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## The Spirituality of the Daughter of Charity

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I have been asked to present the spirituality of the Daughter of Charity and how to live this spirituality in the Company today. I do not claim to make a fundamental presentation on the spirituality of the Daughter of Charity. I am simply going to share with you my way of presenting our spirituality to the (young) sisters of the Seminary. I am counting on your personal experience to complement and make distinctions according to your own context.

### Some preliminaries, by way of introduction

To begin, it seemed a good idea to remind ourselves of what we understand by Christian spirituality, as I do with the Seminary sisters. For this, we can begin with an extract from Romans where St. Paul speaks of life in the Spirit.

For the Christian, spirituality is “life according to the Spirit of Jesus,” this Spirit which gives belief in Jesus Christ, who guides him/her to love as Jesus Christ, and to be committed as Jesus Christ. In effect, the Holy Spirit progressively guides the Christian to reflect Jesus’ manner of living and acting, to make his style of life, his quality of life, one’s own, living more and more in concert with the philosophy of Trinitarian love.

Living according to the Spirit of Jesus means therefore to allow oneself to be shaped, inspired, and led by the same Spirit that shaped, inspired, and led Jesus Christ. This action of the Holy Spirit takes hold of the entire person: heart, body, spirit, with one’s emotions, psychological make-up, behavior, relationships, etc.

John Paul II writes in the Post-Synodal Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (1996 N<sup>o</sup>. 93):

*... the spiritual life, understood as life in Christ or life according to the Spirit, presents itself as a path of increasing faithfulness on which the (consecrated) person is guided by the Spirit and configured by him to Christ, in full communion of love and service in the Church.*

*All of these elements ... give rise to a specific spirituality, that is, a concrete program of relations with God and one’s surroundings, marked by specific spiritual emphases and choices of apostolate, which accentuate and re-present one or another aspect of the one mystery of Christ.*

The central reference for Christian spirituality, therefore, is Christ, as presented in the four gospels. And when we speak of spirituality in the plural, we want to stress the unique ways of following Christ. All Christians do not have the same calls to the mission nor the same charisms. They, therefore, do not all have the same questions, nor

the same challenges to overcome. Christians have different responses characterized by spiritualities that manifest different approaches to the world and to humanity. That is the richness of the Church.

In the following talk, I will approach the spirituality of the Daughter of Charity through the dimension of the Mystery of the Redemptive Incarnation. For this manner of Christ's love deeply touched our Founders and today it remains a challenge for our contemporary world.

My talk is divided into two parts:

- In the first part, I will focus on the spirituality of the Daughter of Charity in the light of that of the founders
- In the second part, we will see how our spirituality allows us to take up the challenges even today.

## **I. The Spirituality of the Daughter of Charity**

Every founder has his/her own way of reading and revealing the Gospel, of taking in, putting into action, and living certain characteristic traits of Jesus. The strong lines of our spirituality as Daughters of Charity follow from this particular way the Founders felt called by Jesus Christ, and invited to participate in his life and mission.

### **A. A baptismal spirituality**

Like all baptized persons, Daughters of Charity are called to the fullness of Christian life. Our entire life as Daughters of Charity is rooted in our baptism. By baptism, Daughters of Charity are incorporated in Christ and consecrated to God. *“Children of God by baptism and living members of the Body of Christ, the Daughters of Charity go to the Father through the Son and in the Spirit. They aspire to live in uninterrupted dialogue with God, remaining in his hands in filial confidence and in submission to his Providence”* (C 2.2).

The Founders frequently remind us that to be “good Daughters of Charity,” is to be “good Christians” (Coste, Conferences to DCs, 113).

In line with baptismal consecration, we are committed to live and act in the spirit of Jesus Christ. *“When it is said that the Holy Spirit acts in anyone, we mean that the Holy Spirit, abiding in such a person, bestows on him the same inclinations and the same dispositions as Jesus Christ had on earth, and causes him to act in the same way. I do not say with equal perfection, but according to the measure of the gifts of this Spirit”* (Coste, Conferences to CMs, 627).

It is therefore, only possible to do as Christ did on the condition of being what he was. *“Whoever looks at the life of Jesus Christ will see an incomparable resemblance in*

*the life of a Daughter of Charity.”*

According to the experience of faith of the Founders, the spirit of humility, simplicity, and charity are concrete expressions of the Spirit of Jesus Christ who must animate our lives as Daughters of Charity. *“It is the will of God that Daughters of Charity should devote themselves particularly to the practice of humility, charity, and simplicity”* (Coste, Conferences to DCs, 529).

Clothed in the Spirit of Jesus as servant, we embrace the risk of living with him, like him, following him, reflecting his manner of living and acting, imitating him.

## **B. A Christocentric spirituality**

All Christians are called to follow Christ and imitate him, but many roads are offered to live this call. As Daughters of Charity, we are called to follow Christ such as the founders perceived him through their spiritual experiences. *“Christ is the Rule of the Daughters of Charity. They endeavor to imitate him as their Founders perceived him revealed in Scripture: Adorer of the Father, Servant of his Loving Plan, Evangelizer of the Poor”* (C 1.5).

### **1. Following Christ as the Founders perceived him**

We contemplate Christ as **Adorer of the Father**, entirely turned toward the Father, and as **Servant of the Father’s Loving Plan**, the work of redemption for which he was sent. We join him in his manner of speaking, particularly to the lowly and the poor, as **Evangelizer of the Poor**.

These three features of Christ must be read in their deepest wholeness: if Jesus is Evangelizer of the Poor, he is the Servant of the Loving Plan of his Father to humanity. And if he is the perfect Servant, it is because his being is totally centered on the Father.

### **2. and continuing his mission**

It is not enough to contemplate the characteristic traits of Christ as perceived by the Founders. It is also about putting them into action in our lives through our life as servant of the poor. For this, we choose to live the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience totally and radically which make us available for the service of Christ in the poor.

Our entire life is marked by the total gift to God. This implies a continuous detachment of ourselves: *“What does a Daughter of Charity say who makes vows of poverty, chastity and obedience? She says that she renounces the world, that she despises all its beautiful promises and gives herself unreservedly to God”* (Coste, Conferences to DCs, 820).

## **C. Spirituality in reference to the mystery of Redemptive Incarnation**

According to our Founders, the center of our lives is the person of Christ, God incarnate in the history of humanity in order to save all. All during their lives, they contemplated this Mystery of the Incarnation through the mystery of the cross.

*They contemplate Christ in the self-emptying of his Redemptive Incarnation and they marvel “that a God should somehow be unable or unwilling to be separated from man” (C 2.2 and St. Louise).*

Our Founders honored Jesus Christ

- in his Incarnation, living and acting among men and women in order to save them
- in his Redemption, giving his life for them.

## **1. The mystery of the Incarnation or Christ incarnate**

Our entire life is founded on faith in the mystery of the Incarnation which is the greatest expression of the mercy of God in regards toward humanity. *“God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” (Jn 3:16).*

The Incarnation manifests the depth of the mystery of God to humanity. It definitively reveals who and how God is. Christ became incarnate so that God might be close to humanity to the point of really becoming one of them. *“He was made in the likeness of all men, except sin,”* St. Paul tells us.

The act of self-abasement and shattering of Christ reveals God’s humble manner of becoming close to humanity, in becoming one of them, lowly and dependent. Jesus is not only *“God among us”* but also *“God for us.”*

At the school of our Founders, we contemplate Jesus Incarnate:

- who is present and who acts in a given time and place;
- who gives his life to save humanity.

### **a. Jesus Incarnate, a man who is PRESENT in a given time and place**

In meditating on the mystery of the Incarnation, our Founders contemplate the humble insertion of Jesus in familial, professional and social environments.

#### **\* His humanity**

**Childhood:** The Founders contemplated the poverty of the infant in the crib. “Do we not also see how the Eternal Father, having sent his Son on earth to be the Light of the World, nevertheless caused him to appear here in the guise of a little boy, just like one of those poor little boys you see coming to the door...” (Coste, Conferences to CMs, 353).

For St. Louise, the childhood of the Son of God “give us freer access” to go to him. *“It is from the example of his infancy that you will obtain all that you need to become true Christians and perfect Daughters of Charity, ask him for his Spirit.”* (Writings, L. 647, p. 666)

**Life at Nazareth:** Our Founders were also surprised by the fact that the Eternal Word made Man spent the greater part of his life in obscurity and devoted to the most ordinary tasks of everyday life. Life at Nazareth represents the essential of Jesus’ life, it is the place of silent and anonymous work. *“We must honor the unknown state, the hidden life of the Son of God”* (Coste, Correspondence I, 81, Letter to Louise de Marillac, N° 50) *“The Son of God, in becoming man, was pleased to adopt a common life that he might be conformable to men ... He also had the same manner of working, of making his way, and of acting like us ... He wanted to insert himself in our nature to unite us with him. He became man to show us by his manner of living how we should live...”* (Coste, Conferences to CMs, 572-573). St. Louise, in advised a sister beginning a new work to contemplate how Jesus buried his life in the midst of his people (Writings, L. 575 to Anne Hardemont, p. 659) *“it is important not to despise the ‘not doing’ of the hidden life of the Son of God...”* (Coste, Conferences to DCs, 16, 23).

For the Founders, it is loving the everyday, doing the ordinary things of life well, including the apparently little and obscure tasks.

**\* Life of faith: “Jesus, Adorer of the Father”**

St. Vincent was struck by the familiarity that Jesus had with God and the surprising intimacy between him and his Father. Jesus is *“faith towards his Father* (Coste, Conferences to CMs, 627-628) and *“charity towards humanity”* (Coste, Conferences to CMs, 584-585) he said. Completely turned towards the Father, Jesus also is totally oriented towards humanity, since the Father’s gaze is turned towards humanity.

For our Founders, it is living in constant union with God in order to recognize God’s active presence, not only in prayer, but also in the heart and life of humanity.

**\* Spiritual struggle: “Jesus, Servant of God’s Loving Plan”**

Our Founders dwelled a long time on Jesus’ acts of humility during his public life, both at the beginning of his ministry when he inclined before his precursor as well as before his apostles when he bent down to wash their feet. *“I must remember the humility that Our Lord practiced at his baptism, to serve as an example that I must imitate...”* says St. Louise.

For our Founders, Jesus seeks only the will of his Father. *“Our Lord’s standard was to do the will of the Father in all things; and for this end, he says that he came upon earth not to do his own will but that of his Father”* (Coste, Conferences to CMs, 492). In the desert, the devil tried to endanger Jesus. The devil not only tempted him in his

mission, but above all in the way he carried it out. Jesus refuses all earthly power, all superficial success, all riches in order to proclaim the primacy of God. He freely chooses to enter into the hidden and simple way daily responsibility. “*The Son of God resolved to be poor!...*” (Coste, Conferences to DCs, 812); “*Our Lord performed all the actions of his life from obedience*” (Coste, Conferences to CMs, 795).

For our Founders, it is a question of following the poor, chaste, and obedient Christ in leading the struggle against the spirit of power, domination, popularity, passivity, etc.

### **b. Jesus Incarnate, a man who *acts* to save humanity**

For St. Vincent, Jesus is not only Adorer of the Father and Servant of his Loving Plan, but also Evangelizer of the Poor. He became incarnate to evangelize and serve the poor.

#### **\* *Jesus, Evangelizer “of the Poor” (Luke 4: 18-19)***

Through her reading of the Gospel of the Samaritan, St. Louise contemplated the love of Christ towards sinful humanity and glimpsed her mission of reconciliation (*Writings*, A 7, p. 700-701).

Faced with the poverty and ignorance of the country people, St. Vincent reflected particularly on the priority Jesus accords the poor in order to express God’s love for all peoples. “*The Son of God came to preach the gospel to the Poor*” (Coste, Conferences to CMs, 299). “*Our Lord Jesus Christ, it would seem, made his chief care, on coming into the world, to help the poor and to take care of them*” (Coste, Conferences to CMs, 111-112).

For our Founders, it is placing the poor at the heart of our lives and concerns, reflecting and organizing our lives in function of them.

#### **\* *Jesus, Evangelizer “through Charity”***

Our Founders often reflected on Jesus’ manner of evangelizing the poor, principally through his being “perfect Charity” which made him kneel before his own in order to serve them in a spirit of humility. “*Our Lord spent himself and his life in service to his neighbor,*” St. Louise tells the sisters in Nantes (*Writings*, L 513, p. 541).

Filled with compassion for all who suffer, Jesus healed the sick, expelled demons, and reintegrated the excluded into society to show God’s tenderness to all. “*We must imitate the life and actions of Our Lord ... who said he was not on earth to do his own will, but to serve and not be served.*” For the Founders, what characterizes the evangelical attitude of Jesus is that he puts himself in the position of servant before all, even before the one who opposed him, Judas. “*The Son of God was consumed with love of the Father in serving the poor*” (Coste, Conferences to CMs, 512)

For St. Vincent and St. Louise, it is putting oneself at the service of healing all who suffer, by a corporal and spiritual service, in order to realize one's vocation as a child of God and become a "friend of God."

## **2. Mystery of the Redemption or Christ the Servant**

Our Founders honored Christ not only in his Incarnation, but also in the great mystery of the Redemption as an act of love par excellence. They contemplated Christ under the two following traits:

- the suffering, humiliated Christ;
- the Servant Christ who gave his life to the end for all men and women.

### **a. Jesus humiliated, the "Poor one" par excellence**

*"When Our Lord was on the cross, what distress was he not in?"* Even though he knew well that it was for the salvation of humanity and for the glory of God his Father, nevertheless, he was pierced with pain and experienced interior sorrow to the point of crying: *"My Father, why have you abandoned me?"*

Our Founders contemplated Jesus Christ humiliated, scorned, despised, beaten, and scourged, taking upon himself violence, cruelty, injustices, and lies to expiate all sins and bring humanity back to the Father's love. The Founders recognized the face of God through humiliation, suffering, misunderstanding, and the crucifixion.

For our Founders, it is about not letting oneself be disheartened by contradictions but to have an attitude of poverty of spirit such that God can love and forgive through us.

### **b. Jesus the Servant gives his life to the end for humanity**

*"Could he witness a greater love than in dying the way he died?" "Look at the Son of God! Oh, what heart of charity! What flame of love ... You have come to expose yourselves to all kinds of miseries ... to take up a life of suffering and to suffer a shameful death for us. Is there any comparable love? But who could love in a more distinguished way? Only Our Lord who is so in love with his creatures that he left his Father's throne to come and take on a human body subject to infirmities. And why? To establish for us, by example and word, charity of our neighbor. It is this love that crucified him and made this act worthy of our redemption" (Coste, Conferences to CMs, 584-585).*

Jesus the Servant lives his mission with a love that led to dispossess himself to be all for others. He went to the end in his offering and since this was rejected, going to the end entailed death.



Our Founders contemplated in the cross, the sign of the infinite love of the Servant, who did not seek revenge, did not punish, but pardoned his executioners and accepted the annihilation of himself. It is in loving, in serving, in saving humanity in abasement and the total gift of himself on the cross that Jesus carries out the Father's loving plan. There, he will appear to us as "*the source of humiliated love, just for us*" (Coste, Conferences to CMs, 584).

For our Founders, it is in giving without reserve, without restriction and without return for the service of the poor. Reflection on the mystery of the Redemptive Incarnation of Christ is naturally followed by the mystery of the Resurrection. If the Risen Christ has no longer had anything to do with space and is beyond time, he is nevertheless always with us until the end of the world (Mt 28:20). The life of the Risen Christ embraces all places and all time. He continues to love the world, to desire its good, and its salvation. The Risen Christ invites us to be with him and in him, to see in his earthly life the model of the mission close to the poor in order to continue it.

#### **D. A spirituality of incarnate servant today**

The Risen Christ continues to become incarnate today in the hearts and lives of humanity. According to the spirituality of the Founders, we continue the mission of Jesus Christ. Like them, we experience Christ Incarnate and Redeemer who continues to be **present** and **active** in our personal lives and at the center of the world. Like them, we respond to the call of Christ who invites us to continue his mission close to the poor, in offering him all that we are and all that we do, in constant trust in Divine Providence (C. 1.9). For us, Daughters of Charity, the actualization of the spirituality of the Founders is authenticated in a **spirituality of service, rooted in charity**.

Constitution 2.1 (last paragraph) states that our spirituality of service, in a large sense, progressively leads us to an identification with Christ the Servant. "*It is this imitation of Jesus the Servant that Saint Vincent and Saint Louise recommended to the Sisters.*"

Constitution 1.10 specifies that the path along which we should allow ourselves to be guided by the spirit of Christ the Servant is that of the three evangelical virtues of humility, simplicity and charity.

For the Founders, there is a profound link between the three attitudes of Christ the Servant described in Constitution 1.5 (Adorer of the Father, Servant of his Loving Plan, Evangelizer of the Poor) and the three evangelical virtues they recommended to us.

The three specific virtues characterize our servant spirituality:

- 1 – Humility in following Christ, Adorer of the Father
  - welcoming the Spirit of Jesus Christ
  - looking with faith on peoples and events

- 2 – Simplicity in following Christ, Servant of the Loving Plan of the Father
  - an attitude of servant for continuing that of Christ the Servant
3. – Charity in following Christ, Evangelizer of the Poor
  - service to the whole person and to all people

## **1. Humility in following Christ, Adorer of the Father**

Our spirituality as Daughters of Charity is characterized first of all by a profound attitude of welcoming the presence of the Risen Christ before taking action.

It is rooted in a living faith in his presence that continues to be incarnate in the history of humanity, in the very simple realities of everyday joys and sorrows, as well as in scripture and the sacraments.

### **a. Welcoming the Spirit of Jesus Christ**

Essential to our spirituality is the movement of “emptying ourselves to be filled with God” and “clothing ourselves with the spirit of Jesus Christ” (Coste, Conferences to CMs, 626). Within our everyday lives, we give ourselves to God. We welcome God’s Spirit, in order to live in deep union with him and serving him in the poor.

To depend on the Holy Spirit is to allow him to create in us a resemblance to the humble, simple, loving Christ (C 1.10, 2.3). *“My dear sisters, give yourselves wholly to God to do thoroughly well what you are going to do. Ask him for the Spirit of his Son that you may be able to perform all your actions as he did his* (Coste, Conferences to DCs, 474). *“It is the will of God that Daughters of Charity should devote themselves particularly to the practice of humility, simplicity, and charity”* (Coste, Conferences to DCs, 529).

Times of personal and community prayer are privileged times to contemplate the incarnate Christ and to welcome him as he is revealed in the gospel and in daily life, particularly in the lives of the poor.

In a spirit of humility, we recognize the Father’s unceasing love for us, uniting us to him. We meet Christ the Servant; we learn to look at the world as Christ saw it and to enter more into his humility and charity.

### **b. Eyes of faith towards peoples and events**

Humility is that attitude of the heart that turns us towards God and towards others. It helps us develop eyes of faith which lead us to a shifting away from ourselves in a positive dynamic because it allows us to recognize the active presence of the Father in the person and life of the poor.

Following the Founders, we live an authentic encounter with God in meeting and

serving the poor. *“In serving the poor, one serves Jesus Christ”* (Coste, Conferences to DCs, 289). When we welcome the poor, we welcome the Lord such as he gives himself to be seen in our world today.

Nourished by prayer and the Eucharist, where we discover the body of the Lord in the poor and simple signs of the word, present in the bread and wine, we learn to recognize him more in the body and spirit of the poorest as in the impenetrability of so many difficult situations where we live. *Through faith the Daughters of Charity “see Christ in the poor” ... The sisters find Christ and contemplate him in the heart and life of the poor (C. 1.7). “Turn the medal and you will see with the light of faith that the Son of God, who became poor, is present to us in the poor...”* (Coste, Conferences to CMs, 42).

In faith, we are invited to contemplate on the face of the humiliated and disfigured poor, whatever their type of poverty may be, the face of the Crucified: Jesus Christ, poor, humiliated and disfigured by his passion.

We believe that the Risen Jesus continues to give himself to be seen in all wounded by life (physical, psychological, emotional, moral, spiritual wounds). Having welcomed his Spirit, we can, like Thomas, recognize him as “My Lord and my God” and say like St. Vincent: *“They are our Lords and Masters.”*

In accomplishing this faith approach which consists in recognizing and welcoming the incarnate Christ in prayer, events and the life of others, we truly become “Adorers of the Father” and make of our entire life a place of union with God.

## **2. Simplicity in following Christ, Servant of God’s Loving Plan**

Constitution 2.1 states: *“It is this imitation of Jesus the Servant that Saint Vincent and Saint Louise recommend to the sisters ‘in order that they might live as good Christians and be good Daughters of Charity.’”* Constitution 2.2 emphasizes: *“They contemplate Christ in the self-emptying of his Redemptive Incarnation and they marvel ‘that a God should somehow be unable or unwilling to be separated from man.’”* *“They learn from the Son of Man how to reveal to their brothers and sisters God’s love for the world.”*

### **A servant’s attitude for continuing that of Christ the Servant**

Our being as Daughters of Charity must, therefore, translated and extend, in our time, the being of Christ the Servant. That is why our spirituality as Daughters of Charity is not only expressed by a welcoming **attitude**, but also by **one of servant**.

In contemplating Christ’s attitude, Servant of the Father’s loving Plan, we gradually learn to do only what pleases him and to desire to do his will as a servant. This virtue of simplicity leads us to become more and more Servants of the Father’s Loving Plan in going directly to God with a disposition that is clear to all. Constitution 2.2 states: *“They endeavor to be docile to the promptings of the spirit, convinced that they*

*will be the instruments of his work insofar as they are faithful.... Louise de Marillac expressed the desire that the Company be dependent on the Holy Spirit so that it might fulfill the designs of the Father and bear witness to the Son, risen from the dead.”*

This attitude of the heart which makes us seek the will of God allows us to discover more profoundly the mystery of Christ’s Cross. It leads us to follow him in his struggles and sufferings through concrete resolutions and the practice of the Evangelical Counsels.

We strive to imitate Jesus’ act of total self-giving to the Father to save humanity. The virtue of simplicity reminds us that humbly washing the feet of the poor is only possible when we live in constant communion with Jesus the Servant.

### **3. Charity in following Christ Evangelizer of the Poor**

Our mission as Daughters of Charity continues the mystery of the Redemptive Incarnation in our day; that is, the involvement of God in the history of humanity. That is why our spirituality as Daughters of Charity is not only expressed in welcoming and being servant, but also by **the action** of being servant.

Rooted in Christ the Servant, who is the “source and model of all charity” (C 2.1 last §, St. Vincent in C 1.4), seeking to allow him to create his image in us, we serve him in the person of the Poor. Our entire life expresses “a state of charity” of which Christ is the source and model. The inseparable love of God and neighbor that is expressed in our service of the poor gives our vocation all its meaning. To be “servants of the poor” is not an action of one moment, but brings us into a “state of charity” (C 2.9 § 1) that includes our entire life.

We must not confuse charity with generosity or even solidarity. Charity is at the same time a vision of faith and putting into action the love of God.

#### **Serving the entire person and all persons**

“Apostles of Charity,” we are sent by Christ, close to the poor, to continue his work of freedom and thus to show them the face of love. The Charity of Christ crucified urges us to love the entire person and to “help every human being to fulfill his or her vocation as a child of God” as is stated in Constitution 2.3.

#### **\*Serving the entire person**

When the Risen Jesus appeared to the apostles, he “*showed them his hands and his side*” (Jn 20:20). Then He said to Thomas: “*Take your finger and examine my hands. Put your hand into my side. Do not persist in your unbelief, but believe!*” (Jn 20:27).

Like Thomas, we are called to join Christ in holding out our hands toward the

wounds of others, to take into account their sufferings and to help them by placing ourselves in their service in the attitude of Christ the Servant. Animated by this Charity poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, we unite corporal and spiritual service.

### **\*Serving all the poor**

The Charity of Jesus crucified presses us to serve all the poor without exception neither of person, nor place, in giving “priority ... to the truly poor” (C 1.8 § 2). *“You have a vocation that obliges you to help, without any discrimination, all sorts of persons, men, women, children and in general all poor persons who need your assistance”* (Coste, Conferences to DCs, 1028).

This service is lived in mutual exchange and sharing: we evangelize one another reciprocally. The poor evangelize us, question us, convert us, energize us.

### **E. Mary, teacher of the spiritual life**

**Mary, the first Christian, the Consecrated one par excellence**, is situated at the beginning and at the very center of the salvific mystery, in having the mission of bringing Christ into human history. Naturally our Constitutions remind us of her place in our lives as Daughters of Charity: *“Whoever seeks to follow Jesus Christ will also encounter her who received him from the Father”* (C 1.12). Our Founders discovered and contemplated the place that Mary held in the heart of God, particularly through the texts of the Annunciation and the Visitation.

Discerning in Mary the servant of the Lord par excellence, they saw in her, the one who could best show us how to fulfill our vocation, her presence was so evangelical. *“Let them ... act as they imagine the Blessed Virgin would have acted. Let them contemplate her charity and humility and be very humble before God, cordial among themselves, charitable to everyone...”* (Coste, Correspondence I, 504).

Constitution 2.16 invites us to take Mary as teacher of the spiritual life, not only in the apprenticeship of a life of union with God but also that of a total commitment as servant. Could not Constitution 1.12 also be paraphrased as follows: *“Whoever seeks to follow Jesus Christ, Adorer of the Father, Servant of His Loving Plan, and Evangelizer of the Poor, will also encounter Mary, the Immaculate One, Adorer of the Father, Servant of His Loving Plan and ... Mother of mercy and hope of the lowly, or who evangelizes the poor.”*

### **Mary, the Immaculate One, Adorer of the Father**

The text of the Annunciation confirms the relationship of Mary with the Lord: “full of grace,” “the Lord is with you.” Empty of all that was not of God, Mary shows us what the Spirit can do in a creature. Totally open to the Spirit, she knows that she only exists in second place, in response to a call. Her heart is empty to welcome in her without reserve, but with joy and gratitude, the very Gift of God.

The text of the Annunciation also reveals Mary's way of being before the Father: deeply attentive to God, she listens to him, matches her heartbeat to that of the heart of God and joins his active presence in the heart and life of others. Totally turned towards God, she is also like his Son, always turned towards humanity, her children. Mary, deeply receptive and totally open to others, has a look that is turned both inward and outward. Her meeting with Elizabeth allows us to see her manner of living authentic and profound reciprocal human relationships. At the Nativity too, Mary allows her limitless sense of welcome to the shepherds and the wise men show through.

At Cana, her attentive and discreet availability allows her to see what no one else observed: that the wine had run out. Mary is sensitive to the human moment of existence, attentive to concrete situations, to people and to things.

Mary, Adorer of the Father, is the model of closeness to God, union with God. She teaches us to give ourselves to God in order to serve him in the person of the Poor, in listening to God's Word through the words of the poor and through events.

### **Mary, Servant of the Father's Loving Plan**

The text of the Annunciation shows us that, after having listened and reflected, Mary decide: "*I am the servant of the Lord, let it be done unto me according to your word!*" Through these words, Mary brings to light her identity as servant, obedient to the Father.

Freely welcoming the Father's Loving Plan into her heart, she gives herself entirely to God in total availability. She lets the love of God work in her life. It is not just any "action," but loving obedience to the will of God, a response to his request, a support for God's Loving Plan.

Her departure for Aïn Karim expresses, in its own way, that a charitable life always assumes leaving of oneself, leaving one's routines, freeing oneself from all that hinders the journey. There is no union with God without renunciation of self.

Mary is the model of support of God's Loving Plan. It is this fundamental attitude that must always direct and animate us. We can only be true servants of the poor in the measure we are servants of the Lord, where we humbly accept the expressions of our Master's desires.

### **Mary, Mother of mercy, who evangelizes the poor**

After hearing and reflecting on the will of God, Mary acted. Her decision went immediately into action. Her being of servant is expressed through concrete acts of service.

Life in the Spirit always moves to outside itself in accomplishing human tasks.

That is why, moved by the Spirit, Mary departed “in haste” to help her older cousin.

\* With Elizabeth, Mary brought out two important aspects of our service to the poor.

- Her greeting introduces us to the quality of being present to the poor, allowing them to talk, listening to them, recognizing them for themselves, sharing deeply with them.
- Her concrete acts of service reveal a love that is not afraid to wear itself out, to do repetitive physical activity.

Mary teaches us to live ordinary life in an extraordinary way by living authentic and deep relationships with the poor, by concretely and courageously putting ourselves at their service to show them the tenderness God has for them.

\* At Cana, Mary brings us into a conversion of opinion in looking at the poor in another way and being attentive to their basic needs. She also leads us to tactfully bring out the abilities of others without personal interest.

\* At the foot of the Cross, far from avoiding shame, suffering, Mary is present, accompanying the condemned Jesus.

\* In the Upper Room, Mary is there, at the service of all, a visible sign of the invisible Christ. She is a link among the disciples, a seed of unity.

\* At Pentecost, Mary believes that the Spirit of her Son continues to communicate and act in the hearts of humanity to help them see themselves as children of the same Father and to live together as brothers and sisters.

## **Conclusion**

In Mary we will discover the perfect attitude of servant. She, who allowed herself to be fashioned by the Spirit, teaches us to allow ourselves, at the beginning of this Third Millennium, to be fashioned by the same Spirit to continue the mission of her Son close to the poor.

That is why we daily meditate on two evangelical prayers, the Rosary and the Angelus, as a way, among others, not only of following the steps of God who approaches our humanity in inviting himself to Mary house, but also of placing ourselves at the school of Mary the servant.

## **II. The Spirituality of the Daughters of Charity and Today’s Challenges**

### **Introduction**

After having determined from a bit closer our spirituality from the experiences of

our Founders, we now come to the second question which also is important: How do we live this Daughter of Charity spirituality today?

How do we continue the mission of the Redemptive Incarnation in today's world? How do we honor Jesus Christ, the source and model of all charity, serving him corporally and spiritually in the person of the poor within the cultural context of our different countries?

Christian spirituality has a basically historical and concrete character. We must struggle against an ideal image of concrete modalities to live our spirituality in today's world.

The modalities vary according to place, context, and ongoing evolutions. It is impossible to determine them once and for all from the outside. They are to be invented on the field of history and to be unceasingly readjusted.

I will limit myself to two world and ecclesia realities of today that very directly call out to us:

- the first is the phenomenon of globalization
- the second is the New Evangelization spoken of by John Paul II

Faced with globalization, we have to inculturate ourselves more and more into the world of the poor. This will reveal itself by a lifestyle that is close to the poor and a positive outlook on life that can astonish and disconcert, to find therein the actual presence of the Risen Lord which leads to following him and opens a pathway of hope.

To commit ourselves in the New Evangelization, service of the poor lived with a spirit of humility, simplicity and charity, is an authentic pathway of evangelization.

## **A. The Daughter of Charity, servant, incarnates the *presence* of Christ in the world of the poor**

### **1. Context: Globalization**

Globalization is a process of worldwide exchange that puts countries, economies, groups, ethnicities, religions, cultures, and values, in relationship with each other, with their positive and negative aspects.

We can undoubtedly affirm that never in the existence of humanity has there been the possibility of being so united as there is today and in the coming decades, thanks to new technologies, to the entrance of computers in homes, or to the ability of everyone to access information and the possibility of nearly unlimited encounters.

Globalization, with its capacity for exchange, can create better life opportunities for everyone; but it also favors the concentration of power in the hands of some and



pushes for the adoption of a sole form of thought and action on a universal plan.

It contributes to the gradual erosion of collective reference points be they social, political or spiritual. The decline of traditional values and the rise of a culture centered on materialistic and economic aspects tend to eliminate cultural differences around the world.

Even if we are able to know what is happening in other places by the speed of communication, we cannot forget the importance of the cultural, social and religious roots of all humanity and their values.

Every person is capable of living these values and therefore showing them to be “alive” for others.

In today’s world where communication technology develops and is perfected day in and day out, the mystery of the Redemptive Incarnation and the mystery of the Resurrection challenge us: how can we enter into relationship with others? Which form of communication should we encourage?

- Christ’s incarnation reflects the culmination of human relationships: Christ came to join all humanity in a universal dimension to communicate his message of love through a quality presence and a reciprocal relationship.
- On the Cross, Christ is despised, above all others. Yet, in living the supreme values of Truth and Goodness in his rejection, he opens a pathway of freedom and life for us.
- The Resurrection presents us with the mystery of the Spirit present in all humanity; this is expressed by the capacity to live and participate in building a more fraternal society.

For Daughters of Charity in the world of universal communication, the center of our concern and commitment is the person of the Poor. It is not, first of all, to engage in a great worldwide humanitarian effort, but to throw ourselves in an adventure of relationship and service where availability and openness to the workings of the Spirit reign.

Our spirituality as Daughters of Charity leads us to:

- seek, with others, concrete ways of living out today the presence of Christ to all, especially to the poor.
- look at concrete persons, taken one by one, each possessing a dignity and living his/her own reality in a given place, time, and culture.

## **2. A challenge: living close to the poor**

By vocation, we are called to take up the challenge to be close to “the totally destitute” in order to render Christ present to the poor.

### **a. Closeness to the poor**

Following Christ, who chose to come among us, we are called to “go to them” and to live the process of winning them over: “Being with, sharing the living conditions of the people, welcoming, going toward, participating in the life of others...”

In 1968 Mother Guillemin said: *“The first reflex of love is to try to resemble the one loved.... This is why we feel urged to become close to the poor, to live among them in true proximity of life and concerns.”*

The words of our Charter state: *“[having] for monastery only the houses of the sick,”* etc. The places where we are to be are the streets of the city and the wards of the hospitals. It is there that we will meet God. *“A sister will go ten times a day to visit the poor and ten times a day she will find God there.”* A rented room specifies a lifestyle where we refuse to settle in (C. 1.9).

Our lifestyle must allow us to live the truest possible proximity with the poor. “Going to them” means “leaving” our lifestyle, our ways of seeing and thinking, to discover those of the poor and to bring our way of living as close as possible to that of our “masters.” It is no longer only moving geographically but experiencing a benevolent closeness to enter progressively into a great understanding of their needs, their mentality, their difficulties, etc.

### **\* Inculturation**

Inculturation, in the first place, implies taking the time to live with the poor, to create bonds and to remain faithful in order to progressively learn their story. We can talk about truly absorbing ourselves with the poor as time necessary for our service, to root ourselves with them, to become poor with the poor, to live among and for them.

Of course, it is not the physical proximity that matters the most. We can spend the entire day outside our community, meeting many of the poor, but if we hold on to a possessive, maternal or moralistic mentality, we do not come out of ourselves, out of our own mentality.

True proximity with the poor is in an interior domain. It is within the heart that true fellowship resides. We will only know them well if we love them. The approach of Christ’s Incarnation is the fundamental reference point where the justification of our closeness to the poor is rooted.

Our quality of presence always plays to a paschal rhythm: it is leaving our “world” to join that of the poor, emptying ourselves to make room to join them where

they are, such as they are, and not as we would like them to be.

We have to unceasingly convert our ways of seeing, thinking and understanding to those of Christ.

*In living our spirituality in a world where the ephemeral and the superficial reign, we take up the challenge of length and quality in our relationships.*

## **b. Reciprocal relationships**

The central conviction of our Christian faith is that the Spirit of the Risen Christ is given to all humanity. The Spirit precedes us, is present in everyone's life, speaks to the heart, is already at work in it. And we, we need only join in the action of the Spirit.

Living with the poor, is not only doing something for them, but entering into dialogue with them and being open and attentive to the mystery of God's action in them, recognizing that the essential of the Christian message can already be found with them.

Listening is therefore primary. It disposes us to receive what the poor already carry as seeds of the Spirit. It invites us to allow ourselves to be transformed as Christ let himself be moved by the words of a pagan, the Syrophenician.

This approach makes us respect the poor and take them seriously. We can then welcome them and make their original way of living our own. Indeed, it is not enough only to dialogue with them, but also to welcome them respectfully for who they are, what they do and what they aspire to do, to the point of learning to see reality through their eyes.

A basic disposition is at the heart of this manner of living with the poor: becoming a partner, in an attitude of reciprocity, where each receives and gives to grow in mutual communication.

Later, we can carry out a true work of discernment to collect and sort that which will favor and nourish life, and denounce with them that which is an obstacle this life that is searching to be born and to grow.

*In living our spirituality in the world where "each one for his/herself" reigns, we take up the challenge of true partnerships where each one gives and receives to advance together.*

## **\* The poor evangelize us by their values**

Faith is a gift from God that makes us welcome God in our lives: *"True religion is among the poor; God enriches them with a living faith; they believe, they touch, they savor the words of life ... For the ordinary, they keep the peace among troubles and*

*punishments. What is the cause of this? Faith. Why? Because they are simple; God made grace abound in them that was refused to the rich and wise of the world.”*

Faith is not only in action during prayer. It must become the guide of our thoughts, judgments, and actions. The eyes of faith lead us to “see” and love the Lord in all that is human, with particular attention for all that is lowly and insignificant in the eyes of the world. The spirit of faith makes us truly see the poor “as our masters” who evangelize us, and not like persons towards whom we bend down.

The poor evangelize us by their qualities and values lived out daily. In the world of the poor, in spite of the egoism that can show itself and the temptation of “each one for his/herself,” bonds of solidarity, a climate of mutual help and simple sharing are created. Often the poor, who have experienced suffering, feel called by the suffering of others.

In addition to solidarity, the poor often know how to appreciate what is done for them, to be content and to foster true gratitude for it.

We can go still deeper. The poor are perhaps the only ones who truly give by making their gift an initiative of love, since for them, the gift implies deprivation.

Furthermore, when the poor accept us such as we are, with all our limitations, they make us discover God’s immense capacity of acceptance and mercy in our regard.

*In living our spirituality, we take up the challenge to allow ourselves to be evangelized by the poor.*

#### **\* The poor evangelize us by their poverty**

The poor evangelize us not only by their qualities, but also because they shake us up and demand from us deep conversion. They ask the best from us, and make us pass from instinct to the spiritual.

If they evangelize us, it is not because they are living examples of virtue. Their heart could also be as violent and deceitful as any human heart. In truth, what humanizes us is that they manifest what humanity is. They reveal that human beings are lowly, weak, fragile, sinful, and mortal.

Without always explicitly asking for affection, the poor remind us of a primordial need of humanity – respect, recognition, esteem. What they are looking for above all is a look that shows consideration, a look that gives them back a positive image of themselves.

Through their need for true relationships, the poor refocus us on the essentials of life – sharing, gratuitousness, love. If we listen to their calls, the poor awaken in us the sources of compassion and goodness; they liberate in us the capacity for undreamed of

love.

To persevere in authentic relationships with the poor, which we sometimes fear, we must recognize that they reveal our own poverty to us. Without knowing it, they put their finger directly on our wounds and limitations that hinder us from fully loving. They become a mirror and help us to recognize, after all is said and done, that we are not so different from one another. Unless we become hardened, the poor can become a grace of deep reconciliation between others and ourselves.

When we are able to see the poor as those who, by reason of their weaknesses, show us the fundamental truth of our humanity, that is to say, our own fragility, then they have already grown, and we with them. Christ is particularly questioning in the poor.

We cannot meet the poor if our hearts are not deeply filled with fraternal fervor, desiring truly to renounce wanting to be above them in order to be simply with them, maybe even the least among them.

In the presence of the poor, we are invited to solidarity, to justice. The poor evangelize us in a new way by leading us to charity, to humility in our service. We place ourselves at the service of the poor, instead of dominating them by imposing our knowledge and our plans for them. It is also letting ourselves be evangelized and letting go of the idea that we are going to “save,” can “save,” someone.

In accepting our service, such as it is, the poor allow us to express, beyond our limits, the source of love that dwells in our hearts and our ability to give life in following Christ the Servant.

*In living our spirituality, we take up the challenge of true fellowship where the lowliest is the favorite.*

## **B. The Daughter of Charity, servant, incarnates the *actions* of Christ the Servant in the world of the poor**

We are in the world, not to conform or assimilate ourselves to it, but to continue the mission of Jesus Christ. The world is where we verify the authenticity of our faith and our charity.

### **1. Context: The New Evangelization**

The expression “new evangelization” was created and put forward by John Paul II in his January 2, 1986, letter to the European Bishops. He wrote: “*The profound and deep cultural, political, ethnic and spiritual transformations that have occurred in giving a new configuration to European society, must correspond to a new quality of evangelization, that knows how to suggest to today’s humankind the eternal message of salvation in new and convincing terminology.*” “*Our works must witness that we love*

*them,” said St. Vincent.*

The service of the poor is a pathway of evangelization as a means of authentically living the gospel.

## **2. Challenge: serving the poor as Christ the Servant**

Our spirituality of service is derived from the manner by which our Founders understood the Incarnation and mission of Christ. *“To be true Daughters of Charity, you must do what the Son of God did while on earth”* (Coste, Conferences to the DCs, 13). God founded the Company to *“do what a God did on earth ... in order to honor the holy humanity of Our Lord”* (Coste, Conferences to the DCs, 56). God sends us to the poor to show them his love.

What characterizes us is not so much service but a spirituality of servant. We manifest our spirituality of servant by the love we give to God and by love of the poor which is translated by acts of charity.

Our affective love of God leads us to an effective love for the poor. We must be empty of ourselves to be entirely turned towards the well being of the Poor. To combat the temptation of imitating “earthly kings” (Lk 22:25) and following the surrounding culture of society with various ways of helping the poor “from on high,” our Founders remind us, time and time again, of the necessity that *“we must imitate the Son of God who did nothing save from the motive of the love which he had for God his Father”* (Coste, Conferences to the DCs, 18).

Being clothed in the Spirit of Christ, we are able to love and serve the poor with:

- “respect and devotion” which reveals a spirit of humility “always seeing God in them”
- “cordiality” which expresses simplicity of heart
- “compassion and gentleness” which shows a spirit of charity.

Our vocation as Daughters of Charity is equivalent to reflecting the vocation of Christ. “Look at the Son of God! Oh! what a heart of charity! what a flame of love! (Coste, Conferences to CMs, 584).

### **a. With an attitude of servant which must be the putting into practice of the virtues of their state of life: humility, simplicity, and charity.**

To truly become “servants of the poor” and so that our service of the poor is an expression of the mission of Christ, we must enter into the dynamism of the Spirit of Christ. There is no true service of the poor without conversion of heart. The service that we should offer today’s society must be filled with and characterized by the necessary virtues asked for by St. Vincent for his daughters.

## \* **Humility**

To consider a service of the poor with respect, the first indispensable virtue is humility. We must not confuse humility with an inferiority complex, a poor image of oneself or lack of confidence. It is not weakness, nor timidity, nor a personality flaw and even less the burying of one's talents. Humility leads us to turn ourselves more towards God and the poor, and to commit ourselves to them as God asks us to do. Humility is a moving away from ourselves in a positive energy that propels us towards others, that frees us from needless complications and complexities.

Serving the poor with humility is first of all freely listening to them before looking to resolve their problems. Putting oneself at their service requires an effort of attention to enter into their world, in opening oneself first of all to the mystery of the person, looking to understand his/her sufferings and joys. This requires an attitude of discretion and modesty on our part.

Humility teaches us not only to be attentive to the lives of the poor, but also to reflect on them, to grasp their point of view. We will never finish trying to understand the language of the poor. Sometimes we believe too quickly that we have found the right formula for explaining or getting someone back on his/her feet. We are unceasingly provoked to deepen our openness to dialogue to find pathways of mutual understanding.

Humility helps us speak at the right moment. It helps us ask for the right words always for a good intention. Humility leads us to believe that the poor are bearers of a unique thought that we do not suspect and of which we can take advantage. In taking their lives and thoughts seriously, we believe in their possibilities and can trust them.

The conviction that the poor carry uncultivated riches within themselves leads us to develop a discreet and attentive quality of presence to the smallest signs of hope, to their aspirations, to their deep desires. The poor need a great deal of confidence. When they feel understood, it then becomes possible to begin something with them.

The decision comes from them not us. Humility alone allows us to have this attitude capable of recognizing that each situation must be approached by the poor themselves and not by us. Inhabited by a spirit of humility, our attitudes and words are no longer enough, nor certain of always being right. We are less likely to take ourselves as a reference point and to make hurtful comparisons. Humility controls our reflexes of power and self-affirmation; we who know, who can, who criticize, we learn to dominate the power we have at our fingertips.

Humility makes us go beyond the human or the psychological to enter into the domain of love. We do not discover new things, but it allows us to acquire a new regard towards the poor. The way in which the poor presented themselves to us depends largely on our attitude towards them. Humility allows us to approach the poor in faith and to recognize the presence of God in them.

If we lack humility, we deprive them of their sense of depth, we cut them from their roots, and thus devalue them. The poor need to be acknowledged for themselves before being helped. They do not ask first of all to be assisted but to be looked upon and recognized as persons. Humility makes us see them as “our masters” who preach to us by their very presence.

Humility is above all an act of faith in Christ, particularly in his Redemptive Incarnation. This faith consists not only speaks of the grandeur of all humanity, but also invites one to penetrate beyond each face to discover the icon of Christ.

### **\* Simplicity**

We must not confuse simplicity with the desire for assertiveness or the desire for power; nor with spontaneity and naivety. Naivety is an excess of confidence that often results from ignorance, from inexperience or from lack of reflection. Spontaneity makes one react immediately, responding to the first impulse without thinking.

The human condition is that of twilight: there are contradictions, ambivalence, and fragility in us all and all a patch of mystery. However, simplicity, which is above all an attitude of the heart, moves from the superficial “I” to the deep and honest “I” and accords as much as possible its will with God’s.

Simplicity allows us to have a sincere behavior that creates clear unambiguous relationships, without seeming to be something that it is not. Through a simple heart, without any sort of disguise, without complication, nor self-searching, we reveal ourselves in all sincerity and act without duplicity, affectation, or ostentation.

If we do not judge beyond ourselves, we clarify our emotions and put the poor at ease: moreover, this encourages us to believe that others do not judge either. On the contrary, if we lack simplicity with the poor, we risk putting their sincerity into question and becoming suspicious of them. The poor very quickly sense a lack of simplicity and relationships then become distorted.

Simplicity makes us avoid all ambiguity in our language, our manner of being, by not drawing attention in one way or another – “frankly and simply.”

When we walk in straightforwardness, we do not constantly have disputes, negative criticism, or bitterness on our lips. Simplicity prevents us from making only negative judgments about the poor.

Even if we can pinpoint certain causes of some forms of poverty, simplicity helps us note the difficulties of the moment as lived by the poor. Our quality of servant of the poor demands this simplicity in all things, in our lifestyle, if we want to be understood by them. Simplicity is also the search for God and God’s glory in all that we do.



## **\* Charity**

A distinctive feature of our spirituality is to make of the service of the poor an act of charity. Our spirit is charity. We must not confuse charity with generosity or even solidarity. It is neither “being in love,” nor emotions. It cannot restrict itself to an act however generous it might be. Charity is the very expression of the charity of the Father, of his unconditional love for humanity. Charity makes us share in the deepest sentiments of God’s Heart, God’s mercy and fidelity to humanity. Charity is going all the way in love, whatever the difficulties encountered along the way. Charity is there for the duration.

The two expressions “service” and “charity” do not naturally go together. Serving the poor is to recognize them as dependent persons, in circumstances of need and thus of inferiority. Yet, service of the poor is not only humanitarian aid but is a place where we must witness to Jesus Christ the Servant in an effective way. Our commitment to serve the poor lives with the affection of a loving heart.

Service of the poor is putting God’s love to work through the faithful commitment of our entire self. It gets its energy and expression from God’s Love. Since charity does not exist without humility nor simplicity, we strive to translate God’s charity in humble and simple service. In serving the poor with charity, we reveal to them the ways of God and show them who God is, and how God loves “to the end.”

Our actions in serving the poor only have meaning if they are done through and in love. It is not so much about doing things as it is doing them “in love” (Coste, Conferences to DCs, 45). It is important that the charity of Christ penetrate our heart to love without counting the cost, to be compassionate, open to others, and non-judgmental. Through charity, we come into solidarity with the poor to the point of accepting that our lives will be completely changed by this virtue.

*In living our spirituality, we take up the challenge of choosing a spirit of service that expresses God’s tenderness for the poor.*

### **b. With a constant focus on the promotion of the whole person and every person**

Our love of God cannot limit itself to a simple spiritual experience; it must take form in a commitment in favor of the dignity, the promotion of the person. It is serving the poor by taking into account all their physical, economic, intellectual, moral and spiritual poverty and giving them means to find their dignity again.

Even if the starting point of service ties up with a particular need of the person: physical, emotional, intellectual, economic, or spiritual, etc., our service takes the whole person into consideration.

## **\* Quality corporal service**

St. Paul said: “*You must know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is within – the Spirit you have received from God*” (1 Cor 6:19). If the body is truly the dwelling place of God, holy ground, this profoundly transforms our relationship and service. The life of every poor person is sacred and we touch them with even greater respect.

In washing the feet of his disciples and in asking us to do the same, Jesus shows us the importance of meeting the physical presence of another with gentleness and tenderness, for the body is precious: it is the person. Our Founders asked us to serve our suffering brothers and sisters with “*compassion, gentleness, cordiality, respect, and devotion*” (Coste, Conferences to DCs, 923).

Our actions, whether in teaching, education, health care, or social services are called to be actions of charity, that is, coming from God’s love. They must not be reduced to purely professional actions, even if they are subject to professional and administrative regulations which govern and fulfill them with the necessary competence.

We have to accompany the poor on their journey, awakening their conscious so that they can progressively analyze and understand their situation themselves, evaluate the realities in which they are involved, and discern and seek solutions for a better future.

#### **\* Quality spiritual service**

Meeting the poor, welcoming them, listening to them, loving them and serving them are the necessary conditions for a service that is evangelistic. Indeed, through service of the poor, we place ourselves at the service of the Good News of Jesus Christ. We strive to proclaim the Good News in deeds as in words, and “incarnate this proclamation” in such a way that anyone, of good will, can hear this Good News, presented in as authentic and simple a way as possible, and thus deepen it and, if he/she chooses, accept it.

However, this is not necessarily saying to make Christians of all people, nor to push all the baptized to return to the Church. In living spiritual service we also strive to place the other in a position to give. The greatest happiness that we can give to the poor is to allow them to give.

Again, it is being open to the questions of our contemporaries, seeking less to give ready-made answers as to study more deeply the questioning.

#### **\* Every poor person**

“You have a vocation which obliges you to assist everyone, without distinction of persons: men, women, children, and, in general, every poor person who needs you” (C 1.7).

*In living our spirituality, we take up the challenge to work for the*

*development of the entire person and of all persons.*

**c. In a spirit of collaboration**

Our vows of corporal and spiritual service of the poor require the gift of our person and our time. But the service of the poor is not limited to serving only the person in difficulty; it also takes into account his/her environment and other persons with whom we are called to collaborate.

The Holy Spirit involves us today, more than ever, to share our spirituality with the laity in companionship for better service. Partnerships and collaboration with others is not a strategic plan due to the fewer numbers of vocations. It is an essential component of our vocation.

**\* Collaboration from within the works of the Company**

We live our spirituality of service in promoting collaboration with the laity in our own apostolic works as much as possible. Today, many of them rely principally on the laity; that is how the mission of the Company can continue.

This collaboration with the laity extends the scope of our mission and transforms our way of serving the poor. Collaboration equally enriches what we do and what we live. It stimulates us to encourage the laity to open themselves to Vincentian Spirituality, to accompany them, to support them, and to form them. This collaboration requires an attitude of availability, listening and sharing.

**\* Collaboration with “those who work to promote the rights of the poor”**

Today, our service also calls us to collaborate more closely with institutions, organizations, and activities that are not under the sponsorship of the Company. Among these are found social service centers for development and assistance, educational institutions, international organizations, ecclesial communities, and movements and services of the Church.

This collaboration is a privileged place to live our spirituality as Daughters of Charity in complementarity with others.

*In living our spirituality, we take up the challenge of putting our respective riches in common to promote the dignity of the poor.*

(Translation: Translation Center – Daughters of Charity, Paris)