Fall 2001

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The Emblem and Motto of the Congregation of the Mission

By

JOHN E. RYBOLT, C.M.

Introduction

Does the Congregation of the Mission have an official emblem and motto? The emblem most commonly used, and hence familiar to its members, consists of an oval frame enclosing the figure of a bearded Jesus standing on a globe, facing forward, rays surrounding his head, and arms outstretched downward. This study seeks to show that this familiar figure of Jesus and the biblical citation *Evangelizare pauperibus misit me* were both known in the time of Saint Vincent. However, the widespread and quasi-official use of both of these together, that is, with the motto surrounding the oval, dates only from the mid-nineteenth century. Where did these elements come from, and what is their official standing? Do they belong together? What can they teach us about the self-understanding of Saint Vincent and the first confreres in relationship to the mission?¹

¹ The vocabulary for the various items is confusing and inconsistent. For the purposes of this study, “emblem” refers to the design itself; “seal” or “stamp” to the use of the emblem as a seal (to close a letter or authenticate a document) or a stamp (a printed label or an image made by ink); “arms” and “shield” to its use on a coat-of-arms. This subject has not been extensively studied. But see: Antonino Orcajo, “El sello y escudo de la Congregación de la Misión y de las Hijas de la Caridad,” *Anales de la Congregación de la Misión y de las Hijas de la Caridad* 104:1 (Enero-Febrero 1996): 12-28.
Antecedents?

An examination of the emblems already in use before the Community acquired its two earliest houses, the College des Bons Enfants and Saint Lazare, shows that they were not the source for the emblem or motto. For centuries the Bons Enfants had been a university residence for students. Its coat of arms, in a later form known to us as a stamp for library books, portrays its two patron saints, Firmin and Charles Borromeo, seated beside a fountain. The text reads *Implor ut effundam* ["I am filled that I might pour out"], an obvious ideal for university students.\(^2\) The emblem of Saint Lazare portrays Jesus calling Lazarus forth from the grave.\(^3\) For other purposes, the house of Saint Lazare also used the two letters SL intertwined in the form of a monogram.

\(^2\) This may be a much later emblem, reflecting the change of name to the Seminary of Saint Firmin.

\(^3\) One version, dating from the sixteenth or seventeenth century, shows Jesus raising Lazarus from the grave. The text: *SAINCT LAZARE LEZ PARIS* surrounds the oval seal. (See *Bulletin mensuel de la Société de Sphragistique*, 15 juillet 1853.) In the 1680s, under the generalate of Edme Jolly, a later version of the emblem used in the coat-of-arms of the original Saint Lazare was affixed above the main entrance to the building. It was eventually moved to the front of the prison chapel, later used as the amphitheater of the medical school, located at the end of the gardens dedicated to Saint Vincent. (Two engravings are in André Dodin, *Saint Vincent de Paul et la charité* [Paris: Seuil, 1983], 70, 81.) This emblem shows the confusion between the two Lazarus figures in the Gospel: Lazarus the leper in the parable in Luke 16; and Lazarus the brother of Martha and Mary in John 11-12, the figure raised from the dead.
Origin of the emblem

Louise de Marillac seems to be at the origin of the Community’s emblem. An amateur artist, Louise drew several religious scenes which are still preserved. Among these is a figure of the resurrected Lord Jesus. She has drawn him in a miniature oval frame, standing on a globe or clouds, rays coming from his head. He faces forward, arms down, hands open, with his cloak billowing over his left shoulder. In addition, he bears the marks of four wounds: the place of the nails in his open hands and feet. Over his head are two texts written on ribbons: APRENDENS DE MOI, QUI SUIS DOUX ["Learn of me, for I am meek" (Matt 11:29)] and VENEZ LES BENIS DE MON PÈRE ["Come, blessed of my Father" (Matt 25:34)]. Unfortunately, this miniature is not dated, nor do we find references to it in her extant writings. Nevertheless, it is tempting
to see this somewhat inexpert work as the earliest surviving attempt to portray the Lord of Charity.

Much about the "Lord of Charity" is obscure. The origin and meaning of the gesture, Jesus with his arms down and hands open, is unclear. A similar gesture is found, although rarely, in carvings in Romanesque church portals in France. There, Jesus is seated in majesty, and the gesture can be interpreted as one of welcome to his house, the Church. The tympanum of the cathedral of Autun is a clear example.

The origin of the title "Lord of Charity," or more precisely "Lord of the Charity," is, likewise unknown. The figure of Jesus, gesturing to the poor below, was intended to nourish the piety of the members of the Confraternities of Charity. Perhaps because the gesture itself is not immediately clear in its intent, some versions, perhaps later ones, added small depictions of acts of corporal and spiritual charity. An examination of the writings of Louise de Marillac and Vincent de Paul suggests that the subject might first have been made available in the form of engravings and later as large paintings. A possible early reference is in a letter written by Vincent to Louise de Marillac, dated 28 January 1640. "Here is an image that we had printed at the Charity. You are the first to whom I am sending one. A painter had it engraved; it cost him 80 ecus." This remark apparently means that the engraving, of which no copies seem to have survived, is based on an earlier and now undatable painting, since it does not exist either. There is no proof, however, that the subject was the Lord of Charity. Another letter, written by Louise to Vincent, and dated provisionally as August 1647, reads: "If you have any pictures resembling the one of the Lord of Charity in any of your books, I would beg you most humbly to do me the kindness of giving me one." The meaning here is unclear. Louise may be referring to holy pictures (images) slipped into a book, or to some other reproductions. The clearest reference is found in another letter, dated provisionally between 1640 and 1646. Louise wrote to a sister: "I am enclosing pictures for you. One is a Lord of Charity to put in the room

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7 80 ecus, the equivalent of 240 livres, was a huge sum, amounting to more than half of what it would cost for the support of one missionary for an entire year. See letter 1972, CED 5:479.
where you receive the poor. The other is for your room.\textsuperscript{9} In a letter to Jean Martin, from Paris, 29 September 1656, M. Vincent refers in all likelihood to the same pictures: “We will send you the images of the Charity which you are asking for.”\textsuperscript{10} Since “image” often referred to small reproductions, it is unclear whether he was referring to them or to the large canvases.\textsuperscript{11}

\textit{Lord of Charity with Heart}

\textit{Courtesy of the author}

\textsuperscript{9} Letter 3, \textit{Spiritual Writings}, 335.
\textsuperscript{10} Letter 2150, \textit{CED} 6:98.
\textsuperscript{11} An old rule for the Confraternity of Charity specified: “12. That a picture be made for the Chapel, but the money of the Charity should not be used to adorn the chapel.” Unfortunately, the subject of the painting is not mentioned. (“Memoire des points principaux qui regardent l'établissement de la Charité tirés de l'instruction précédente sur ce sujet,” in Félix Contassot, “Paroisses et autres fonctions,” ms. [Vol. XI of his studies] in ACM, 84.)
There are at least nine of these paintings still extant. The simplest, and perhaps the earliest because of its similarity to Louise’s miniature, is of the Lord alone. He bears the marks of the five wounds, including the visible heart surrounded with rays of light.\footnote{Dodin, \textit{Saint Vincent}, 66.} It hangs in the mother house of the Daughters of Charity, rue du Bac. At the base of this painting is the text: “This picture was painted by Mademoiselle LeGras, our most honored mother and founder.” Based on a comparison of the miniatures which Louise painted, it seems that she was not the artist of the whole painting. It is more likely that her devotion to the heart of Jesus, missing from all the other known paintings, led her to add it.\footnote{The heart was an important enough symbol for Louise that it became part of the official seal of the Company of the Daughters of Charity. For her devotion to the Sacred Heart, see note 14.} The second, also in the mother house, displays the figure of the Lord as before, with wounds in his hands and feet, but without a visible wound in the side, or the heart. At the top is the text: \textit{DEUS CHARITAS EST JOA 16} [“God is Love.” (1) John (4:)16]. In addition, two vignettes in the

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Lord_of_Charity_Rue_du_Bac_Courtesy_of_the_author.jpg}
\caption{Lord of Charity, Rue du Bac \textit{Courtesy of the author}}
\end{figure}
Lord of Charity, Chavagnes

Courtesy of the author
lower register portray spiritual and corporal works of mercy. On the left is a figure of a priest, wearing the collar of the secular clergy, giving communion to a woman confined to bed. On the right is a Daughter of Charity offering a glass of red wine. Since the recipient of her charity is not pictured, it is perhaps the recumbent figure to the left of the painting.

The next six copies are similar in theme. One is kept at the parish of Boulages (Aube) in the diocese of Troyes. It dates from 1666, but it may reflect an earlier period since its design is simple. The second, in the parish of Chavanges (Aube), is more complex: six figures on the lower left, and at least eight on the lower right. Its most remarkable feature is that the priest giving communion to the sick person looks like Vincent de Paul. If so, this would be the earliest known painting from life. It bears the date 1642. The third, in the parish of Lhuitre (Aube), is similar to the previous, and may feature a more mature Vincent de Paul. It is undated. The fourth and fifth, located in Saint Germain en Laye, are even more complex in terms of the number of figures. The figure of the priest is generic. The sixth has not yet been restored, but is believed to be similar to all the others. The last one is in the parish church of Brie-Comte-Robert (Seine-et-Marne). It, too, is

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14 (F. Portal, C.M.) “Louise de Marillac et le Sacré Coeur,” Petites Annales de Saint Vincent de Paul 1:6 (15 June 1900): 173. The artist was Duviert. The painting bears the following text at the base of the canvas: “This painting and those of the high altar are an undying witness to the charity of the distinguished Claude Hervé, widow of the late Claude Seurat. She gave these paintings to this church in the year 1666.” Despite what is said in a notice on the subject, the figure is not of the Sacred Heart. (A. Prévost, Saint Vincent de Paul et ses œuvres dans le diocèse de Troyes [Troyes, 1896], 163-65.)

15 This painting contains two texts, written out on scrolls held by angels at both sides of the head of the central figure. The one on the left reads: “Come you blessed of my Father. Take possession of the kingdom prepared for you since the beginning of the world.” That on the right: “... because I was hungry and you gave me to eat, thirsty and you gave me to drink, I was sick and you visited me. Matthew 25[:36].” It may be that Louise de Marillac was responsible for this addition of the works of charity, to preserve for posterity the image of her director, who would not consent to have his portrait painted.

16 It hangs in the baptistery of the church of Sainte Tanche. The text is the same as that of the Chavange painting.

17 Fernand Portal, “Notes sur l’iconographie de Saint Vincent de Paul. II. Les représentations du Seigneur de la Charité,” in Georges Goyau, Les Dames de la Charité de Monsieur Vincent. 1617-1660 (Paris: Art Catholique, 1918), xxv-xxx. This painting is identified in Pierre Coste, C.M., “Une fête à Saint-Germain-en-Laye,” Annales C.M. 91 (1926): 977-91. Since Coste’s day, the two paintings have been restored and are the property of the town of Saint Germain.

18 This was located at Mailly-le-Camp (Aube), as mentioned in Portal, “Notes,” xxvii, but may now be at the former major seminary of Troyes.
undated, but resembles the large Paris painting of the Lord alone. However, it also has the three texts found on the more complex, and presumably later, examples.

For our purposes here, it should be remarked that none of these paintings of the Lord of Charity includes the eventual motto of the Congregation of the Mission.

**Use of the Emblem: Seals**

In Vincent's era, seals were used in two ways, for either letters or documents. Since letters were not sent in envelopes, they were closed by placing a small piece of paper on the outside of the carefully folded letter. This small tag was held in place by a dab of sealing wax, pressed by an identifying seal. Hence, these seals were visible on the exterior. Seals were often used in verifying signatures to a document. In this case, they were often pressed directly into sealing wax dropped onto the page, or indirectly on a small piece of paper laid over the warm wax. These seals were normally placed below the signatures.

The wax impressions on letters which Vincent de Paul wrote, and of various early seals, have the same design as the Lord of Charity. As superior general of the Mission, Monsieur Vincent had to have an official seal. For his early letters, however, he simply used a drop of wax with pieces of paper, without a specific seal. One example is reproduced in an early portrait dated to about 1700; the emblem below his portrait is similar to that of the Visitation. Once he had selected a design for an official seal, he had at least three of them made, large, medium, and small. The text on each of them differs somewhat, probably depending on the amount of space available to the engraver: Large: SUPERIOR GENERALIS. CONGREG. MISSIONIS. Medium: svp. GENERALIS. CONG. MISSIONIS. Small: SUP. GEN. CONG. MISS. The three seals are oval, and each one generally follows the same design. They depict the Lord alone, standing on the globe, with garments billowing over his left shoulder, hands outstretched downward, rays of light, alternating long and short, streaming from his head.

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19 The large seal is clearly shown in Dodin, *Saint Vincent*, 98, and measures 3 cm. in height; the medium, 2 cm. Coste describes this seal in his *The Life & Works of Saint Vincent de Paul*, 3 vols. (Westminster, Maryland: Newman, 1952), 3:349.

20 The original large and small seals are preserved in the Archives of the Mission, Paris. The medium seal is known only through its impressions.

21 The mirror image of the design painted by Louise de Marillac, since engravers often copied their work directly, thus yielding a reverse of the original once copies were made from the engraved plate.
Vincent de Paul, IHS and heart emblem (about 1700)

*Courtesy of the author*

Large seal of Vincent de Paul

*Courtesy of the author*
In contrast with the model painted by Louise, which shows up also in the paintings of the Lord of Charity, the four wounds are either not shown, or difficult to distinguish.

It is not known when Vincent used his official seals for the first time. The earliest surviving letter known to have the large seal, however, is dated 19 September 1632, written to François du Coudray. The earliest letter using the medium seal is 31 March 1641, and the earliest with the small seal dates to late 1637 written to Louise de Marillac. M. Vincent was somewhat inconsistent in his use of the seal, particularly in the letters he wrote himself. By contrast, judging from the dossiers in the Archives of the Mission, Paris, the Daughter of Charity Archives, Paris, and the Turin and Krakow Vincentian archives, when his secretaries wrote letters for him, they almost always used one of the three seals.

Earlier in life Louise herself used a variety of seals simply to close letters. The first seal she used for the Daughters of Charity has the appearance of the emblems of the Society of Jesus or of the Visitation: IHS surmounted with a cross. The familiar seal of the Daughters of Charity, however, did not appear on letters to M. Vincent before 1644.

Besides a seal for the use of the superior general, others were also needed to authenticate documents from additional houses and provinces of the Congregation of the Mission, as well as their superiors and visitors. By the 1650s they can be seen on documents and letters sent to M. Vincent. These used the same design as his seal but had different texts. For example:

Saint Lazare, house: SIGILLUM MISSIONIS DOMVS S. LAZARI PARISIEN.
Bons-Enfants, superior: SVPER.COLEG.BON.PVER.PARIS.CONGREG.MISSION.
Rome, superior: SVP.CONG.MISSIONIS.ROMAE.
Genoa, superior: SVP.CONG.MISSIONIS.GENVEN.
Poland, visitor: V.PR.POLONIAE.CONG.MISSIONIS.

22 Letter 124, CED 1:173-74. Coste, however, does not speak of the details of the seals.
24 Letter 276, CED 1:394-95. The letter itself is undated. Coste supplied the date of November 1637.
25 This is reproduced by Portal, "Louise de Marillac," 174.
26 Louise to Vincent, 2 April 1657, mentioning the Daughters' seal (Letter 2239, CED 6:270-71).
27 The most complete collection of these original seals is found in the volume of documents from each house accepting the brief of Alexander VII on the vows; these are dated generally in 1655 or 1656. (Archives of the Mission, Paris.) Not every house sealed its document, although seventeen did.
There are few, if any, seals belonging to individuals, since this was forbidden by the practice enshrined in the Common Rules: “When a letter is written it should be submitted to the Superior, and it will be up to him whether to send it or not.” (V,11) In other words, letters normally were to be handed in to the superior unsealed.

Another example of the seal is found on the bell dated 1644, which the founder sent to the seminary newly opened in Troyes. The design is as we know it, except that the position of the arms of the figure of Jesus differs slightly from the standard rendering. The text around the two emblems on the bell is difficult to decipher, but apparently is: DOM.TRECENSIS.MISSIONIS.28

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28 An article in the Annales C.M. has badly misread the text, rendering it: “Evangelisare pauperibus misit me Dominus,” clearly based on the form of the seal relevant when the article was written. The bell was displayed at the former Grand Séminaire de Troyes. (Charles Lalore, “Un souvenir de Saint Joseph et de Saint Vincent de Paul au Grand Séminaire de Troyes,” Annales C.M. 47 [1882]: 485-88.) It is not clear whether the two identical seals were added later or formed part of the original decoration.
A general seal, marked SIGILLUM CONGREGATIONIS MISSIONIS ["seal of the Congregation of the Mission"], also exists. It was used for the book containing the minutes and decrees of the general assemblies, beginning, however, on the day of Vincent’s death in 1660.29

It was left to René Alméras, Vincent’s successor in office, to regulate the question of seals. Alméras sent a circular letter dated 4 August 1670, to accompany the Rules of Office revised by the assembly of 1668. In this letter he noted that the Admonitor (to the superior) should have a separate seal, smaller than that of the superior. More importantly, he wrote: “The Visitors should also have their own seal, so that the superiors of their provinces might better recognize their letters addressed to individual confreres of their house, and so that they would not be opened, but be delivered to them sealed. This seal should have around the image these words: Visitator Provinciae N. Congregationis Missionis [“Visitor of the Province of N. of the Congregation of the Mission”].” Unfortunately, the superior general did not specify the content of the image.30 This decree has been followed fairly regularly since that time. As a result, none of the existing seals, whether belonging to the founder or to others, includes the traditional motto of the Congregation of the Mission.

The differences between this figure of Jesus and the engraving done for the frontispiece of the Common Rules, dated 1658, should be noted. In contrast with the Lord of Charity, this latter shows Jesus teaching, his right arm upraised in a gesture of blessing, and his left pointing to a work of charity. This engraving also has two biblical citations: Sicut misit me Pater, et Ego mitto vos. Io. 20 [“As the Father has sent me, so I send you. John 20”] and Circuibant per Castella Evangelizantes & c. Luc. 9 [“They went about the villages preaching the gospel etc. Luke 9”] (The title page of the rules also has the text Et erat subditus illis. Luc. 2 [“And he was subject to them. Luke 2”].) Besides the texts, the design also shows various acts of charity.31 This frontispiece was, in a sense, the founder’s last chance to present an image of Jesus, the evangelizer of the poor. He did so, but without either the emblem or the motto

29 Unlike those mentioned above, this was a dry seal, used for embossing documents.

30 Circular Letter of René Alméras, from Paris, 4 August 1670, manuscript; vol. 230, “M. Alméras et son generalat 1661-1672” in Archives of the Mission, Paris. In addition, some provinces or houses adopted a language other than Latin for the legend on their seals.

31 The basis for this design might be found in the vignettes on various copies of the painting of the Lord of Charity.
Stult mutit me Pater, et Ego mito vos. Io. 20.

Circuivant per Castella Evangelizantes &c. Luc. 9.

Common Rules Frontispiece

Courtesy of the author
Early drawing of arms and motto, by Fermin Get
Courtesy of the author

familiar to today's Vincentians.

**Use of the Emblem: Arms**

Arms in the form of a shield were often used to identify buildings, such as Saint Lazare. When Firmin Get, the superior in Marseilles, wrote to ask permission to display the arms of the Congregation on a new building, he received the following from Saint Vincent: "Très volontiers je trouve bon que vous fassiez mettre sur la porte de votre nouveau bâtiment les armes dont vous m'avez envoyé le modèle."³² ["I consent most willingly to your placing over the door of your new building the coat of arms, for which you sent me the model."] The fragile page sent by Get, with the drawing of the arms and the motto, may still be the one in the archives of the Maison Mère. Following the traditional shape, the arms are not oval, like the seals were, but rectangular, in the shape of a shield. Note that the motto appears here on a ribbon below the shield, not surrounding the figure on the shield.

This letter may make it appear that Get was the designer of the emblem, but the late date of the letter shows otherwise. What the saint probably meant was that he approved the use of the traditional em-

³² Letter 1872, *CED* 5:379, and note 2, dated 14 May 1655. The design of this seal is described in Godefroi de Montgrand, *Armorial de Marseille*, 252, as reported in H. Simard, *Saint Vincent de Paul et ses œuvres à Marseille* (Lyon: E. Vitte, 1894), 96. The colors are a silver background, the Savior in flesh-colored tints, clothed in red and blue, as typical of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; the rays around his head are gold.
blem taken from the seals, worked into a coat of arms, with the addition of the text.

Similar graphic ideas also appear. One is in an unexpected place: the design of the emblem of the Enfants Trouvés (the foundlings) organization. This depicts the Child Jesus, rays streaming from his head. He faces forward, with arms extended downward. His body, wrapped tightly in the bands common to children of that day, rests on a base of clouds. This design is seen in the emblem itself, with its surrounding identifying text, and in at least one painting. The particular canvas, prepared for the canonization of the saint, portrays a large painting in the background, behind the figure of Vincent de Paul addressing a group about the foundlings. It is unclear whether the community’s emblem and this design are directly related. Their similarity, however, suggests that they are. Another derivative is the posture of some nineteenth-century statues of the founder. The sculptor, consciously or not, depicted the saint in the same attitude of open-handed charity.33

33 These are found at the Vincentian Motherhouse, in the passage leading to the chapel at the rue du Bac, and at the chapel of the Berceau.
Origin of the Motto

The origin of the choice of the motto is unknown. Louis Abelly, Vincent’s first biographer, did not mention the choice of a motto, either for the Congregation as a whole or for the founder personally.34 Firmin Get may have chosen the text (see letter 1872 above), but this is unlikely, given its importance. Vincent commented occasionally on the text, taken from Luke 4:18, based on Isaiah, “Evangelizare pauperibus misit me,” but did not claim that this text summarized his entire spiri-

34 Abelly did, however, remark as follows: “We can say in truth that without realizing it, he [Vincent] left us a miniature portrait of his whole life and a sort of motto, when he said one day: ‘Nothing pleases me except in Jesus Christ.’” Louis Abelly, The Life of the Venerable Servant of God: Vincent de Paul, ed. by John E. Rybolt, C.M., 3 vols. (New York: New City Press, 1993), 1:103.
Neither do the Common Rules or the early constitutions (as available in the Codex Sarzana) propose an official motto or emblem for the Congregation. The motto and emblem were not pictured in the illustrations accompanying the Common Rules, nor in the various printer’s devices in the booklet itself. Saint Vincent, in fact, used other biblical texts to describe the mission, as mentioned above.

The Common Rules, however, do allude to the text in the introductory letter: “My idea was that men who are called to continue Christ’s mission, which is mainly preaching the good news to the poor ["qua potissimum in Pauperum Evangelizatione consistit"] should see... because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives....”

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35 See conference 180, 17 May 1658, on the rules, for a discussion of this text (CED 12:3ff.); conference 195, 6 December 1658, on the end of the Congregation (CED 12:90ff.); conference 216, 7 November 1659, on vows (CED 12:367ff.); conference 19, (CED 11:32), and conference 86, 29 October 1638, on perseverance (CED 11:108ff.). Although the text in the Latin Vulgate is that cited here, the original languages (Greek, Hebrew) and modern translations divide the sentence differently. “...because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives....”
things from his point of view and want what he wanted." This is far from the choice of a motto.  

Emblem and Motto: Decline and Restoration

A. Eighteenth Century

In the period before the French Revolution, apart from Get's use of the emblem in the arms decorating the Marseilles house, it was used only on oval or circular seals for letters and documents. Because of the need to identify the authority behind the seal, the motto did not appear with it.

The text appeared, carved on a book lying at the saint's feet, in the large statue sculpted by Pietro Bracci (1700-1773) for Saint Peter's basilica in the Vatican, and placed there in 1754. Why did Bracci choose this text? It is uncertain, but he may have known of its connection with the Congregation, or he may simply have chosen it – as others did – as well illustrating the life of the newly canonized saint. In addition, neither the series of paintings commissioned by the Congregation to celebrate the founder's canonization, nor that by Antonio Bicchierai displayed during his canonization at the Lateran basilica,

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36 Other references are both in Common Rules 1,1: "quando evangelizavit pauperibus," and "evangelizare pauperibus, maxime ruricolis."
depict the emblem or the motto. 37

Two Spanish engravings, one dated 1767, have variations on the same text: SPIRITUS DOMINI SUPER ME, EVANGELIZARE PAUPERIBUS MISSIT [sic] ME. LUC C 18.

Although this motto did not appear with the emblem used as a seal, two other texts, however, also became associated with Saint Vincent during the eighteenth century. These showed up in various engravings, paintings and pious images perhaps more as slogans than as mottoes. The first and most common was CHARITAS CHRISTI URGET NOS ["the charity of Christ urges us"]. 38 This text appeared in French (1685, a work prepared for the Daughters of Charity) or Latin (in an engraving by Bonvicini dated 1735 and used in an Italian edition of the life of Vincent, and another, dated 1746, drawn for the house in Turin at the time of its opening). Although Saint Louise probably chose one form

37 Antonio Bicchierai (1688-1766) specialized in religious subjects and painted several for beatifications and canonizations. (See Marcello Fagiolo, La Festa a Roma dal Rinascimento al 1870, 2 vols. [Rome, 1997], 247.) His canonization painting of Saint Vincent ascending into Glory is displayed at the Leonine College, Rome. A recent general work that treats the Bracci statue, among others, is Noè, Virgilio (Cardinal), I Santi Fondatori nella Basilica Vaticana (Modena, Italy, 1996), 515 pages.

38 2 Cor 5:14.
of the text as the motto of the Company of the Daughters of Charity ("The Charity of Jesus Crucified urges us"), it was also used to commemorate Vincent's devotion to practical charity. For instance, it was used in an eighteenth-century painting of the Community's emblem now in the refectory of the Vincentian house on Via Vergini, Naples. Since the text was depicted on ribbons with the emblem, this makes it appear that it was the motto to accompany the emblem.

A further version appears on an undatable seal with the Congregation's emblem, and the following two texts: CARITAS CHRISTI URGET NOS. INfirmus ET VISITASTIS ME. The latter portion ("I was sick and you visited me")³⁹ points to the possibility that this seal was used in hospital work, perhaps in connection with a Confraternity of Charity. When and where is unknown.⁴⁰

The second text, used as something of a motto, is AD SALUTEM PAUPERUM ET CLERI DISCIPLINAM ["for the salvation of the poor and the education of the clergy"] taken from the collect written in 1741 after the canonization of Saint Vincent. This appears on some engravings of the period.

We can conclude from this examination of eighteenth century usage that the text Evangelizare pauperibus misit me did not appear associated with the emblem of the Congregation of the Mission. It did appear, however, but only rarely, with images of Saint Vincent. A simple reason for this could be that this text is longer than the more commonly used CARITAS CHRISTI URGET NOS. The latter text also had the advantage of emphasizing the role of Saint Vincent in founding various charitable works in France, especially those for abandoned children. Vincent de Paul was better known in France, even before the Revolution, for his work with the foundlings.⁴¹

³⁹ Matt 25:36.
⁴⁰ This seal is found in the Archives of the Mission, Paris.
⁴¹ Another text, probably not in common use is DIEU EST CHARITÉ ["God is love"]. This appeared with the emblem on the cover of the Petites Annales de S. Vincent de Paul, beginning in 1901. This was a publication of the seminarians in Paris, but served as a vehicle for several historical articles. There does not appear to be any commemorative or religious medal of the saint with designs on both faces which bear the emblem of the Congregation with or without the motto. One small medal in the collection of the Archives of the Mission, Paris, has the text from 1 Cor 9:22: OMNIBUS OMNIA FACTUS SUM ["I have become all things to all"].
B. Early Nineteenth Century

Immediately after the French Revolution there was little interest in the question of the emblem and motto of the Congregation. The Congregation clearly was in disarray after its suppressions and restorations in lands controlled by the French. Many old seals continued to be used for official documents, however, since engraving new ones was costly. A new seal was nevertheless designed for the superior general, although it is difficult to be clear about its date. The earliest known date for the use of this new seal is 2 September 1828. The text is SVP.GEN.CONG.MISS. The artist used some freedom in this design: placing Christ on a support, like a traditional Tabor for a monstrance, and having two branches of leaves or perhaps palm fronds, on the outer rim of the seal, below the letters. This may be the same as the medium seal, mentioned previously, used by Vincent de Paul himself, or it may be modeled on it.

Neither do we find the emblem, with or without the motto, on the title pages of the Congregation’s official books printed in France. Also, it did not figure in the works of Brother François Carbonnier (1787-1873), the Vincentian artist of the mother house, who decorated the chapel in the 1840s and 1850s. Standard depictions based on the early emblems were not found in Italy, Spain, and Poland, nor the overseas missions. Instead, the Saint Vincent monogram came to be used.

The monogram consisted of the two letters S and V intertwined in some pattern. This was a fairly common artistic idea, and similar monograms are associated with other saints, such as SJ for Saint Joseph, and SL for Saint Lazare. The monogram is found in the decoration of the interior and exterior of the mother house, especially the chapel designed by Brother François in later decades. It also features in the carved stone decoration of the chapel of the Berceau, completed in the 1860s. Over time the SV monogram came to be used on the title pages of books, on letter-head stationery, occasionally for the seals of houses, and it has continued in use to this day, such as for the library and archives of the Maison Mère.42

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42 Less commonly, the letters SVP are also found.
C. Mid-century Restoration

By the time of the generalate of Jean-Baptiste Étienne (1843-1874), the iconography of the Congregation began to develop again as the Community itself became better organized. The former seals of the provinces and visitors either remained in use or were replaced in the older provinces and newly made for the younger ones. Used either to seal a letter with wax, to emboss paper, or to rubber stamp documents, these new seals, like older models, were generally oval, although round versions were also employed.

The Vincentian emblem can also be found in the decoration of the Maison Mère chapel, completed in mid-century. Besides the SV monogram mentioned above, the familiar ovals with the figure of the glorified Christ also appeared, but without any motto. The major text in the chapel, instead, is PERTRANSIT BENEFACIENDO ["He went about doing good"]⁴³ painted in an arc over the casket exposing the remains of the saint. The same text, in French, was used on a medal prepared at some period in the nineteenth century to commemorate Saint Vincent: IL PASSA EN FAISANT BIEN. The image, however, is of Saint Vincent standing, dressed in cassock and surplice, with a child at his side.⁴⁴

⁴³ Acts 10:38, where Peter says it of Jesus.
⁴⁴ In the Archives of the Mission, Paris. This same text also appears on the façade of the chapel at the Berceau, a building related in time and intent, if not in architecture, to the chapel in Paris.
In 1845, a figure of Christ, apparently taken from the emblem, appeared without the motto on the title page of at least one book printed for the Congregation in Paris.\textsuperscript{45} However, no indication exists of an official adoption of the emblem and motto for use as a seal by any general assembly in the nineteenth century, nor in the minutes of the general council in the same period. Where did these ideas come from? The push to adopt an emblem and motto may have come from the Daughter of Charity seal and motto which appeared on the title pages of their official books beginning in 1852.\textsuperscript{46}

Another influence might well have been the Miraculous Medal. The oval medal had the familiar text, "O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you," surrounding the design of the Virgin. She is pictured with arms outstretched, standing on a globe,

\textsuperscript{45} Collectio Selecta Decretorum Conventuum Generalium Congregationis Missionis (Paris: Leclere, 1845).

\textsuperscript{46} Prières extraites du formulaire à l'usage des Filles de la Charité (Paris, 1852).
with stars around her head.\footnote{Seals and emblems from the Irish province, dated from 1849 to 1861 at least, show a similar variety of style; none has the motto surrounding the emblem.} Seen from a distance, the Vincentian emblem and the front of the Miraculous Medal are virtually indistinguishable. In addition, the decoration of the Vincentian Mother House chapel, and occasional house seals, employ a Marian monogram, either an intertwined AM (Ave Maria), or even the M surmounted by the cross, as appears on the reverse of the Miraculous Medal. This use may point to the Community's search for appropriate images for self-identification. In any case, if, on the one hand, the Vincentian emblem offered a model for the medal, it was on the other hand most probably the medal which confirmed the Vincentians’ use of the emblem and motto together.

The earliest known use of the emblem surrounded by the motto took place outside of Europe, among the members of the American province. After their designation in 1835 as an independent province, their need for identification grew, and so the Vincentians adopted various emblems and mottos. Early printed stationery bore texts like \textit{AD SALUTEM PAUPERUM ET CLERI DISCIPLINAM} (1840) or a design of Mary, modeled on the Miraculous Medal; or the AM (“Ave Maria”) monogram with a cross (both 1860s), or simply “Congregation of the Mission” (1860).\footnote{The source of this design is the sculptor Edme Bouchardon (1698-1762), whose silver statue of the Virgin Mary was venerated in the church of Saint Sulpice in Paris until it was destroyed during the Revolution. Because of its fame, it was often copied, and the archbishop of Paris designated it as the model for the front of the Miraculous Medal. (René Laurentin, \textit{Vie de Catherine Laboure}, 2 vols. [Paris, 1980], 1:102-103.) The artistic relationship between the Lord of Charity (the Vincentian emblem) and Bouchardon’s Immaculate Conception is too close to be an accident, but it is impossible to prove a conscious connection.} Out of these somewhat tentative designs came, surprisingly,
the first use of the oval emblem with the motto, dated 1862. This was used for letterhead stationery prepared for houses and the province by the printer Murphy in Baltimore, who produced the earlier stationery of 1840.⁴⁹

In France the earliest known uses of the oval emblem and the motto are a medallion on the main altar crucifix at the Maison-Mère, dated 1867, a stained-glass window at the church in Folleville, dated 1869, and an illuminated parchment prepared for the fiftieth anniversary of Étienne's vows (celebrated on 4 August 1870, the twenty-seventh anniversary of his election as superior general). Although the motto does not completely surround the emblem in these last two depictions it appears to be only artistic license, since the same design was followed for the emblem and motto of the Daughters of Charity also depicted on the same windows and document.⁵⁰

Dumont engraving of emblem and motto, 1882
Courtesy of the author

This initiative was not soon repeated, perhaps because of the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war (1870-1871), and the decision taken by the superior general to flee to Brussels.⁵¹ Only after his return and death in 1874 did an engraving by the artist Dumont make its appearance in an official publication, dated 1876.⁵² That year marked the tercentenary of the birth of Saint Vincent, following the date 1576 given

⁴⁹ The American text sometimes reads: EVANGELIZARE PAUPERIBUS MISIT ME DEUS. CONG. MISS.
⁵⁰ Archives of the Mission, Paris.
⁵¹ War was declared 19 July 1870, and concluded with the treaty of 10 May 1871.
⁵² Acta Apostolica... in Gratiam Congregationis Missionis (Paris, 1876).
by Abelly. Whether the French model was taken from the American version or developed independently is unknown, but it seems likely that the American stationery offered a model to be imitated by others. From 1876, the Dumont emblem with the motto began to be used more commonly, propagated probably because of the Catalogue des Maisons et du Personnel, and on the cover of the Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission. In these cases, the text was uniformly EVANGELIZARE PAUPERIBUS MISIT ME, followed by a star. The four words were separated by a raised period. However, the new design also appeared in the aforementioned coat-of-arms, and these two alternated in some official publications.  

The emblem, with or without the motto, offered possibilities for part of the heraldry of Vincentian bishops or for their vicariates or dioceses (such as for Bishops Lynch in Canada, and Rosati in the United States, during the nineteenth century, and most likely other earlier bishops). In the twentieth century, too, the emblem continued to be used on seals. One reason was probably that many of them were made in Paris under the direction of the procurator of the Mother House. This guaranteed a certain level of uniformity. In addition, the emblem and motto were used in countless decorative ways, such as watermarks, and identification of buildings. They were embroidered into vestments

53 The combined use of the emblems of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity joined with the SV, or sometimes the AM, monogram seems to date only to the late 1930s.
and banners, and were worked into a multitude of materials: glass, stone, and bronze in particular.

**Contemporary Use, Theological Content**

As can be seen from the accompanying illustrations, today there are many varieties of the emblem and its accompanying motto. There is, however, no official "logo;" none was specified in the Constitutions of 1984, for example. Instead, several versions of the Community's emblem are in use.

![Modern version of emblem and motto](image)

Unlike the emblem and motto, the SV monogram was introduced among the Daughters of Charity to provide a recognizable emblem in areas where the use of the habit was not permitted. Then, because of its popularity among the Sisters, members of the Congregation of the Mission also began using it, although unofficially. This monogram has appeared on pins, letterheads and printed books among other places.

The Congregation of the Mission has developed its self-image in various ways over more than 350 years. As it has for other congregations, such as the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, the words *Evangelizare pauperibus misit me*, chosen in the beginning, whether by Saint Vincent, Firmin Get or by someone else, have continued to offer spiritual descendants a powerful subject for reflection. As the Vincentians have contemplated their identity in recent years, they have once again held up before themselves what Jesus took as his motto in the synagogue at...
Capharnaum. The Christocentric emblem reminds Vincentians that they go on mission as Jesus did, the “Evangelizer of the Poor,” following Saint Vincent’s expression.55 This connection with Jesus is also evident in the Constitutions, paragraph five: “Hence, Jesus Christ is the rule of the Mission, and shall be considered as the center of its life and activity.”

The Congregation of the Mission might well have used as its emblem one of many other symbols: the Trinity (the patron of the Congregation),56 a book, or the Blessed Virgin, the Blessed Sacrament – these are represented in the title page of the Common Rules. The emblem might have had something to do with the Community’s works, such as a light or candle, a galley, or some emblem of the priesthood. However, the Congregation made use of the glorified resurrected Jesus. He is pictured with wounds in his hands and feet, but in an open-handed attitude of charity. For the Congregation this emblem can easily represent the charity vowed by its members. Jesus’ major statement about his mission on earth, Evangelizare pauperibus misit me, now accompanies the emblem. Both emblem and motto together fuse the two aspects of Jesus’ ministry, the corporal and the spiritual. These ingredients could be explored much further for the purpose of edification and animation.

Those who follow Saint Vincent can take comfort and strength in identifying with this glorified yet wounded Jesus, sent to evangelize. The words “He has sent me,” seen as personalized, refer to the vocation of each member to mission.

56 Although the text of a repetition of prayer denotes that Vincent said the “Pope has given us the Most Holy Trinity as a Patron” (23 May 1655, CED 11:180), the Bull of Approbation speaks only of a “special devotion to the Most Holy Trinity” (CED 13:260), nor does it seem correct theologically. Nowhere else does Vincent claim a patron (saint) for the Congregation of the Mission, although, concerning a patron for the Daughters of Charity, he did so frequently in his conferences to them.
Official Seal of the Vincentian Fathers, Western Province, Saint Mary’s Seminary. 
Courtesy of the De Andreis-Rosati Memorial Archives, DePaul University, Chicago, Illinois