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Vincentian Priesthood as missionary

— An essay written for the 400th anniversary of St. Vincent's ordination —

By Robert P. Maloney, C.M.
Superior General

Jesus is *the* priest of the New Testament. There is no other priesthood than his. "I am the way, the truth, and the life," Jesus tells us, "no one comes to the Father except through me."¹ It is he who is the enfleshed Word of God, revealing the Father to us in his person. It is he who offers sacrifice "once for all,"² as the author of Hebrews puts it. It is he who pastures the flock. "I am the shepherd."³ "I am the vine."⁴ "I am the gate."⁵ "I am the light."⁶ "I am the true bread come down from heaven. The one who feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood will live forever."⁷ All ministerial⁸ priesthood is a sharing in that of Jesus.

Having said this, I have already stated the most basic thing about priesthood. As a service to the Kingdom, and to the Church as sign of the Kingdom, its source and pattern is Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

This article attempts to situate St. Vincent's vision of priesthood within a theological framework and to draw a few implications from the model of priesthood he chose.

Variety of models

Because priesthood, like all mysteries, is rich, it reveals itself in a wide variety of ways. Vatican II analyzes priesthood under three traditional headings: teaching, sanctifying, and ruling.⁹ In a commentary on the council, written 25 years after its closing, Avery Dulles discusses five models of priesthood:¹⁰ cleric, pastor, presider,

¹Jn 14:6.

²Heb 9:12, 26; 10:12, 14.

³Jn 10:11.

⁴Jn 15:6.

⁵Jn 10:9.

⁶Jn 8:12.

⁷Jn 6:51.

⁸As is evident from the occasion chosen (the 400th anniversary of St. Vincent's ordination), this article focuses on ministerial priesthood. One could also write at great length on the priesthood of all the baptized — especially in light of Vatican II and its aftermath — but that is a topic for another day.

⁹*Presbyterorum Ordinis* 1, 4-6; cf. *Lumen Gentium* 28.

¹⁰Avery Dulles, "Models for Ministerial Priesthood," *America* 20 (#18; October 11, 1990) 284-289.

herald, and servant. Then, recognizing that these models all refer to functions of priests and sensing the insufficiency of a functional approach, he sketches a summary model, which he calls "representational," since he judges that the priest in each of his functions represents Christ as head of the body.¹¹

In a talk given in 1995, Rembert Weakland also describes the priest's role under five categories:¹² teacher/preacher, presider, healer, enabler, leader. Similarly, Walter Burghardt, reflecting on his rich experience among priests, speaks of jurisdictional, cultic, pastoral, prophetic, and monastic models.¹³

These different analyses make one thing very clear: priesthood involves a variety of functions, even if no one of these adequately describes it. There are different emphases and models in living it. How priests embody these functions concretely will vary from age to age, from culture to culture, and often from person to person.

Priestly roles in the new testament

Raymond Brown, in his brief but influential book *Priest and Bishop*,¹⁴ analyzes four principal roles that funnel into Christian ministerial priesthood, describing each of them in these terms:

1. *Disciple*

Jesus calls the twelve to be with him more intimately: "You are my friends."¹⁵ This sets up a pattern for the Church's seeing priests as particularly obliged to faithful discipleship. If Christians are called to be a light to the world, the minister is called to be a light to the community.

While it is clear in the New Testament that all Christians are called to be disciples, it is also clear that Jesus gives a distinct leadership role to some and makes special demands of them.

2. *Apostle*

But the priest is called not just to *be with* Jesus, he is also *sent out* to others in Jesus' name.

¹¹As Vatican II puts it, the priest acts "in persona Christi capitis" (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 2).

¹²Rembert Weakland, "A Renewed Priesthood in a Renewed Church," *America* 25 (#19; October 26, 1995) 327-334.

¹³Walter Burghardt, "On Turning Eighty: Autobiography in Search of Meaning," *Woodstock Report* (#41; March 1995) 2-11.

¹⁴Raymond Brown, *Priest and Bishop* (New York: Paulist, 1970).

¹⁵Jn 15:14.

The apostle is a missionary figure, someone who moves on. The keynote of his ministry is service. This service is rendered first to Jesus, by being his ambassador, and then to others. The New Testament describes a variety of services which the apostle shares with others:

- * preaching
- * teaching
- * counseling
- * praying
- * consoling
- * correcting
- * visiting
- * befriending
- * suffering
- * collecting money
- * doing ordinary work

3. *Elder-Bishop*

The elder-bishop is a residential figure. He is responsible for the daily, ongoing care of a local church. He has the task of organizing, stabilizing, managing the household well. Administration is one of his chief responsibilities. He is to administer as a shepherd who cares deeply for his flock.

Most of the authority structures of Christian priesthood develop around this image, but they are supplemented consistently by the disciple and servant images.

4. *One who presides at the Eucharist*

The New Testament witnesses to a rich variety of interpretations of the Eucharist and gradual development in regard to its practice. By the end of the first century, as is evident in the *Didache*, the Eucharist had come to be seen as a sacrifice. As this happened, the ministry of presiding at the Eucharist was recognized as an exercise of priesthood. The elder-bishop was seen as the usual presider, the focus of unity in the community.

By the time of Ignatius of Antioch (who died around 110), the four roles that Brown describes have blended, and the full concept of Christian ministerial priesthood emerges. Priesthood takes varied forms as one or another of the roles is emphasized,

but all four have this in common _ bearing witness to Jesus: "Become imitators of me as I am of Christ."¹⁶

A contemporary theological perspective¹⁷

Perhaps the most influential contemporary analysis of ministerial priesthood is found in the writings of Karl Rahner.¹⁸ Rahner's view might be synthesized as follows:

The primary role of the priest is to proclaim the effective word that forms and sustains the Christian community. He shares in the mission of Christ, who is sent by the Father to proclaim God's kingdom. The priest is, therefore, a servant of the kingdom and of the Church as a sign of that kingdom. A culminating moment in his ministry is the liturgy, especially the Eucharist, where the priest efficaciously proclaims, "This is my body.... This is my blood," and the Lord himself is really present in sacramental form to nourish and strengthen his people. Rahner summarizes: "This efficacious word has been entrusted to the priest. To him has been given the word of God. That makes him a priest."¹⁹

As a leader in the Christian community, the priest is also called to prophetic witness, to live the word he preaches, to "imitate what he handles," so that he might proclaim the gospel not only by his word but by his life. In this sense, Christian priesthood combines the roles of Old Testament prophet and priest.

¹⁶1 Cor 11:1.

¹⁷Among many other works, the reader might wish to consult: Raymond Brown, *Priest and Bishop: Biblical Reflections* (New York: Paulist Press, 1970); Bernard Cooke, *Ministry to Word and Sacraments: History and Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976); Donald B. Cozzens, *The Changing Face of the Priesthood* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2000); Jean Galot, *Theology of the Priesthood* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1984); Nathan Mitchell, *Mission and Ministry: History and Theology in the Sacrament of Order* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1982); Henry J. M. Nouwen, *Creative Ministry* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971); Henry J. M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972); John W. O'Malley, S.J., "One Priesthood: Two Traditions," in *A Concert of Charisms*, Edited by Paul K. Hennessy (New York: Paulist Press, 1997) 9-24; Thomas O'Meara, *Theology of Ministry* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983); Kenneth B. Osborne, *Priesthood: A History of the Ordained Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988); William D. Perri, *A Radical Challenge for Priesthood Today: From Trial to Transformation* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1996); David N. Power, O.M.I., *Ministers of Christ and His Church: A Theology of the Priesthood* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1969); "Theologies of Religious Life and Priesthood," in *A Concert of Charisms*, Edited by Paul K. Hennessy (New York: Paulist Press, 1997) 61-103; Karl Rahner, *Servants of the Lord* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968); Karl Hermann Schelkle, *Discipleship and Priesthood*; Edward Schillebeeckx, *The Church with a Human Face: A New and Expanded Theology of Ministry*. Trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroad, 1985).

¹⁸Cf. Karl Rahner, *Servants of the Lord* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968); "Understanding the Priestly Office," in *Theological Investigations XXII* (New York: Crossroad, 1991) 208-213..

¹⁹Karl Rahner, "Priest and Poet," in *Theological Investigations*, III translated by Karl-H. Kruger and Boniface Kruger (New York: Helicon, 1967) 303.

The priest's role in building up the community involves a variety of functions, traditionally described as *teaching* ("prophet," dedicated to the word), *ruling* ("king," "shepherd of the flock," dedicated to pastoral leadership), and *sanctifying* ("priest," dedicated to the sacraments and other forms of prayer).

As is evident, in Rahner's approach, proclamation of God's community-forming word is at the heart of priestly identity. The traditional priestly functions flow from this identity. This is clearest perhaps in the case of preaching and teaching ("prophet"). But sacramental ministry too ("priest") is an aspect of the priest's role as proclaimer, when he brings God's effective word to bear on crucial moments in the lives of believers. Likewise, pastoral leadership ("king") involves discerning what God's word is saying in the concrete circumstances of the life of the community and then applying it through decisions.

Priesthood for St. Vincent²⁰

St. Vincent was very much influenced by the thought patterns and the vocabulary of his contemporaries and teachers. Bérulle, to whom Vincent owed so much but from whom he eventually distanced himself, focused much of his spirituality on the priesthood.²¹ In Vincent's conferences and letters, we find many of the same phrases and emphases that we discover in the writings of Bérulle, Olier, and John Eudes. They speak above all of the centrality of Christ and the need for the priest to empty himself and "put on the Lord Jesus Christ."²² They encourage priests to have "religion toward God."²³ They are very conscious of the "exalted" role of the priest and the need for the priest to be holy.²⁴

²⁰The reader might wish to consult: D'Agnel, *Saint Vincent de Paul, guide du prêtre*, 1928; J. Delarue, *L'Idéal missionnaire du prêtre d'après saint Vincent de Paul*, 1946; L. Mezzadri, "La espiritualidad sacerdotal," *Anales* (1983) 627; L. Mezzadri, "Jésus-Christ, figure du prêtre missionnaire dans l'oeuvre de Monsieur Vincent," *Vincentiana* (1986) 323; E. Motte, *San Vicente de Paúl y el Sacerdocio*, 1915; L. Nuovo, "Sacerdocio," *Diccionario de Espiritualidad Vicenciana* (Salamanca: CEME, 1995) 550-552; J. B. Rouanet, *San Vicente de Paúl, sacerdote instrumento de Jesucristo*, 1960; C. Sens, "Comme prêtre missionnaire," *Au temps de St. Vincent de Paul... et aujourd'hui...*, 1981; R. Facéline, "Vocation and Mission of the Priest According to St. Vincent de Paul" in *Vincentiana* (2000) 218-227.

²¹René Deville, "L'École française de spiritualité (Paris: Desclée, 1987) 112. Cf. Michel Dupuy, *Bérulle et le sacerdoce. Étude historique et doctrinale. Textes inédits* (Paris: Lethielleux, 1969).

²²Rom 13:14.

²³Cf. J.-J. Olier, *Introduction à la vie et aux vertus chrétiens*, (Edition Amiot, 1954) 7-9. The term is difficult to translate. It means, basically, having a covenant relationship with God in an ecclesial context.

²⁴Bérulle, with considerable exaggeration, describes the loss of holiness among priests in this way: "The first priests were indeed both saints and doctors of the Church. God preserved within this same order authority, holiness and doctrine, uniting these three perfections in the priestly order.... However, time, which corrupts all things, brought about laxity in most of the clergy. These three qualities: authority, holiness and doctrine, which the Spirit had joined together, were separated by the human

Vincent joined these and other leaders of the time in the reform of the clergy, becoming one of its principal proponents. As was often the case with him, his view of priesthood, while influenced by his teachers, was independent of theirs, especially as he envisioned priesthood in the Congregation he founded.

For Vincent, in his mature years, Jesus the priest is most of all the missionary of the Father, the Evangelizer of the Poor. He knew that there had been great scholar priests like Sts. Jerome, Albert the Great, and Thomas Aquinas, that there had been outstanding residential priests like Ambrose, Basil, and Chrysostom, that there had been influential monk priests like Benedict and reforming curial priests like Bellarmine, that there had been zealous street priests like Philip Neri, and that in his own time there were wonderful teacher priests, especially among the Jesuits. All this entered into his thought patterns, but he chose to focus on another model: the priest as missionary.²⁵

Yet St. Vincent wrote relatively little about priesthood. Nor did he speak about it in a systematic, theological way. His perspective is largely practical, as was his bent. While in part he shares the vision of those who most influenced him, particularly Bérulle, his view gradually grows distinct from theirs. We can summarize his teaching under four headings.

1. *He was very critical of priesthood as he actually found it in early 17th century France.*

A large number of the priests Vincent met were ignorant. Their lives were undisciplined and corrupt. Many bishops were self-interested and had little care for their flock. As a priest told him in 1642, "the most scandalous are the most powerful, and flesh and blood have, as it were, supplanted the gospel and the spirit of Jesus Christ."²⁶ Vincent believed that priests and bishops were the principal cause of the evils within the Church.²⁷ He cites John Chrysostom as saying that few priests will be saved.²⁸

Of course, Vincent was conscious that he himself had not been exempt from the temptation to embrace priesthood as a comfortable career. He was ordained at 19 with precisely that objective in mind. But he underwent a remarkable conversion in which a

spirit and the spirit of the world. Authority has remained in prelates, holiness in religious, and doctrine in the schools." Cf. "A Letter on the Priesthood," cited in *Bérulle and the French School, Selected Writings* edited with an introduction by William M. Thompson (New York: Paulist Press, 1989) 184.

²⁵Cf., SV XII, 262: "All aim at loving Him, but they love Him in different ways: Carthusians by solitude; Capucians by poverty; others again by singing his praises. But we, my brothers, if we have this love, are bound to show it by leading the people to love God and their neighbor...."

²⁶SV II, 282.

²⁷SV XI, 308-309.

²⁸SV VII, 463.

series of events purified his view of priesthood. I will not recount those events here since they are well known to the reader and others have done so both frequently and well.²⁹

He came to see priesthood as an exalted vocation of which he was unworthy. He wrote in 1656: “This state is the most sublime on earth, the very one Our Lord willed to assume and follow. As for myself, if I had known what it was when I had the temerity to enter it — as I have come to know since then — I would have preferred to till the soil than to commit myself to such a formidable state in life — to be sure, priests today have great reason to fear God’s judgments, since, in addition to their own sins, He will make them accountable for those of the people because they have not tried to satisfy God’s just anger for them, as they are bound to do. What is worse, He will impute to those priests the cause of the chastisements He sends them.... Let us go further and say that all the disorders that have afflicted the Savior’s holy Spouse stem from the evil lives of priests....”³⁰

In his conference of December 6, 1658, Vincent cries out: “There is nothing greater than a priest, to whom God gives all power over his natural and mystical body, the power to forgive sins, etc. Oh, God, what power! Oh, what dignity!”³¹

2. *The priest, by his character, participates in the priesthood of Jesus.*³² *He is an instrument.*

In a conference on the formation of the clergy, Vincent states that the character of priests is a participation in the priesthood of the Son of God. It is a character that is completely divine and incomparable.³³

In repeating this point often, St. Vincent stands in the main stream of the entire Christian tradition. Jesus is *the* priest. All other priests share in Jesus’ priesthood. They are his instruments.³⁴ This theological principle gave St. Vincent an awe for the dignity of priesthood.³⁵ It led him to say a hundred times (he himself states!)³⁶ that if he were not already a priest, he would never have become one.

²⁹As Dodin, Román, Mezzadri, and many others point out, one cannot fully understand Vincent’s view of priesthood (and many other things in his life) without understanding the series of events that led to his conversion. Cf., André Dodin, *Saint Vincent de Paul et la charité* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1960) 11-25; also, Luigi Mezzadri, “Jesus-Christ, figure du Prêtre-Missionnaire, dans l’œuvre de Monsieur Vincent,” in *Vincentiana* N° 3-4 (May-August) 1986, 326-330; José María Román, “The Priestly Journey of St. Vincent de Paul. The Beginnings: 1600- 1612” in *Vincentiana* N° 3 (May-June) 2000, 207-217.

³⁰SV V, 568.

³¹SV XII, 85.

³²SV XI, 7, 344.

³³SV XI, 7.

³⁴SV XII, 80.

³⁵SV VII, 463; XI, 93.

³⁶SV VII, 463.

In language very reminiscent of Bérulle and Olier, Vincent writes to a priest of the Mission:

Oh! how fortunate you are to be the instrument of Our Lord in forming good priests and to be an instrument such as you, who enlighten and fire them up at the same time! In this you do the work of the Holy Spirit, who alone enlightens and inflames hearts — or rather, this Holy and Sanctifying Spirit works through you, for he resides and operates in you. He does so, not only that you may live of his divine life, but also to establish his same life and manner of working in these men, called to the most lofty ministry on earth, through which they must exercise the two great virtues of Jesus Christ, namely, reverence toward his Father³⁷ and charity toward mankind.³⁸

Of course, since the priest's life and mission are so intrinsically tied up with that of Jesus, then "putting on the Lord Jesus Christ" means, in the concrete, acquiring Jesus' virtues, particularly the five missionary virtues to which Vincent calls members of his Congregation. It also means standing before the Father faithfully in prayer and listening to his word. Vincent tells William Desdames on January 30, 1660, that he will find in Christ all virtues and "if you let him do it, he will exercise them in you and for you."³⁹

3. *His dominant model of priesthood is missionary.*⁴⁰

Quite independently from the teaching of Bérulle, his former master, Vincent makes a definite choice of his model of priesthood: the priest is for him predominantly a missionary: "God sent out priests as he sent his Son for the salvation of souls."⁴¹ It is clear that Vincent focuses on the "apostle" or missionary model which Raymond Brown describes as being so prominent in the New Testament:

My brothers, he who says missionary says apostle. We must therefore act like the apostles, since we are sent, like them, to instruct the people. We must proceed with gentleness, and in simplicity, if we wish to be missionaries and imitate the apostles and Jesus Christ.⁴²

³⁷In the French, *la religion vers son Père et la charité vers les hommes*. This terminology is very characteristic of the "École Française." Cf. Olier, *Pietas*, n. 4 (Editions Amiot, 1954) 165, where almost exactly the same words are used.

³⁸SV VI, 393.

³⁹SV VIII, 231.

⁴⁰SV XI, 67.

⁴¹SV VIII, 33.

⁴²SV XI, 267.

Luigi Mezzadri puts the matter very succinctly: “Between the pseudo-Dyonisian concept of priest as ‘man of cult’ and the Augustinian concept of priest as ‘man for the mission’ Vincent instinctively chooses the second.”⁴³

Vincent returns to this theme again and again:

This is how truly apostolic souls speak and act. Entirely consecrated to God, they desire that His Son Our Lord be known and served likewise by all the nations on earth, for whom He Himself came into the world; like Him, they wish also to work and die for them. That is how far the zeal of Missionaries should extend; for, even though they cannot go everywhere, nor do the good they wish, they still do well to desire this and to offer themselves to God to serve Him as instruments for the conversion of souls....⁴⁴

4. *The missionary priest is for the poor.*

The whole life of the missionary priest must be dedicated to the poor. St. Vincent states this very eloquently:

That priests give themselves zealously to caring for the poor — is not that the office of Our Lord and of a number of the great saints, who not only recommended the poor to others but who consoled, comforted and healed them themselves. Are not the poor the afflicted members of Our Lord? Are they not our brothers? And if priests abandon them who do you imagine will assist them? So, if there are some among you who think that they are members of the Congregation to evangelize the poor and not to aid them, to remedy their spiritual needs and not their temporal ones, I respond that we must assist them in all ways.⁴⁵

Vincent recommends a practical, concrete, pastoral charity and a willingness to seek out the poorest of the poor wherever they might be:

To make God know to the poor, to announce Jesus Christ to them, to tell them that the Kingdom of God is near and that it is for the poor, oh! how great that is.⁴⁶

He insists:

⁴³Luigi Mezzadri, *op. cit.*, 348; cf. also, “La conversione di S. Vincenzo de’ Paoli. Realtà storica e proiezione attuale,” in *Annali della Missione* 84 (1977) 176-182.

⁴⁴SV VII, 333.

⁴⁵SV XII, 87; cf. XI, 202, 391; XII, 84.

⁴⁶SV XII, 80.

One could ask the Son of God: ‘Why did you come?’ It was in order to evangelize the poor. That was your Father’s order.... It may be said that by coming to evangelize the poor we do not mean to come merely for their salvation but also for accomplishing those things predicted and prefigured by the prophets, to make the gospel concretely effective.⁴⁷

Some Implications

Let me offer, on this occasion of the 400th anniversary of St. Vincent’s ordination, just a *few* implications of his choosing a missionary model for priesthood. On other occasions I have written at considerable length about other implications.⁴⁸

1. During this post-Vatican II period, many observers have noted the phenomenon which is sometimes called “parochial assimilation.” Especially in countries where there is a shortage of diocesan clergy, many bishops have asked religious and members of Societies of Apostolic Life to take over parishes. From their point of view, such requests are quite understandable, since bishops need resident priests to take care of the people in their dioceses; their dominant model of priesthood is necessarily a resident one (the third model presented above in the schema of Raymond Brown). But, from the point of view of a missionary congregation, parochial assimilation can bring with it immobility and the domestication of a charism that demands that a priest go wherever in the world the needs of the poor summon him. Elsewhere I have written at length about St. Vincent’s attitude toward parishes.⁴⁹ Here, let me simply state that the Congregation, and all its provinces, must make every effort to remain quite mobile, even in the face of bishops’ requests to take over parishes.

2. When St. Vincent emphasized the awesomeness of the state of priesthood, because it is a share in the ministry of Christ, he regarded this as the grounds for humility, since the priest will always be unworthy to participate in the “office of the Son of God.”⁵⁰ He did not make the mistake of confusing ordination to this “awesome” state with promotion to a prestigious social status. Priests are ultimately servants. Our lifestyle as missionaries should demonstrate this. Though it is surely important that we celebrate joyfully on the occasion of ordinations, there is a tendency in some countries, as the rectors of seminaries often attest, toward triumphalism and lavish celebrations at ordinations. I am happy that in the Congregation this is not usually the case, though unfortunately sometimes it does happen. Ordinations should clearly signify and celebrate a call to mission and itinerant ministry, not to status (other than the status of being a servant).

⁴⁷SV XII, 84.

⁴⁸Cf. Robert P. Maloney, “On Being A Missionary Today” in *He Hears the Cry of the Poor* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1995) 118-125.

⁴⁹Cf. Robert P. Maloney, “On Vincentian Involvement in Parishes,” in *Vincentiana* N° 2 (March-April) 1997, 105-116.

⁵⁰SV XII, 80.

3. While diocesan priests and bishops necessarily focus on the local Church, missionaries must develop and constantly nourish a universal sense of the Kingdom and the Church. St. Vincent was admirable in this regard. In an era when most people lived and died within five miles of their birthplace, he sent missionaries to Poland, Italy, Algeria, Madagascar, Ireland, Scotland, the Hebrides, and the Orkneys. Today, when the Vincentian Family has spread to more than 135 countries, it is all the more imperative for missionaries to have a global world-view.

4. Missionaries have a distinctive form of relationship with local bishops. St. Vincent's life illustrates this strikingly. He was both obedient and independent. He repeatedly emphasized that when we give missions in a diocese we should do so at the call of and in obedience to the local ordinary. But at the same time he resisted the attempts of bishops to domesticate the Congregation. In fact, he labored for years to make sure that we were exempt from their authority so that we might preserve our mobile, missionary nature (he made analogous efforts, with similar success, in regard to the Daughters of Charity). There is a long tradition of tension in the Church between exempt groups⁵¹ and local ordinaries.⁵² It is very important that religious superiors be able to negotiate this tension with balance. On the one hand, the bishop is in charge when we are engaged in an apostolic mission in his diocese. On the other hand, our own superiors are in charge in choosing what dioceses we go to, how long and under what conditions we will stay, and when we will withdraw. Dialogue is, of course, crucial in such matters, but our own superiors must be firm in promoting and protecting the charism of the Congregation.

5. After a rather dubious start as a priest, Vincent became a great reformer, speaking often to priests and about priests. In his conferences to the members of the Congregation, Vincent preaches a recurrent theme as he sends missionaries out: that they be holy. If we share in the missionary vocation of Jesus, then we must "pattern ourselves, as far as possible, on the virtues which the great Master himself graciously taught us in what he said and did."⁵³

6. Let me suggest, as a conclusion to this article, *ten* characteristics of the missionary priest today. There are surely many others.

- a. He is a mobile evangelizer, on fire to spread the good news.
- b. He has an international perspective, a global world-view.
- c. He is in vital interaction with the culture of the country where he serves.
- d. He learns the language of his people.
- e. He is deeply rooted in the scriptures.

⁵¹Cf., Canon 591.

⁵²In the fifth century, John Cassian wrote: "A monk ought by all means to fly from women and bishops"! He added that this was an "old maxim of the Fathers." His concern, of course, was that bishops would interfere in the lives of the monks or try to use them for their own goals. Cf. *De institutis coenobiorum et de octo principalium vitiorum remediis* 11.18 (ed. J.-C. Guy, SC 109.444; tr. E. C. S. Gibson, NPNF, 2nd series, 11.279.

⁵³*Common Rules* I, 1.

- f. He is creative in confronting the needs of the poor.
- g. He is well informed about the social teaching of the Church.
- h. He is engaged in ongoing formation.
- i. He is a man of God, deeply rooted in Christ.
- j. He lives out the five missionary virtues: simplicity, humility, gentleness, self-denial, and zeal.

To be a *missionary* — that is the calling of Vincentian priests — to breathe deeply of the missionary spirit that St. Vincent inspired in the Congregation, to let it fill our minds and hearts, and then to go. "Go into the whole world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mk. 16:15).