our peace, and breaks down the wall of separation,"³⁵ used. If the community of his disciples develops a genuine passion for dialogue, justice, and peace, then it is a clear sign that the Kingdom of God is at hand.

³⁴ Cf. CR XI, 8.

³⁵ Eph 2:14.

3. *Teaching peace as a ministry.*

In *Pacem in Terris*, Pope John XXIII noted that we sow the seeds of God's peace when we minister to the four hungers of the human spirit: truth, justice, love, and freedom. Education programs are a primary means for doing so.³⁶ Pope Paul VI wrote: "Lack of education is as serious as lack of food; the illiterate person is a starved spirit."³⁷

Right from the time of St. Vincent, the ministry of education was an important one for both the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity. All the missions given in Vincent's lifetime involved daily catechetical instruction. In addition, Vincent and his companions soon became involved in seminary work, preparing the diocesan clergy for more effective service, especially to the poor. Today the Congregation of the Mission continues to have the responsibility for a number of seminaries, as well as four universities. The Constitutions of the Congregation also state that the formation of the laity, with a view toward leading them to a fuller participation in the evangelization of the poor, is one of the ways in which the purpose of the Congregation is achieved.³⁸ The Statutes of the Congregation recognize the importance of educating young people, as well as adults, and suggest various places where this can be carried out appropriately, with an accent on social justice, particularly among the poor.³⁹

Starting at least in 1641, the Daughters of Charity began to focus on the *petites écoles*. St. Louise sent the sisters to teach young girls to read and write, catechizing them at the same time. She herself engaged in this work. Today, the schools of the Daughters of Charity have more than half a million students. Even beyond schools, Daughters of Charity offer formation to large numbers of young people in our youth groups throughout the world.

The websites of all the major branches of the Vincentian Family provide abundant teaching materials on the Social Teaching of the Church, integral human development, the quest for justice, and peace education.⁴⁰ Particularly noteworthy is Vinpaz (Vincentians for

³⁶ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, "Women: Teachers of Peace," *Origins* 24 (# 28; December 22, 1994) 465-469; JORGE MEJIA, "Dimensions of the Bishop's Essential Ministry of Peace," *Origins* 24 (# 39; March 16, 1995) 641-648; DOLORES LECKEY, "Peacemaking and Creativity: Three Dynamics," *Origins* 24 (# 45; April 27, 1995) 777-780. Leckey focuses on three dynamics that make for peace: listening, beauty, and laughter.

³⁷ PAUL VI, *Populorum Progressio*, 35.

³⁸ C 1, 3^o.

³⁹ S 11.

⁴⁰ Vincentian Family: www.famvin.org
Congregation of the Mission: www.famvin.org/cm

Peace), which can be found on the site of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

In programs of education for peace, Dolores Leckey identifies three dynamics in teaching peacemaking.

The first of these is listening. In a noisy world, with so many media and so many conflicts, one becomes more and more conscious of its importance. As one observes tables in restaurants and in meeting rooms where everyone's cell phone is constantly ringing, one wonders if anyone is really listening! Listening is ultimately an act of trust in which we seek to understand others, all of whom are different from us. But real listeners, I am sad to say, are rare. Can we teach children to listen better?

Secondly, there is a power in beauty. We sense this as we listen to music and gaze upon works of art or as we join in well-prepared liturgical celebrations. One of the horrors of war is that it destroys beauty. The words of war are poisonous rather than poetic. The screeches of bombs are terrifying rather than liberating. Can we teach children to love beauty and to create rather than destroy it?

A third element is laughter. Hilaire Belloc once wrote: "There is nothing worth the wear of winning, but the laughter and love of friends."⁴¹ Those who learn to laugh genuinely with one another are already building mutual peace.

In his poem, *The Fiddler of Dooney*, William Butler Yeats writes⁴²:

*For the good are always the merry,
Save by an evil chance,
And the merry love the fiddle,
And the merry love to dance.*

4. *Learning the ways of non-violent dialogue.*

Without dialogue, genuine peace cannot exist. When conflicting parties enter into dialogue, several prerequisites are essential:

- Each must seek to discover the truth of the other: Why has the conflict arisen? What were the remote and proximate

AIC: www.famwin.org/aic

Daughters of Charity: www.filles-de-la-charite.org

St. Vincent de Paul Society: www.ozanet.org

International Association of the Miraculous Medal: www.amminter.org

JMV International: www.secretariadomjv.org

MISEVI: www.misevi.org

⁴¹ HILAIRE BELLOC, *Complete Verse*, with a preface by W.P.N.P. Roughhead (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1970) "Dedicatory Ode," 60.

⁴² *Yeats's Poems*, edited and annotated by A. Norman Jeffares (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1991) 109.

causes? What injustices are being redressed? What are the legitimate demands on both sides?

- Each side must recognize its own responsibility in the conflict.
- Each must speak of the problems as objectively and calmly as possible, recognizing the destructive acts which make people suffer, especially the poor.
- Each side must offer concrete proposals. One cannot come to the peace table empty-handed. The proposals made must be realistic and must proceed step-by-step.

Can we as a Vincentian Family learn to dialogue well? Can we teach others the art?

It was a clear, cold, winter night. Perched at the end of a pine- tree branch, a dove watched with wonder as snowflakes silently fell. She jumped when a voice from behind interrupted her quiet reverie.

"How many snowflakes can a branch bear before it breaks and falls to the ground?" the owl asked.

"I have no idea," responded the dove, recovering from her shock.

"2,326,482,671," said the owl.

"What? How do you know that?" asked the dove.

"I counted them myself," replied the owl. "It was on a night just like this that it happened. The flakes were falling quickly. 'One, two...,' I counted. When I reached 2,326,482,670, a final snowflake alighted on the branch. 'CRACK!' I heard, and the branch plummeted to the ground."

The dove reflected silently for a moment and then mused, "I sometimes wonder: if one more voice were raised for peace, would it finally come?"