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To the members of the Congregation of the Mission

My very dear Confreres,

May the pardon and peace of the Lord be with you in abundance during this Lenten season!

All four gospels paint the same stark picture of Jesus' death: he dies crucified between two criminals, one on his right and one on his left. But whereas Mark, Matthew and John say almost nothing about the two criminals, Luke gives them speaking-roles in a dramatic episode. In fact, this scene is the longest and most important Lucan change in the crucifixion story. We usually refer to its main character as the "good thief," though Luke calls him neither "good" nor a "thief." While Mark and Matthew describe both men crucified with Jesus as "bandits," Luke simply refers to them as "wrongdoers," perhaps because, as the evangelist who most emphasizes gentleness, he wants to avoid placing Jesus in violent company at his death.

Later tradition gave various names to both wrongdoers (Joathas and Maggeatras, Zoatham and Caamba, Titus and Dumachus, Dysmas and Gestas). Most of these names are forgotten today, but some readers may still recall the good thief as "Dysmas." Under that name the Roman liturgical calendar assigned him a feast day, March 25, formerly regarded as the day of Jesus' crucifixion, but now celebrated as the feast of his incarnation. A charming legend, found in one of the apocryphal gospels, relates that when the Holy Family went down into Egypt two robbers set upon them. One, however, halted immediately when he saw the tears that welled up in Mary's eyes. It was these same robbers (now caught plying their trade in Jerusalem!) — so the story goes — who were crucified with Jesus. The one moved by Mary's tears was the good thief at Jesus' right.

But the gospels are silent about the wrongdoers' past history and personal lives. At first reading, the dialogue in the Lucan story seems simple and direct; yet in fact it is filled with subtle undertones. One of the wrongdoers, the evangelist states, joins his voice with those blaspheming Jesus: "Aren't you the Messiah? Then save yourself and us." But the "other wrongdoer" (Luke never calls him anything else)...
rebukes his companion: “Have you no fear of God, seeing that you are under the same sentence? We deserve it, after all. We are only paying the price for what we’ve done, but this man has done nothing wrong.” Notice that on the Lucan crucifixion stage the good thief plays the role of witness to Jesus’ innocence. Later a second witness, the centurion, will confirm the good thief’s judgment, testifying: “Surely this was an innocent man” (Lk 23:47).

Now the drama heightens as the good thief speaks directly to the crucified Lord: “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

“Jesus!” This form of address is stunning in its intimacy. Nowhere else in the four gospels does anyone address Jesus simply by using his name without any further reverential qualification. Luke is applying an artistic touch to convey the genuineness of the wrongdoer’s request. But note the irony too: for Luke, the first person with the confidence to speak so familiarly with the Lord is a convicted criminal, who is also the last person to speak with Jesus before his death. He phrases his plea in terms of “remembrance,” a favorite Lucan word and one found on ancient Jewish gravestones: “Remember me.” Contrary to all expectations, this wrongdoer, having heard Jesus mocked as “King of the Jews” and having concluded that an injustice is being done, believes that Jesus really will rule over a kingdom and humbly asks to be remembered.

Jesus responds with an “Amen” saying, the only use of this solemn form in Luke’s passion narrative and also its sixth and final use in his gospel. Here the solemn formula introduces the bestowal of the free gift of God’s forgiveness. Jesus’ assurance goes beyond anything that the wrongdoer (or the reader) might have anticipated: “Amen, I say to you, this day you shall be with me in paradise.” Much more is granted than was asked. The response includes not just forgiveness, but intimacy: you shall be with me. The good thief will, in Jesus’ company, enjoy the fullness of happiness with God.

Let me offer you two brief reflections on this wonderful story, filled with Lucan flavor.

1. We believe that grace is a pure gift. God bestows it freely and abundantly. We do not earn it; we only respond to it. On the deepest level, grace is God’s presence, God’s offer of personal love and self-communication. The gift is the giver. God touches our hearts and stirs up, even creates, a response within us.

But it is important to note that this gift is not merely an unseen reality; rather, it comes in very concrete forms. The gospels remind us of this again and again. For the good thief in Luke’s story, Jesus is grace. One can almost imagine this “other wrongdoer” studying Jesus and slowly arriving at the conclusion that the man beside him is not only innocent of a capital crime
but genuinely good. In fact — this little detail often goes unnoticed — Luke gives the good thief more time to observe Jesus than any of the other evangelists, since in his gospel (different from that of Mark, Matthew and John) the two wrongdoers walk the entire way of the cross with Jesus before dying with him (Lk 23:32). The goodness he sees in the person of Jesus touches the good thief’s heart and evokes a response: “Jesus, remember me.”

Isn’t that how grace often works in us too? It enters our lives through the faithful witness of others, like our parents, or a self-giving servant of the poor, or a sick person who bears illness with courageous faith, or through the life of a saint or the death of a martyr whom we read about? The signs of God’s love — what we call “grace” — are visible all around us. What is remarkable in the story of the good thief is that he does not turn in on himself in what surely must have been a desperately grim moment when his life was draining away. Instead of sinking into depression or despair, he sees goodness itself in the person of Jesus and utters a hopeful plea: “Jesus, remember me.” He sees grace personified and responds.

2. My second reflection is also very Lucan. There is something remarkably humble in this “other wrongdoer.” Unlike his companion, he recognizes the truth of his own situation. His sober analysis was, I suspect, shocking both for the first wrongdoer and for the bystanders: “We have been condemned justly. We are only paying the price for what we’ve done, but this man has done nothing wrong.”

Thomas Merton once wrote: “We make ourselves real by telling the truth.” Truth lies at the core of our being, straining to emerge. When we express the truth, we begin to build our true self. So it was for the good thief. Drawn by the innocence and goodness of the Lord, he recognized his own emptiness, and precisely in doing so, he was able to see, to hear, to receive, to be filled. There is a humble, and at the same time affectionate, ring in the good thief’s plea: “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” And Jesus’ warm response is a further Lucan testimony that the humble are exalted: “Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” As St. Vincent often reminded his followers, to the humble all good can come, whereas the proud always remain empty.

As we enter upon our Lenten journey, I invite you to reflect with me on this beautiful Lucan scene. In a time when there is so much war, so much terrorism, so much hunger, so much disease, and so many senseless deaths, I encourage you to see the abundant signs of God’s gracious love, even in the midst of suffering, as did the good
thief. I also pray, with you, that all of us in the Vincentian Family will know how to stand before the Lord, before each other, and before the poor with great truthfulness and humility. Humility will enable us to see our companions on the journey as grace in our lives, visible signs of God’s presence and love.

As he approached the place of crucifixion, the “good thief” must surely have felt that this was his darkest hour. But for him, light shone in the darkness. He experienced, as the psalmist loved to sing (139:12): “For you, Lord, darkness itself is not dark and night shines as the day.” If we stand before God humbly in this Lenten time, I am confident that we too will rejoice in the light of the Lord.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.

Superior General
To the Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission

My very dear Confreres,

May the grace of Our Lord be always with you!

I write today to inform you that, after a wide process of consultation, and with the consent of the members of the General Council, I have named Fr. Javier Álvarez as the Director General of the Daughters of Charity.

Fr. Francisco Javier Álvarez Munguía of the Province of Madrid was born in Pedrosa de Muñó (Burgos), Spain on March 20, 1954. He entered the Congregation of the Mission on September 11, 1973. On November 8, 1982, he was ordained a priest by Pope John Paul II in Valencia (Spain).

During the first two years after his ordination he served at the Apostolic School of Tardajos (Burgos). In 1984 he was assigned to the Theologate of Burgos as a formator and, at the same time, obtained a degree in Spiritual Theology. Subsequently, he earned a degree in Philosophy from the Pontifical University of Salamanca. In the year 1997, he defended his doctoral thesis in the Faculty of Burgos to obtain a Doctorate in Theology.

From 1986 on, he served as Director of Students of the Province of Madrid in Burgos, and from 1991-1997 as Provincial Councillor; also from 1987-1997, he collaborated with the Faculty of Theology of Burgos, teaching courses in the "Religious Life" department.

From 1990 on, he was a member of the Commission organizing a program in Vincentian Studies offered each year in Ávila for the confreres and sisters. In this program he taught various subjects.

On July 22, 1997, he began his service as Director of the Daughters of the Province of Santa Luisa in Madrid.

As Fr. Javier undertakes the ministry of Director General, I know that I can assure him of your prayer and mine, asking the Lord to pour out his Spirit on him and to give him abundant wisdom and deep pastoral charity.

On this occasion I also want to express my deepest thanks to Fr. Fernando Quintano whom I have had the great pleasure of working with over the last ten years. During the General Assembly last year, I was struck by how many positive comments were made about the dedicated, creative service that Fr. Quintano has rendered to the Company as Director General. I feel the same sentiments
myself. Not only have I found it easy to work together closely with Fr. Quintano, but I have also consistently enjoyed his company and his good humor. I ask the Lord to bless him as he begins to prepare for a new form of service in the Congregation of the Mission.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.

Superior General
FEATURE:

Guillaume Pouget, C.M.
(1847-1933)

Presentation

In 2004, Vincentiana has planned to dedicate the first and last of the five features which it normally publishes each year to the figures of lesser-known confreres in order to contribute, even a little, to a better knowledge of them. A feature will be dedicated to the most important event for us this year, the 40th General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission (Rome, 5-29 July 2004); another feature will highlight some apostolic experiences among the poorest which confreres carry out in different parts of the world, and still another, finally, to the “new missions” of the C.M.

This first issue, which we are offering you now, is specially dedicated to the memory of M. Pouget. In it you will find a brief biography, an interesting article on his theological and spiritual thought and a bibliography on this great French thinker. The initiative of highlighting here this Vincentian came from Fr. Erminio Antonello, C.M., the present Visitor of Turin, who, in May 2002, sent to the Editorial Board an article on Pouget, which he had written, suggesting that it be published in view of the 70th anniversary of Pouget’s death, which occurred in 1933. The Editorial Board accepted the idea, and it is being published now, although it had been planned for 2003. Our sincere thanks to him for this suggestion, for having given us all the necessary material, and above all, for the effort which he made to delve deeply into the life and work of this illustrious confrere. Thanks also to the Motherhouse for providing us with original photos of Pouget.

Paraphrasing J. Guitton in his book Dialogues avec Monsieur Pouget, Paris: Grasset (1954), we can say that preparing this feature “has been a holy obligation, that is to say, a joy” (p. 14).
Guillaume Pouget, C.M. (1847-1933)
M. Pouget: 
The Geniality of Humility

by Jean Guitton*

of the French Academy

Paris, July 3, 1995**

In my long life (I was born in 1901), I have met many admirable people, from all strata of life. But I have never known anyone like M. Pouget. Between the appearance and the reality, there was about him something that was entirely, even scandalously, different. Who was M. Pouget? He appeared to be an old man, close to the end of his life, who had been pushed to one side in those modernist times and who was about to disappear from the scene. That is what he seemed to be. And, in reality, what was there? From my point of view, there was almost everything.

In his research, his preoccupation was to show that Christian revelation is never in contradiction with good sense and reason. In this, the problem of faith is well posed; because, whatever the reasons might be, faith cannot be a deduction. In fact, he would say, reason can simply indicate the motives sufficient for believing. He knew that one had to acknowledge the place of grace, while fully appreciating human liberty and sincere human effort. His work had as its goal the setting aside of obstacles which are opposed to adherence to faith. Thus it is that Revelation is offered to intelligence with a transparency which attracts without constraining. In such a way, he outlined the exact dimensions of the religious problem: at the point where the human being is set before God who reveals self and engages the human response in liberty.

Theological reflection, according to Pouget, gains a mystical dimension. But it is a mystique which is concrete and simple, with

* French philosopher (1901-1999), author of many works dedicated to Catholic thought.

Christ as its centre. When, in my deepest soul, I think of M. Pouget, I find a geniality, the geniality of humility. In all that I have learned from him, he used the most ordinary and simple of words in order to reveal what was essential. In his words, he penetrated truth itself, the definitive sense of life: "I am 78," he told me, "moving at full sail towards my eternity. And, to my benefit, it is only Christ who matters. Everything leads me towards Him. If there were no Christ, what would we do?"

So then, from this point of view, criticism is a small thing. We have links with the invisible world, we belong to God, a great deal more than we sense or realise, to the very last fibres of our being. "Beyond the little sidetracks," he told me once "get into the habit — when you are young — of seeing always the immortal Christ, and round about him all the saints who are already reigning in heaven with Christ, and all those who, here below, follow, in humility and patience, and with all their might, the divine Crucified One."

"The great day of eternity is a horizon so vast that nothing is of worth before it. While waiting for it, I seek to work to make souls live in a reasonable manner. Life is simple. It is enough to have the intention of doing one's duty, and the good which you do will always count to you."

"I, who am no mystic, by means of studying, I will become a little like one. I am not trapped by the earth: beautiful countryside, all the views which I might ever see, this cannot fulfil me like the Three Persons: when I consider that the Father, Son and Spirit are concerned with me! In the life of Christ, we see how everything is oriented towards his Father. We Christians, we really are a tertium genus: for us the things of this earth count for little; what is above is all in all." The secret of M. Pouget consisted in this supernatural horizon of faith towards which was turned his enlightening blindness.

Among the testimonies about M. Pouget, his place in contemporary history, the most notable is the following. The author is a "critical spirit," a non-believer. He writes in 1942 on the subject of the Portrait of M. Pouget: "This is the most remarkable religious book that I know of in more than a century. The talent of the engraver (he does not paint) is almost worthy of the model. Had I not known M. Pouget: he alone would be the Counterreformation. Until yesterday, I did not know his name. He is all that a Catholic should be in terms of science and exegesis, all that a Catholic might be in putting reason at the service of the faith. And he may even do it to excess, as happens in a similar case. In this one man, together with his texts, M. Pouget is a Council, and notably the Council of Trent of the 20th century, which arms the Church of 1920 in its hand-to-hand combat with science, as that of 1550 armed it against the criticism of the Renaissance."

(EUGENE CURRAN, C.M., translator)
Guillaume Pouget, C.M. (1847-1933):
A Short Biographical Sketch

Guillaume Pouget was born in Morsanges de Maurines, in the department of Cantal, France, 14 October 1847, the son of Jean and Catherine Besse, and the oldest of six children. Until age 15 he helped his family in their agricultural work, and then entered the minor seminary of Saint-Flour. The good example of the Vincentian seminary directors gave him the idea of joining the Congregation of the Mission. On 7 October 1867 he began his Internal Seminary (novitiate), and two years later, in Paris, he made his vows. After his priestly ordination, 25 May 1872, he was sent to the minor seminary of Evreux where, for 11 years, he taught the physical sciences. It was there, at age 35, that he had his first attack of glaucoma.

During this same time, he began on his own to study Hebrew, and then other ancient near-eastern languages. Later on, he even drew up a Coptic dictionary. He was becoming more and more devoted to scripture studies.

In 1883, he was named superior of the minor seminary of Saint-Flour. There, at the end of the academic year, we encounter the first of Pouget's writings. In it, he set down the essentials of how to study, so that the intellect could be controlled in research. Pouget explained the need for the intellect to never abandon its quest, since to reduce its engagement would be, in fact, to eliminate the transcendent structure that characterizes the intellect. Moreover, since the intellect is intimately involved with feeling and will, he pointed out the need to harmonize them in the formation of the "heart."

In 1886 he was sent to the Vincentian scholasticate at Dax as professor of the sciences, but he actually taught philosophy, history, and Sacred Scripture.

Two years later, in 1888, he was called to the Motherhouse in Paris, to teach the physical sciences, first of all, and then Church history and Sacred Scripture. He did this until 1895, when, suspected of harboring Modernist ideas, he was removed from his position. Shortly after his arrival in Paris, an explosion in his physics laboratory cost him an eye, thanks in particular to a botched operation (he would call the doctor "the butcher"). This handicap hastened the progress of his glaucoma which, by the beginning of 1909, left him completely blind.
By chance, in 1901 Antoine Sévat, a confrere of Pouget's, spoke about him to Jacques Chevalier, a friend of his and a native of his region, and the two were introduced. Chevalier became Pouget's disciple and, between 1906 and 1909, while living in Paris at the Thiers foundation, drew very close to him, spending two or three afternoons with him every week. As a result, Chevalier began to allow young students of the Ecole Normale Supérieure, a graduate school of education, who were keen to debate the problems that philosophy and the physical sciences were posing to faith, to meet Fr. Pouget. With them, the priest began a systematic work of research into questions of philosophy and theology.

These disciples of his were anxious to collect his spiritual heritage and to preserve it from oblivion. They began this in earnest after Pouget's death, 24 February 1933. The best known of all this work is the book that Jean Guitton consecrated to his teacher: *Portrait de Monsieur Pouget* (Paris: Gallimard, 1941). It had already appeared in five fascicles in the *Cahiers du Van*, Lyons, from 1936 to 1939.


(John Rybolt, C.M., translator)
Guillaume Pouget
and the Theological Renewal
at the Turn of the 20th Century

by Erminio Antonello, C.M.
Province of Turin

Rarely in a thinker do his biographical reality and his thought
coincide as tightly as they do for Guillaume Pouget (1847-1933). One
can write his biography in a few lines; his theological reflection
requires more space. Having become blind a little after becoming 50,
and having been deprived of his teaching position in Church History
and Old Testament in the Scholasticate of the Vincentians in Paris
because of the Modernist crisis, he would have been buried in the
obscurity of his later years had he not met in a rather casual way
some young people of the Normal School who took away his
isolation.

These young students — among them J. Chevalier, J. Guitton,
and E. Mounier — giving him their free time from university studies,
interrogated him about the problems that modern thought posed to
traditional faith. They wrote down his thoughts and reflections or,
"making themselves the hand and eye" of their teacher, they worked
out with him systematic reflections on the questions debated at the
time. It is through this rather underground path that this patient
reflection on the foundations of Christianity has come to us, a

1 In this article the theological and spiritual thought of Fr. Pouget is
summarized in a broad outline in the context of the theology between the two
centuries. It was written to recall the 150th anniversary of Fr. Pouget's birth.
For that occasion, Fr. Pouget's niece, Mrs. Paule Houdaille, desiring to make
her uncle known in his birthplace (Haute Auvergne), supported the writing of
this article, which we are presenting to you and which appeared in the
J. GUITTON, Portrait de Monsieur Pouget, Paris-Gallimard 1941; Dialogues avec
Monsieur Pouget sur la pluralité des mondes, le Christ des Evangiles, l'avenir de
notre espèce, Paris-Grasset 1954; E. ANTONELLO, G. Pouget, testimone del
rinnovamento teologico all'inizio del XX secolo, Milano-Glossa 1995, 272-280
(it is from this monograph, that Fr. Antonello composed the present article).
reflection that he transfused in these students who chose him as teacher in a rather original form of dialogical teaching and intellectual alliance.

Thinking about faith — for Pouget — was neither a diversion nor the result of academic activity. His interior meditation had been, instead, a substitute for the active life. Because of this, it was a work that wore him out, keeping him company in the solitude of his blindness:

There are those who think I am like those nice old people who spend their time mumbling some prayer. I think, and that is exhausting.

I am not necessarily impressed by my being blind, because that would make me sad; I cannot see my hand today, but I can still count my fingers. I would much rather think about the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit than about something that does not matter, except to souls that follow that path.

He came in contact with the burning questions of the time from a distance and in a sporadic way according to the questions that those who came to see him in his room posed to him. From this point of view G. Pouget was more a witness than a player in the rather delicate history of the transformation of the way to do theology in the first part of the 20th century.

1. Between Modernism and Vatican II

The problematic at the heart of the theological debate at the beginning of the century turned on the question of whether or not it was possible to use the historical-critical method in theology, and, if the answer were positive, under what conditions. The cultural pressure from a historical-critical viewpoint made problematic the "speculative theology" then in use, leading to the introduction along with it of "positive theology" willing to research the historical evolution of doctrine. This operation was not without difficulty, because it would have to be preceded, in a way that would rule out superstitions, by a clarification about the gnoseologia theologica, that is, on the criteria for knowing revealed data, once one was able to be sure of its historical dimension. The question had hardly been raised at the beginning of the century, when it in fact became the question put aside with the emergence of the Modernist crisis.

The introduction of history and of historical criticism in the exegetical/theological arena raised the objection — and, in fact,

3 J. Chevalier, op. cit., 128.
4 J. Guitton, Dialogues, op. cit., 204.
around this question was constituted a so-called “conservative wing” of scholars who were firmly opposed to its unconditional use — that it seemed to dissolve the “sacred text” of the Word of God into a simple historical-literary repertoire. On the other side, the “progressive” one — we use an inappropriate word, but one that indicates a tendency opposed to the other group indicated — were those theologians and exegetes who, in the name of progress in historical-positive science, supported the need to introduce these methods into the study of Scripture. In truth, this way of putting things does not show the range of thinking in the complexity of the debate; in fact, however, the historiography of Modernism flattened itself out on this polarization of extremes, tending to have them come together in one or the other intermediate positions, discredited as simple “positions of compromise.”

This misunderstanding has also permitted the facile establishment of a “direct sonship/derivation” between Modernism and Vatican II. In reality, to these intermediate positions — still not sufficiently studied — one may attribute an originality all their own and a precious function: that of having assured a link between old and new, as if it were a connecting fabric, thanks to which, once the polemics had calmed, one could slowly work out the rethinking of the theological method that has made the renewal of theology possible. It is in this middle position that the theological reflection of G. Pouget falls, with the clarification that he has not produced a theology in the sense of a “theological system,” but rather that he has explained a need for theology: that of taking on the historicity of revelation in a theological context, leading to and anticipating the period in which theology will enter the path of making of revelation its proper intrinsic regulatory principle. Thus, he, with other exegetes and theologians, indicated a theological way that, put forward as a seed in the Modernist period, will flower in the theology of Vatican II.

As confirmation of this thesis there is a rather singular episode one can cite. According to the witness of Loris Capovilla, his personal secretary, Pope John XXIII took from his reading of Portrait de Monsieur Pouget the hermeneutical criterion for distinguishing the “deposit of the truths of the Faith” from “the language in which they are expressed,” enunciated in the opening address of the Second Vatican Council. In this distinction historiography recognizes the “salient point of the spirit of the Council in signaling the passage of the Church to a new historical epoch.” Had Fr. Pouget been able to

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6 COLLEZIONE, Storia dei Concili ecumenici, Brescia-Queriniana 1990, 406-407. In that address (Gaudet Mater Ecclesia, 11 October 1962), we read: “The deposit of faith, that is, the truths which our revered doctrines contain,
1. He might have taken a deep breath of relief and observed, "All in all, I did not get around too badly."

2. The Biblical Question and the Introduction of the Historical-Critical Method in Exegesis and in Theology

The principal interest of Pouget was Sacred Scripture and History. His point of departure for beginning his approach to the Bible was the traditional position of Biblical concordance. Pouget was a conservative, and at times more so. He was forceful. He was for the agreement of theology and the Biblical text. History is stories. One should be satisfied with reading the Holy Scriptures devoutly.

Having come across the question of the plurality of sources in the Pentateuch in his classes, and as he followed the free courses of Church History on the "Acts of the Apostles" of L. Duchesne at the Sorbonne, his historical-critical understanding of Sacred Scripture matured.

As he distanced himself from the traditionalist concordance position that established a relationship of identity between Scripture and Revelation — from which derived the absolute inerrancy of Scripture and the eventual difference among scientific positions and Scripture were just resolved in favor of Scripture through "discoveries" that were at times curious if not to say pure fantasy — Pouget clarified the inadequacy between Scripture and Revelation, and consistently, between dogmatic formula and dogma. Assuming the distinction between Scripture and its revealed content, Pouget was able to accept the historical-critical method without having to renounce faith from reason. At the same time, while maintaining the distinction in the terms of inadequacy, he was able to avoid falling into the position of the biblical Modernism of Louis. When I came to Paris, I lived on my past, I was a conservative and even more so. I was forceful. I was for the agreement of theology and the Biblical text. History is stories. One should be satisfied with reading the Holy Scriptures devoutly.
two realities. This was an autonomy that, if first the Sacred Scripture and then the dogmatic data took shelter from the uncertainty of criticism — as Loisy intended —, would, at the same time, relegate revelation to what was unverifiable, and thus the theology that would result from this approach would not have any plausible foundation for the historical sciences, that is, ultimately without any justification or intelligibility.

More precisely, because the pre-critical position concerning Scripture could no longer be maintained when compared to criticism, Pouget intuited the principle that permitted scriptural studies in historical-critical terms without eliminating the transcendence of revelation. Such a hermeneutical principle — brought to light by the Magisterium in [the encyclical of Leo XIII] Providentissimus Deus (18 November 1893) — consisted of differentiating revealed truth from the “appearances” of a scientific and historical type, between revealed content and historical-literary vehicle. On this basis Pouget hoped for a non-dissociated way of understanding the relationship between faith and history, and, consequently, a method that would safeguard, at the same time, the exigencies of faith and those of the historical-critical method.

In fact, the taking up of the principle of inadequate distinction between Scripture as Word-of-faith and Scripture as an historical-literary vehicle, without, however, radicalizing it in separation, as did Loisy, permitted Pouget to sustain the introduction of the historical-critical method into biblical exegesis and, as a consequence, into the theological fabric, obtaining the gain of not having to remove theology from the exigencies of the critical method, and, thus, of not isolating it from a scientific context.

3. The Relationship Nature-Supernatural and Faith-Reason

The taking up of this double dimension, historical and divine, of the Scripture put in evidence — in G. Pouget — a more profound dialectic about how Christian revelation happened, or rather the relationship between nature, and the supernatural, and thus between faith and reason. Compared with the unambiguous exaltation of one or other extreme in this dialectical polarity, that had given rise to nationalistic or totally uncritical positions in the second half of the 19th century, Pouget chose a balance between the two. He held that reason and faith, nature and the supernatural, were not far apart in their dynamisms, but reconcilable. The balanced solution of this irreducible tension constituted the “principle” on which Pouget weaved his apologetic of the Christian event, which, in light of his way of thinking, realized the highest hypothesis of the dynamic of reason, that is, to stretch forward in awaiting an eventual revelation from God.
Pouget loved reason in the highest degree and held that only Catholicism could defend it to the full, because it safeguarded reason's metaphysical capacity to receive the Absolute:

The highest authority for me is reason; and I should say "my" reason, because I will be judged according to my own thinking. That is why one must always refine it and keep it alert.¹⁰

Denying the absolute is the great sickness of our day. It fouls the air. No one doubts physics, but they do morals! Only we Catholics are truly sensible. We do not walk away from reasoning — for that is what decides the existence of revelation and its limits.¹¹

We cannot reject the little light which God has given us to know him and to love Christ.¹²

Reason is not corrupt — he held — it does, however, need discipline; it must, that is, be educated to love the truth more than itself.

I keep telling myself — keep a grip on reason. But there is something above reason. It is the truth. Truth alone counts.¹³

Intelligence attaches itself to truth, but it must be formed for what is true.¹⁴

Reason, in fact, does not work in man in pure terms, according to the restriction of rationalism, but inheres in a historical subject, made of sensibility and of free will, and, precisely because of this, can be conditioned by its surroundings. All of this can obscure the "rightness" of reason in opening itself to what is true.¹⁵ If reason, then, is not prejudicially limited to the phenomenal aspects of reality and is educated in its "natural" desire for the supernatural — signaled by the dynamic of going beyond itself that distinguishes it — it finds itself open to the phenomenon of revelation. Revelation, in the act of revealing itself, even though it cannot be deduced by reason, not only does not obscure human intelligence, but fills it with more luminosity that helps it to be aware of the original dynamism to tending toward the Absolute:

¹⁰ J. GUITTON, Dialogues, op. cit., 216.
¹¹ J. CHEVALIER, Logia, op. cit., 159.
¹² Ibid., 102.
¹³ Ibid., 205.
¹⁴ Ibid., 112.
¹⁵ G. POUGET, La méthode dans les études, Published by Eure, Evreux, August, 1882 and recently reprinted in Bulletin des Lazaristes de France, n. 77, December 1989, 4-14.
We have higher tendencies in us: one cannot say that they require the perfect realization of that which they aspire to be. But if God grants their fulfillment, that is better. Revelation... surpasses reason; but it enlightens it, rather than imprisoning it.

Thus, faith and reason are considered — by Pouget — in a fertile virtuous circle. The reasons, with which intelligence questions faith, make the responses of faith support the interests of man. Otherwise, "faith would have nothing to say if reason had not asked for something."

4. Distancing himself from the Biblical Modernism of A. Loisy

The tension between faith and reason, maintained dialectically in balance, is the background to the solution of the "exegetical question," that came up with the publication of the little red books of A. Loisy. The thinking of Pouget concerning Loisy was positive at first, although with prudence, and critical on some points. Later on, however, especially with the examination of his commentary Les Évangiles Synoptiques, he became aware of the insufficiency of the biblical exegesis of Loisy. In a short time, with the help of J. Chevalier, G. Pouget published a vigorous criticism of it. He revealed the structure of Loisy's methodology, showing that an exegesis that wished to proceed in a "separate" way from faith does not succeed — notwithstanding the intention of wanting to protect faith from the uncertainty of the critical method — at remaining neutral or objective. Furthermore, he accuses Loisy of having substituted for the pre-comprehension of faith the vision of rationalism, and thus of not having stayed in that neutrality that his critical method, founded on the adequate separation between faith and history, should have — as he claimed — maintained.

M. Loisy can interpret well when he bears witness to the Gospel. But he should never oppose his interpretation to that of the Church, as one would oppose science to legend. He should not pretend to have followed "in everything a purely scientific method" (1, 268). His commentary is full of hypotheses which he spins, gradually, into affirmations or quasi-affirmations, without being able to commend anything but a small number of

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17 Ibid., 154.
18 J. Guittion, Dialogues, op. cit., 207.
19 E. Antonello, G. Pouget, testimoine, op. cit., 36-37, 73-75.
"a priori" statements, either philosophical or undisclosed critiques. We do not blame Loisy for having a bias: history, moral science, can never do without a bias of some sort. The Church has one, and she knows it; M. Loisy has one also, but we would like to hold a grievance against him because he does not seem to recognize it. Furthermore, we should add that the Church's bias seems to us, historically, much more solid and much closer to the facts, than that of M. Loisy: for the criticism itself, we prefer St. Paul to Strauss, even amended.21

In other terms, Pouget chides Loisy for having ignored the fact that history is "a moral science," which is to say that its understanding is determined by "a mentality" that conditions it; and that thus its "historical" data is in agreement with the interpretation of the meaning borne by the tradition that transmits it; because of which — in the final analysis — Loisy shows himself lacking in the sense of tradition.

Loisy takes the texts like neatly severed slices which he submits to analysis. But, in reality, they are connected to an uninterrupted flow of life within a society, the Church, which has its own psychological laws, to understand by tradition. Loisy lacks the sense of tradition.22

Now, the sense of tradition, of which the biblical texts are the written reflection, is the sense of the faith given by the Church and her Magisterium: thus, it is not possible to understand in a correct manner the sense of the texts of Scripture outside the sense of the tradition of faith. And consequently, the coordination of criticism with faith, in such a way that faith constitutes the pre-understanding of the sense of the texts of Scripture is not something arbitrary, but is an intrinsic necessity to the nature of the inspired texts.

In this reflection, G. Pouget finds himself in objective harmony with the theses of Histoire et Dogme of Maurice Blondel and with those found in La méthode historique of M.-J. Lagrange, even if at a historiographical level one cannot document any links among them. Evidently, it is through the path of culture that these same ways of thinking show themselves. They converge in showing both the inevitability of the historical consideration of dogma as well as the conditions necessary so that one does not fall into rationalism.

21 Ibid., 353.
5. Singularity of Revelation

The reflection of Pouget, which has as its purpose the defense of the historicity of revelation, discovered the danger of the reduction of the Christian faith according to the categories of world religions, in which Christianity loses its specificity inside the general religious aspirations of humanity. It is precisely in arguing with the New Theology, that Pouget defends the singular nature of the Christian event. In this vein he denounces rationalism colored with vague religiosity, in which Christian revelation with its dogmas is reduced to a form of religion of the spirit.

If the result of this theological current is the misrepresentation of revelation, then — argues Pouget — it is necessary to introduce the historical dimension of revelation to avoid such a dissolution. This is so because the Catholic faith does not base itself on the ideologies that from time to time the human spirit raises up on the stage of history; it rests, instead, on the “singular” historical event of Jesus Christ’s giving himself to God, which has been given over and conserved in the tradition of the Church.

*The Catholic faith is that which lives in the midst of a changing world, under successive expressions: it is a message of authority. It is concentrated in the sure revelation on the nature of God that was made in Jesus Christ and on the meaning of his Person: the Trinity and the Incarnation... In the Catholic faith Jesus Christ is not at all the supreme realization of our race; the term of human development must not coincide with the Incarnation. The Incarnation of Christ, born of the Virgin Mary, crucified, risen from the dead on the third day, designates something absolutely unique... Catholic doctrine is, above all, a tradition: it is not a matter of inventing a meaning for it, but to assure the meaning it has always had.*

From this we see the preoccupation of Pouget not to close in rigidly the tradition of faith and dogma in “expressive formulas” that...
are changeable; and, consequently, we see his discreet suggestion that the theological task apply itself to freeing revelation from the philosophical systems with which it tends to be overburdened within every epoch, so as to rediscover the proper sense of revelation that lives in Scripture and in the tradition of the Church.

Even Catholics at times make the serious mistake of linking dogma to the philosophical expressions of an epoch. But, in Catholicism, there are not just Catholics, there is the Church; and the Church never abandons dogma, never limits it to the philosophy of one period... rather than the necessity of building a dogmatic construction... we have to demolish; we must above all get rid of that which is obsolete in the old constructions, and highlight the true sense of dogmatic expressions.26

Within this polemic, then, G. Pouget finds the need for theology to put itself into listening to revelation’s “giving of itself” in the development of history. In this same period, he introduced himself to this orientation with a very brief, but original, unedited study called “La connaissance du singulier” [Knowledge of the individual thing] in which he expressed the need for theological knowledge to conform itself to the singular and historical datum of revelation.27

6. Revelation as the Pedagogy of the Communication of God

On this methodological base of his theological journey, Pouget was able to trace the underlining of revelation as pedagogy used by God to communicate himself. This concept of the pedagogy of God in revealing himself emerges particularly in the general framework of his treatise, Origine divine ou surnaturelle de l’Eglise catholique [the Divine or Supernatural Origin of the Catholic Church], centered on the revelation in Jesus Christ, center and decisive pivot of history. He is the revelation prepared for by God through the history of the Old Testament, seen in the ascending line of prophetic messianism, actuated with the historical event of Jesus Christ, and “radiating itself” in the history of the Church.28 The subtitle of the work

26Ibid., 201, 203.
27 G. POUGET, “La connaissance du singulier,” mimeographed paper of ten pages, 21 cm by 28 cm, in personal Archives of J. Chevalier, Cérilly, Lot-Pouget, n. 16. The text has no date; we can date it approximately between 1905-1907.
28 G. POUGET, Origine surnaturelle ou divine de l’Eglise catholique d’apres les données de l’histoire, Lyon 1923. The origin of this book of 569 pages is described thus by J. Chevalier: This book came from the work that J. Chevalier, at first alone, then with Maurice Legendre and some of his students of the time,
significantly carried the citation from Hebrews 13:8: Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

This work is the densest of Pouget’s, in which he has left us, even if in an apologetic manner, the significant data that interprets his thought. In it he intended to demonstrate that the inaccessible God, to whom every human religious set of beliefs tries to draw near, does not manifest himself from the depths of the human spirit as natural religion proposes, nor through the dialectical development of human thought as idealistic rationalism presumes, nor from the effort of moral aspiration, as autonomous ethics thinks. God, instead, gives himself to us in the reality of the unique event of human history of Jesus of Nazareth. And this event is embedded in human history through the slow pedagogy with which God prepared for himself, first a people truly his own, and then, through a group of disciples capable of listening, of following, and of going forth, he created the Church, a unique super-ethnic reality that would reach the people of every time and place to put redemption in action.

A particularly effective demonstration of the underlining of revelation as “pedagogy” is his article “La fede nella divinità di Cristo durante l’età apostolica” [Faith in the Divinity of Christ during the Apostolic Period], where Pouget shows the method by which Jesus manifested his own mysterious identity as Son of God. It is a pedagogy that, through the signs of miracles and of his word, lets filter into the human consciousness of the apostles the mystery hidden in his person: signs that prepared their freedom to make, through the gift of the Spirit, the act of faith in Jesus of Nazareth as God.

It is thus through the taking up of the notion of pedagogy that Pouget was able to recuperate revelation in its historical nature, insofar as, though supernatural, it would be portioned out according to the receptive capacity of the hearer, which is always conditioned by history. From this it follows that the concept of revelation, until that time identified reductively with its sources, begins to become problematic: on the one hand, the idea of revelation considered in objective and intellectual terms as the sum of “revealed truths” begins to crumble; on the other hand, it begins to open itself to its

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Roger Jourdain, André Bridoux, Pierre Bailly, had undertaken in 1905 under the direction of Fr. Pouget, whose notes he assiduously edited. Taken up again many times, and considerably enlarged, this great work was finished during Advent 1922 and was printed in Lyon in 1923, for private use, through the good offices of Victor Carlhian. Cf. G. POUGET, Mélanges, Paris-Plon, 1957, Preface, III.

29 “La fede nella divinità di Cristo durante l’età apostolica,” in Rivista Storico-Critica delle Scienze Teologiche, 1 (1906) 813-831; 1 (1907) 1-12; 2 (1907) 81-90; 4 (1907) 249-282. This long article of 72 pages was published with the pseudonym GUTOPE, an anagram of Pouget.
own "subjective" side, as the dialogue of the free communication of God with his people.

Objectively, we are only at the beginning of a process that will find pure expression in *Dei Verbum* of Vatican II. However, in similar attempts at a balanced presentation of the historical dimension in the examination of Sacred Scripture one already glimpses the placing in evidence of the *subjective/personalistic aspect* of revelation. History in fact shows that the action with which God revealed himself is intertwined with the development of the history of a people, and thus revelation can be considered not only objectively as a complex of revealed truths, but also as the *revealing act of God* who met man/a people who are put into the attitude of listening.

7. Outline of "Positive Theology"

On the consideration of the historical dimension of revelation, in Pouget, the need arises to develop a "positive theology" in an apologetic key that can demonstrate in the light of critical history the homogeneity of the development of dogma from its beginning point that is, from the revealing act of Christ accepted by the apostolic community. This is the intent of some small works of Pouget on the principal dogmas of faith: *Le sacrifice dans l'Eglise du Christ* [Sacrifice in the Church of Christ], *La vie de Dieu en nous* [The Life of God in Us], and *Le surnaturel dans la Bible* [The Supernatural in the Bible], in which he shows the derivation of some fundamental truths of faith, such as grace and the Eucharistic sacrifice, from the very intentions of Christ, that one can see revealed in the texts of Scripture. From these "experiments" we extract the methodology that Pouget suggests for dogmatic investigation: that the investigation of the faith be grounded in Scripture read at the same time in the light of both history and tradition. This methodology of investigation, Pouget held to be not only appropriate, but necessary in a cultural context in which the science of history had become paramount. Because of this he held to the necessity of the use of "positive theology," and he used it critically when examining "speculative theology": critical, not in the sense of refuting it, but rather in the sense that he foresaw the need for the "speculative" to calibrate and coordinate itself on the basis of historical research.

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36 G. POUGET, "Le sacrifice dans l'Eglise du Christ," in G. POUGET, *Mélanges*, op. cit., 115-152; it was composed in May 1916. "La vie de Dieu en nous," in *ibid.*, 52-68. This small work was sent at the beginning of October 1916 to J. Bouvier and J. Chervalier, who were at the war front. "Le surnaturel d'après la Bible," in *ibid.*, 69-114. This was found in the manuscripts of Pouget after his death; it is not dated, but, given its affinity with the previous writing, it presumably comes from the same period. Cf. *ibid.*, Préface, VIII.
According to Pouget, in fact, speculative theology was functional in one place, the medieval era, in which faith was given as something that made peace; but because the modern era with the historical-scientific problematic placed in discussion the historical foundations of the faith, it is necessary that theology use a methodology of justification of its foundations. Therefore, speculative theology — in his thinking — was not placed aside, but was to be questioned, because its methodology, which seemed inadequate both for the historicity of revelation and for the methodology of the modern way of knowing, needed to be integrated.

In this criticism of the speculative imprint of the “theology of the schoolmen,” one notes a similarity, external as it may be, with the thesis of É. Le Roy, expressed in his article, “Qu’est-ce qu’un dogme?” This author, formed in the mathematical sciences, in his desire to make up for the non-scientific character with which dogmatic assertions appeared in the eyes of his contemporaries, had tried to give dogmas an interpretation as simple “practical norms.” Similarly, taking a critical position with scholastic intellectualism, G. Pouget held that the truths of faith cannot be reduced to simple theoretical figures through speculation, but are given in the order of salvation to help the realization of human morality.

... our knowledge of the objects of faith... without engaging in long developments, is more than enough for us to draw practical determinations in view of our religious conduct, and it is exactly for this end that the revealed truths have been conceded to us.32

However, if the anti-intellectual vein of Pouget is undeniable, this tendency is not understood in the sense of an anti-truth reduction of dogma. Dogma appears in the writings of Pouget as the hermeneutic of the Church which confesses the fact of revelation in the order of the salvation of man. And theology, in prolonging this...

31 É. Le Roy conceives dogma as a proposition that does not have the possibility of presenting its own intrinsic evidence. “A dogma is a proposition that presents itself as being neither proved nor provable. Even those who affirm it true declare impossible that one can ever arrive at seizing the intrinsic reasons for its truth. Now, modern thought... distrusts the alleged immediate evidence that one multiplied so easily in the past. It discovers there quite often simple postulates adopted for the purpose of practical utility more or less consciously perceived” (Dogme et critique, 6-7). Dogma in this way of thinking then does not have a theoretic value, but a practical one, as a rule of action or “an attitude to take or a direction to follow.” Cf. É. LE ROY, “Qu’est-ce qu’un dogme?,” in La Quinzaine, 16 April 1905, taken up again and broadened in É. LE ROY, “Qu’est-ce qu’un dogme?,” in Dogme et critique, Paris-Bloud, 1907.

32 J. CHEVALIER, Logia, op. cit., 30.
perspective, establishes itself on the research of the foundation and the reasons, and thus tends to align itself as positive theology.

8. The Primacy of Christ the Redeemer in the “Moral World”

These last investigations of Pouget lead him to put his attention on the center toward which he had already directed all the preceding reflection: the primacy of Christ in the moral world. Reflection is introduced through the medieval question of the predestination of the Incarnate Word, and following the Scotist direction, that is putting oneself in the perspective of the intention of God rather than in the chronological view of their historical realization, he found that the “order of creation” is oriented to the “order of the Incarnation.” And thus, in the eternal design of God, the Incarnation of the Son is prior to creation: this signifies that man was created in the Son. As a consequence, Christ is at the center of the moral world, since through the assumption of a human nature in the person of the Word, all men find themselves ontologically, and not just by example, linked to him. And thus, Christ, as “head” of the moral world, carries it into the bond of Trinitarian communion, through his life obedient unto death and unto resurrection.

On this premise Pouget faces in succession two problems: the condition of sin of the human person with the interpretation of original sin, and the link between the Incarnation of the Word and the sin of man in the work of redemption.

The decadence of the moral world is an effect of human freedom, because man is not necessarily linked to the law that rules him. Therefore, that which is a surprise is not the presence of evil in the human world, but its wide diffusion. Revelation explains that original sin exists from the origins of the world, because of which very person is born affected by a sin that he did not commit. This fact — observed Pouget — creates difficulty for reason: how can one be responsible for a sin that someone else committed through his own actions? Stated thus, the doctrine of the Church seems to be an obstacle for a thinking mind. How does one resolve the problem? One needs — for Pouget — to clarify the limits of the content of faith, freeing the content from the excess baggage of interpretations due to cultural conditioning. In this regard, Pouget shows the weight exerted by Augustinianism, and, by contrast, the exactness with

which the documents of the Church present the origin of original sin as a *privation of grace* and not as a *fault*. As a consequence, the concept of the "origin of original sin" is interpreted in analogous terms in respect to the idea of sin personally committed.

It was his opinion that Adam, the first man, was created *for* the supernatural state, but not *in* the supernatural state, and thus that God had created Adam in a state of justice and of natural integrity, and that only in a second moment, when he had used his own liberty in obedience to its design, would he have been elevated to the state of grace. He founded this interpretation on the fact that the Council of Trent had preferred the saying that Adam "was constituted in grace," leaving aside the other expression that was then prevalent as the opinion of various theologians, that said that Adam was "created in grace." This for three reasons: first, because it seemed more faithful to the details of Scripture which recognized a "natural state" in the first man; second, because it seemed to him more consonant with the free nature of man; and third, because it avoided considering God as a clumsy Creator, who had to resort to repairs after the disobedience of man. And here the second question arises.

God does not then substitute for the first plan of creation, which had gone awry, the plan of redemption. But the *redemptive plan* of the elevation to grace of fallen man was already part of the project of creation: man was *created* in Christ, that is already made one in creation with him who heals him by uniting him in his obedience to the Father.

For this reason Pouget opposed the logic of the thought of St. Anselm on the reason for the Incarnation. We have to free — he observed — the motivation of the Incarnation from every form of dependence on the condition of sin of the creature. In the design of God, the Incarnation is not a function of sin, but of the unity of the moral world to Christ-the-Head: and only as a consequence, since the plan of God finds man as a sinner, does he prolong the Incarnation in the redemptive act that saves the world from sin. The reason for this opinion is that, were the Incarnation determined by sin, sin would have some sort of primacy over Christ. The originality of Christianity thus lies in the reunification of the whole moral world around its center: Christ.

Christ is the center of the moral world. It could fall. It fell among us... One fell down a rung, and it is difficult to climb up again... But this moral world had what was needed to find a remedy: the redemption, where Christ by his obedience as man to God gave more honor to the majesty than the faults of others could be an insult to him.34

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9. From Christ to the Church

"Redemption is the whole of Christianity." The announcement of the supernatural event pervades history and makes God closer to man than man is to himself, realizing the fullness of human nature once again placed in the orientation to Christ in which it had been created. The lasting nature of the event of salvation in time is the Church. The Church is not, in the interpretation of Pouget, a purely spiritual or liturgical fact, but an event of a new fraternity: gathering people of every age and entering into symbiosis with the culture gives origin to a civilization characterized by the order of love. At the same time, it is not a simple social reality, but rather the Body of Christ:

St. John puts it down for us very well that we are all one in the Father and the Son; that which includes the presence of the Holy Spirit and that, by means of the Son (Jn 17:21-23). If we are all a single living body, and the Body of Christ is eminently alive, being animated by this superior reality which Scripture calls "pneuma" and which is attributed as a term of God Himself (Jn 4:24), it is impossible that the members of this body not have a "reciprocal action" on one another, as St. Paul clearly notes (1 Cor 12:12-30). This idea that the Church is the Body of Christ, an idea familiar to St. Paul (cf. Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 6:15; Eph 4:4; Col 1:24; 2:19-20), is the basis of what we call the Communion of Saints, that is to say, members truly belonging to the soul of the Church, living a same superior life, which is grace, a type of divine life (cf. 2 Pt 1:4), by which they are made children of God (Rom 8:14-15).

Because of this, in Pouget's thought, Christ and the Church become inseparable. "The great advantage of the Church is to be in the hand of Christ." In the Church is a supernatural reserve that has no fear when faced with difficulties. Pouget thus has no fear of the human sins of the Church, which must be seen in the light of its being the "Church of Christ":

The Church is a two thousand year-old person; what is happening to her today is a little like a headache in the life of a person. We need to see behind the small human aspects of the Church the immortal Christ, and around him all the saints who already reign in heaven, and all those who, here below, without

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35 Ibid.
37 J. CHEVALIER, Logia, op. cit., 206.
38 Ibid., 49.
being clothed in crimson nor decorated in ribbons, follow with all their strength in humility and patience the divine Crucified One, with whom they will one day reign in heaven.  

10. The Spiritual Identity of Pouget

The passion for the Church, understood as the concrete face of Christ in time, puts into the light a double dimension of the interior identity of Pouget that we would like, in conclusion, to outline.

The first is his concrete love for the spread of the Church throughout the world, and thus his missionary fervor. He was animated by the hope that the event of salvation carried by Christ would expand and that the Church could fill the whole of humanity with her proclamation. The task of forming in theology the young who were placed in his school was driven by his desire to form witnesses in the society.

Be apostles, convince: "Non armis, sed argumentis," as St. Bernard says — he said to those who came to his room —. Piety is not enough. What is important is witness. The twelve were only a handful in a world much more wicked than ours, and they worked, and their work was not fruitless. It is their work we need to continue, and it is the same force, the eternal Christ, who sustains us. We must whisper this into the ears of youth who, lacking experience, could be, at the beginning of their active life, troubled and discouraged. They should think that evil arrives of itself, and all alone, one only needs to let it drop, whereas good requires a continual effort.

He was suspicious of overly pious and devout forms of prayer. He feared that they would become a psychological refuge and would resemble a false mysticism that shuts souls in their own spiritual comfort.

Piety is easier than criticism. I believe that to launch oneself into heaven, you must have a solid base on earth. Read St. John, and you will see how Christ insists on his works and, yet, it is the most mystical Gospel. If the Apostles... had not left the Cenacle, the world would still need conversion.

Therefore, in regard to Christian faith, Pouget highlighted more its relationship with life than with sentiment or with intellect. Faith

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39 Letter of Pouget, 12 August 1922, cited in ibid., 129.
41 Ibid., 151.
42 J. GUITTON, Portrait, op. cit., 411.
is given to be a help to realize the design of God in our life; for this reason faith was necessary, as he interpreted it, in charity and in moral life.

There is something better than writing books: it is to beget souls into eternal life. Christianity is not about having nice thoughts, it is about doing them, to come to the help of others.

The second line of the spiritual identity of Pouget, which is worthy of note, is the ever more passionate assimilation to Christ.

Only Christ is important... He alone is necessary, transcendent: others do not count next to him (1 Tm 2:5).

We could say that a mystical union with Christ grew in him through his patient meditation on the Christian event. Because of this he outlined a saint in Pauline terms of a personal self-awareness so involved in Christ that he has been assimilated in him: "Not him, but Christ in him and by him." And he still lived this tension with Christ as an event which is continually renewed, sin notwithstanding.

I forget the past. Whether it was good or bad, I forget it. We cannot do anything about the past. I have not taken hold of Christ as he has taken hold of me. I say with Paul: I strive for that. The best penance is not useless regret, but to try to become perfect. Look at Paul: he does not keep still. He reaches out toward the future: the things of above are before him, he can reach out to them.

And a few days before his death, while he was feeling the parting from persons whom he had loved, he was able to say:

It is sweet for me to go toward Christ, and it is hard for me, hard, because one leaves those one has loved. But we will not be separated. In Christ, union is good.

(Robert Stone, C.M., translator)*

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43 J. Chevalier, Logia, op. cit., 50.
44 Ibid., 172.
45 Ibid., 110.
46 Ibid., 27.
47 J. Guitton, Dialogues, op. cit., 241.
48 J. Chevalier, Logia, op. cit., 297-299.

* The instigator of the preceding article, Mme Paule Houdaille, grandniece of Fr. Pouget (11, rue Cuillerier; 94140 Alfortville; France) can procure a mimeographed collection of 130 pages of Fr. Pouget's unpublished or out-of-print texts. Write to her at the above address for more information.
Guillaume Pouget: Bibliography

This bibliography is based on that found at the end of the book by E. ANTONELLO, C.M., Guillaume Pouget (1847-1933), testimone del rinnovamento teologico all'inizio del secolo XX (pp. 272-280). There would be great interest in referring to it, in order to find there a brief presentation of each title.

I. Writings of G. Pouget


1916. “La vie de Dieu en nous,” in *ibid.*, 52-68.


1925 circa. *Compléments au cours sur la Création*, duplicated, 125 pages.


1932. *Inspiration de la Bible*, 70 pages, printed in Lyon, “for private use.”


**II. Correspondence**


2. Correspondence “Pouget - Bizard” in personal archives of M. Vansteenkiste, C.M. (Motherhouse).


III. Some works and articles on the life and thought of Fr. Pouget


"There are those who think I am like those nice old people who spend their time mumbling some prayer. I think, and that is exhausting. I am not necessarily impressed by my being blind, because that would make me sad; I cannot see my hand today, but I can still count my fingers. I would much rather think about the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit than about something that does not matter, except to souls that follow that path."

(Pouget)
Religious and Laity: A Common Mission in the Church and in Society*

by Benjamín Romo, C.M.
Delegate for the Vincentian Family

I. The Common Mission of the Church

1. A word about the laity in the New Testament

For us today, who live in a rather hierarchical Church, it is difficult to gauge the importance of the role of the laity in the Church at its beginnings, and especially the role of laywomen. Reading the New Testament from this perspective, we become aware that there were many men and women who were deeply committed to proclaiming Jesus Christ and his message of salvation for humankind.

A quick perusal of the New Testament brings to mind various persons who, on meeting Jesus of Nazareth, chose to collaborate with him and continue his mission. On reading John's gospel, we find that it was not Peter, John or any other apostle, but Mary Magdalene who was the first to announce to the apostles themselves: “I have seen the Lord” (Jn 20:18).

The New Testament mentions many other lay people, men and women, who joined together for the sake of a common mission: to

* Conference given at the meeting of the Union of Superiors General (USG), in Rome, on 27 November 2002.

1 For this first part I have made good use of two unedited articles of Fr. Robert Maloney, the Superior General of the CM: “The Role of the Laity in our Vincentian Family” and “The Profile of a Lay Vincentian in the 21st Century.”
proclaim Jesus Christ and the project of the Kingdom. In the Acts of the Apostles (9:36), we come across Tabitha “who was always doing good and helping the poor.” There is Mary, the mother of John Mark, whose house in Jerusalem was used as a meeting-place for prayer (Acts 12:12). The Acts of the Apostles also tell us of Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira (Acts 16:14), in whose house Paul and Silas met with the Christians of the city. There was also Phoebe, whom Paul described as a deaconess and whom he praised for having been a great help to many people, including himself (Rom 16:1-2).

Reading the New Testament from the perspective of the laity in the life of the Church will lead us to discover their active presence. Perhaps the best example in the whole of the New Testament is Paul’s statement about Prisca and Aquila, declaring that all the churches of the Gentiles owed a debt of gratitude to this couple. It would be difficult to find a greater compliment than this. In the eyes of Paul and Luke, they were exceptional missionaries. They appear in the letter to the Romans (16:3), the first letter to the Corinthians (16:2), chapter 18 of the Acts of the Apostles (18:2; 18:26), and the conclusion of the second letter to Timothy (4:19). They were, together with Paul, the founders of the church of Ephesus. Priscilla, whom Paul calls Prisca, is mentioned before her husband, which seems to indicate that she occupied a more important role than he in the missionary activity of the early Church. Taking these facts into account, it will be easy to discover how collaboration was evident. Whatever their situation (as married persons, celibates or young “presbyters”), all considered themselves to be Church. Transformed by Jesus, they were committed in all simplicity to proclaiming the message of salvation, which is Jesus himself. They were all united in a common Mission.

Through 20 centuries of history, the role of the laity has had its ups and downs. Especially in the last millennium, the hierarchy of the Church has taken the leading role in the tasks and the mission of the Church, to the detriment of the role of the laity and their collaboration in the work of redemption. Nevertheless, we cannot ignore the fact that there have been many lay men and women who have wielded great influence in many of the great spiritual movements in the Church’s history. In the third and fourth centuries, the majority of the fathers and mothers of the desert was lay people. In the mystical tradition of the 12th and 13th centuries, many laywomen, like Julian of Norwich, played a fundamental role. In France in the 17th century, an epoch of saints like Francis de Sales and Vincent de Paul, Madame Acarie, a mother of six children, was

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1 Rom 16:4.
one of the persons most sought after as a spiritual guide. We could point out many other men and women who have been examples of commitment and dedication in the course of history.

2. Five convictions that form the basis of collaboration between laity and religious

The action of the Holy Spirit has led the Church to adopt new ways of living out Jesus Christ's project of life in the midst of the world. Lay people and religious communities consider themselves to be Church and grow each day in a greater awareness of carrying out the mission in collaboration. And in this way, they share their own wealth in common and allow it to be converted into a transforming power in the midst of the world.

Allow me to share with you five convictions that, among many others, form the basis for mutual collaboration:

First: Mission is not merely an activity of the Church; it is its very essence. If the Kingdom of God is the fundamental theme of Jesus' preaching, then "mission" is the command given by Jesus to his disciples: Go! Go and proclaim the Kingdom! Their mission therefore is to preach the Kingdom. All the members of the Church are missionaries. Already in 1975 Evangelii Nuntiandi stated that "anyone who rereads in the New Testament the origins of the Church, follows her history step by step and watches her live and act, sees that she is linked to evangelization in her most intimate being." And so, it is the whole Church that receives the mission of evangelizing, and each one's work is important for the growth of all. Religious and lay people in the Church therefore share the task of being missionaries in the midst of the world; they proclaim Jesus Christ and make his gospel effective, according to their respective charisms. We could therefore say that there are not different "missions;" there is only one Mission, and it is to proclaim Jesus Christ.

Second: The laity carry out their mission in the world. Drawing inspiration from documents such as Evangelii Nuntiandi and Christifideles Laici (1988), lay men and women carry out a vast and varied array of ministries in the Church. They act as leaders of local communities, catechists, teachers, animators of prayer, servants of the Word, ministers to the sick in their homes and in hospitals, and servants of the poor. They play an important role in initiatives for peace and justice among the nations. By their vocation lay people are called to evangelize the world of culture, politics, economics, the

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3 Cf., Mk 1:15; Mt 28:19-20.
4 Evangelii Nuntiandi, 15.
sciences, the arts, international life and the communications media. Today we often find the lay faithful creating web pages on the Internet, and drawing up solid plans for promoting human advancement, culture, and development. Motivated and inspired by the charism of an Institute, they are increasingly sharing their goods as they seek to make their work in the world more effective.

To share the charism of one’s religious community with the laity is to bring the gospel through them into the many areas of our world where religious life as such has not been able to penetrate.

Third: Mission is the path to holiness. Holiness is the universal vocation of all those who are baptized in Christ. The call to follow Jesus Christ holds true for all the faithful who are incorporated into the life and mission of Jesus. The path of Mission is the path to holiness. “This charge [the call to holiness] is not a simple moral exhortation, but an undeniable requirement arising from the mystery of the Church.”¹ Holiness is the perfection of charity, and charity is the fundamental task of the Church by which the Kingdom of God is built. Christians are called to create a culture of solidarity as an expression of love, and to use it as a foundation to build a civilization of love embracing all human beings and all aspects of human life. By sharing a common vocation to holiness, religious and the lay faithful are placed in a position of equality that enables them to advance together as they follow Christ and to work jointly in building the Kingdom.

Fourth: Families and young people are called to play a special role in carrying out the common mission of the Church. With regard to families, it is important to recall the beautiful expression used by Vatican II and repeated by Evangelii Nuntiandi which describes the family as a “domestic Church.”² The family, like the Church, is a place where the gospel is transmitted, especially to the young, and through them is radiated to others, particularly because of their witness of unity and love. On the other hand, both in the New Testament as well as in the other documents of the Church, special mention is made of the young. Timothy and Titus, two of the great missionaries of the early Church, were young men. As a matter of fact, Paul had to advise Timothy: “Let no one look down on you because of your youth.”³ Today 64% of the world’s population is under 25 years of age and this fact points to the evangelizing potential in young people. To share the charism of one’s Institute with families and with the young is an urgent need today.

¹ Christifideles Laici, 16.
² Lumen Gentium, 11; Apostolicam Actuositatem, 11.
³ 1 Tm 4:12.
Fifth: At this present moment in which we are beginning the 21st century, the Spirit of the Lord is opening up new avenues for the missionary activity of lay people. And, on the other hand, the document Vita Consecrata reports how religious communities today are living and sharing their charism with the laity.

And the reasons for sharing the charism are not the dearth of vocations to priestly and religious life, and still less, sociological factors. The reason is basically ecclesial in so far as the Church is a community marked by communion and participation. On this subject we can recall the enlightening words of the Pope who says: "The new phenomenon being experienced in these days is that some members of the laity are asking to participate in the charismatic ideals of Institutes. This has given rise to interesting initiatives and new institutional forms of association. We are experiencing an authentic re-flourishing of ancient institutions, such as the secular orders or third orders, and the birth of new lay associations and movements linked to religious Families and Secular Institutes. Whereas at times in the recent past, collaboration came about as a means of supplementing the decline of consecrated persons necessary to carry out activities, now it is growing out of the need to share responsibility not only in the carrying out of the Institute's works but especially in the hope of sharing specific aspects and moments of the spirituality and mission of the Institute."8 One of the fruits of the Church as a "communion" is the collaboration and exchange of gifts in order to share more effectively in the Church's mission. An Institute manifests its charism in two ways: by living it and by sharing it with others.

II. An experience of collaboration:

The Vincentian Family

Since we are speaking of lay people and religious engaged in a common mission, let me share with you how the charism of St. Vincent de Paul has been lived out in recent years with regard to the service of the poor in the Church.

The Vincentian charism began with Vincent de Paul at the beginning of the 17th century, and very quickly came to be shared with the French lay faithful of his day. In terms of collaboration, we find that our saint

- believed in the power of the laity;
- created opportunities for the lay faithful to live their faith in the very heart of the world;

8 Starting Afresh from Christ, 31.
• shared with them his own vision of Jesus Christ and the poor;
• shared his evangelical lifestyle with all classes of lay people;
• had a listening attitude towards the laity and the poor, and learned from them to let himself be transformed by God.

1. The various branches

Let me present to you some of the Associations that were founded by St. Vincent or arose within the Vincentian Family and that, while being faithful to their identity, share a common spirituality and mission.

St. Vincent de Paul believed in the power of the laity and in the evangelizing and transforming role of women in the Church and in society. Because of this conviction, and in response to the needs of the poor, he established The Charities in France in 1617. Today they are known as the International Association of Charities, AIC. These groups, principally consisting of women, are present in 52 countries with a total membership of 250,000. They are engaged in implementing projects that promote the poor, denounce injustice, and form pressure groups to combat unjust structures.

Seeking to evangelize the poor and renew the clergy, Vincent de Paul founded the Congregation of the Mission or the Vincentian Missionaries (CM). Working in 80 countries and numbering around 4,000 missionaries, they collaborate with lay people in the integral promotion of persons and communities.

In the year 1633 Vincent de Paul together with Louise de Marillac founded The Company of the Daughters of Charity (DC). Present today in 90 countries and numbering around 23,500, they collaborate with the laity, especially with Vincentian associations. They are active in areas afflicted by poverty and war and reach out to the poorest of the poor.

Drawing inspiration from the charism of Vincent de Paul, the young man Frederick Ozanam and his companions from the university established the Society of St. Vincent de Paul (SSVP) in Paris in 1833. Its end is: To help our neighbour, those who suffer and are abandoned, after the example of Jesus Christ and according to the Vincentian tradition. This foundation became an excellent means of actualizing the Vincentian charism in response to the concrete needs of the historical moment. Today the Association is present in 133 countries and has about 650,000 members.

In the wake of the apparitions of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal to St. Catherine Labouré in the year 1830, there arose the Association of Vincentian Marian Youth (JMV). Its end is to form its members to live a solid faith following Jesus Christ, the evangelizer of the poor. Living their missionary vocation in the Vincentian style, they work for the promotion of the poor, evangelizing the most neglected communities. They work in close collaboration with other groups of the Vincentian Family. They are present in 62 countries and have 72,000 members.

Again, following the apparitions of Our Lady to Catherine Labouré, there arose the Association of the Miraculous Medal (AMM). Forming part of the Vincentian Family, and with a presence in 30 countries, they dedicate their activity in the Church to the evangelization and promotion of poor families in their own communities, and reach out to the most neglected groups. In all, they have about a million registered members.

The Lay Vincentian Missionaries (MISEVI): This is a Vincentian association that arose in 1999 and whose aim is: to live the missionary dimension of the Vincentian charism with passion. For this reason, after receiving a solid formation in human and Christian living, and some technical or professional training, they go to the missions “ad gentes” and devote a part of their lives (from two to ten years) to the promotion of the poor. Their projects are carried out in collaboration with the works of the Daughters of Charity or with the Vincentian missionaries themselves. They have permanent lay missions in Mozambique, Bolivia, Honduras, and Spain.

There are many other associations and institutes who drink from this common well which is the Vincentian charism, for example, the Religious of St. Vincent de Paul who are here with us, but, for the purpose of this presentation, I have limited myself mainly to the collaboration among the above-mentioned groups.

All these associations or institutes share the same charism because:

- they recognize St. Vincent as the one who founded or inspired them;
- they have the same mission: the evangelizing service of the poor;
- they have, in some way, the same concrete way of serving the poor;

\[10\] A recent study speaks of 267 communities that have appeared in the course of history; of them 167 exist in the world today. Cf., BETTY ANN MCNEIL, D.C., The Vincentian Family Tree, Vincentian Studies Institute, 1996.
• they share a common spirituality of incarnation: Christ, incarnate in the poor;
• they share a secular character.

2. Some elements pertaining to our juridical structure

All of the associations mentioned above are recognized by the Holy See. The AIC has an ecclesiastical assistant appointed by the Church, and the same is true of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Curiously enough, by a disposition of the Holy See, the Vincentian Marian Youth, the Association of the Miraculous Medal, and the Vincentian Lay Missionaries all have the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission for their Director General. All these associations have a lay president elected by their members. The Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul and the Congregation of the Mission enjoy a close family relationship and a solid interaction among them based on mutual respect. They have come together for formation and also undertake common projects of service and evangelization of the poor.

3. Experiences of collaboration

The Vincentian lay and consecrated persons who work in 135 countries of the world, motivated by their charism and by the appeals of the Church and the world today, have begun some common projects. Here are some of them:

They have drawn up programs for formation in common. Encouraged by the words of the Pope, “Dear sons and daughters of St. Vincent: today more than ever, seek out the causes of poverty with boldness, humility and competence and foster effective, flexible, and concrete solutions for both the short- and the long-term. In doing so, you will help the Church and the gospel to be credible.” In each country they have initiated programs for the continuing formation of the lay faithful, the Daughters of Charity and the Congregation of the Mission. There are programs of common formation in Vincentian spirituality and in the social teaching of the Church.

One of the programs of direct service to the poor is called “The Globalization of Charity: The Fight against Hunger.” During their annual meeting in 2001, at the beginning of the new millennium, the leaders of the different branches of the Vincentian Family chose hunger as their focal point for the following two years and suggested

that all the energies of the various associations be channelled towards combating this scourge. Two types of action were put into place: the immediate procurement of food and programs to overcome the causes of hunger, for example, education, creating awareness, community involvement and solidarity, and joint efforts with public authorities.

Every year there is a Meeting of the International Leaders of the Vincentian Family. Eight branches of the Vincentian Family come together to share their experiences and projects in the service of the poor. There are also moments of reflection and formation, prayer and joint implementation of common projects.

There is also an Annual National Meeting of the different branches of the Vincentian Family. To celebrate the feast of St. Vincent, the various associations and Vincentian groups come together every year in each country. It is an opportunity for prayer, sharing and formation in our own spirit and also to formulate more effective responses to the forms of poverty in our surroundings.

In many countries there is a Coordinating Commission that organizes common formation programs, apostolic projects, and times of prayer in which the different branches of the Family participate.

Furthermore, we are preparing a book on lay Vincentian spirituality. This formation material is being put together for the purpose of offering a Vincentian spirituality that is more incarnate in today's reality and drawn from the experience of the lay faithful themselves.

Finally, I would like to mention the Common Prayer of the Vincentian Family. With the collaboration of our international leaders we have drawn up and distributed a common prayer to all countries. It serves to unite us in the same spirit and to animate our evangelizing work for the poor. In addition, some of the branches have prepared, or are preparing, their own "book of Vincentian prayers."

III. Some of the challenges that arise from the joint action of religious and laity in the mission

1. Sharing one's charism with the laity

This is the first challenge facing religious life today: the sharing of an Institute's charism for the sake of growth and renewal. "Today many Institutes have come to the conclusion that their charism can be shared with the laity." 12 It is already taking place and bringing

12 Vita Consecrata, 54.
benefits to both consecrated persons and lay people. On the one hand, consecrated persons radiate their own spirituality; and on the other hand, they receive from the laity a new vision of their own charism, and this gives them an openness to new projects that respond more effectively to today’s human situation. “The whole spiritual and religious world, that oftentimes closes in on itself around insignificant problems, erupts when confronted with the grave problems people face and the natural way in which they put up with hunger, cold, hardships, inconveniences and insecurity for the whole of their lives…. It is a fact that the religious life which enters more deeply into this world… begins to discover the charismatic origins of its consecration…. Religious life has discovered from its lived experience that the poor person is a privileged mediation for the encounter with God.”

Collaboration is the source of the inner renewal of religious communities, now that lay people have come to discover the essential elements of their life and of the charism itself. To share one’s charism is to share the gift one has received so that others, lay people, may live their faith committed to the cause of peace and justice in the world. What actions can we take to share our charism, at both the provincial and local levels, and to live our common Mission more effectively?

2. Living one’s charism with a spirit of collaboration

Starting out from an ecclesiology of communion and participation, we arrive at an attitude of shared responsibility in the common action of building the Kingdom. To collaborate in carrying out Jesus’ project means to be humble enough to step back and to let the laity be in the vanguard in the areas that belong to them, in the Church and in the world. It means to give up our obsolete and self-sufficient attitudes towards the laity, to break with a clerical and elitist mentality. It means to assume attitudes of mutual listening, dialogue and discernment. It is to live in an attitude of openness, ready to give and to be given, and at the same time, to receive and to allow oneself to be transformed. Many saints and many of our own founders themselves went through a profound transformation in their spirituality and charism as a result of God’s call through their encounter with lay people and with historical events. Looking at our communities, how do we live this collaboration? What is the dominant mentality?

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13 V. Codina - M. Zevallos, Vida religiosa: Historia y teologia, Ed. Paulinas, Madrid 1987, p. 188.
3. Religious and laity together facing the challenge of formation

Formation is the soul and the driving force of the mission and the commitment to build the Kingdom. The lack of formation is one of the greatest obstacles to the participation of the laity in the mission of the Church. The collaboration between religious and lay people begins with formation. Our mission today, it seems to me, is focused to a great extent on the formation of lay ministers. For integral formation to be at the service of the Church’s mission, its starting point must be our concrete reality, and it must also return to this same reality in order to transform it. The Word of God, our present history, world events, and reflection on our charism and the situation of the poor, are the theological loci of formation. This formation is a fundamental challenge for the future of religious communities and of the mission of the laity in the Church. The formation of lay collaborators and consecrated members must be a constant concern for us. What contributions do we allow the laity to make to our formation? What programs do we have for common formation with the laity?

4. Promoting a lay spirituality together

For the first Christians the following of Jesus Christ formed part and parcel of their daily life, and both illumined it and transformed it. Their missionary commitment sprung from daily life, and profoundly affected their life, transforming it. A balanced interplay of prayer and action is extremely important in order to open the way to a healthy lay spirituality that is incarnated in the concrete history of the human person and of humanity. The “ora” of contemplation must be blended harmoniously with the “labora” of action, so that our spirituality will unite all the dimensions of human life in an experience of faith. As we set out again on the road to holiness today, we are immersed in a profound communion with God and in a commitment to transform the world. Both religious and laity need to create a spirituality that is centered in Christ and in his gospel. One of the challenges is for our communities to become “schools of prayer” for lay people.¹⁴

5. Walking together with a missionary spirituality

The Church is missionary by its very nature. The mission is its essence and its reason for being. It exists in order to evangelize and serve. The Second Vatican Council underlined the fact that the whole Church is missionary and, therefore, every baptized person must feel

¹⁴ Cf., Nuevo Milenio Inciunt, 33.
called to contribute to the proclamation of the gospel. For religious life, therefore, the missionary dimension is not something optional but rather essential. The fact that many lay people today are called by God to live the mission \textit{ad gentes} challenges us to create the conditions and the structures needed for them to live their vocation as missionaries. In a globalized world such as ours, there must be a readiness to go wherever our charism is needed, and so we too must have a missionary mentality because only one who is truly a missionary can lead others to share in the mission. The challenge we face is to discover the missionary possibilities of our charism in order to share them with the laity. To accompany them in the mission is also a part of the task of religious communities. How do we live out and transmit this missionary dimension flowing from our own charism?

6. **Being with the poorest**

We cannot leave lay people with an ambiguous faith and a timid commitment in the face of the world; they need the radicalism of the gospel along with a coherent life. The lived witness of our communities must show clearly “where we stand” and “with whom we stand.” For Christians, baptism is the deepest motivation for turning our commitment to Jesus into a preferential option for the poorest and most abandoned by society. The challenge for religious consists in keeping a real and effective presence in the face of old and new forms of poverty which continue to afflict the world and are a cause of scandal for humanity. War, hunger, social exclusion, sickness, violence and many other realities of this kind continue to call out for a committed presence on the part of those who follow Jesus. In the Church there is an awakening among lay people who seek to be radical in their faith commitment and hope to see a religious life that is more coherent with the gospel and with their own charism. The laity are looking for religious communities that are open, welcoming and that, by a lifestyle marked by simplicity and closeness, show them how to be with the poor.

7. **Create “new opportunities” for the mission of the laity in the Church and in the world**

One of the biggest challenges facing the Church, and religious life within the Church, is that of creating new opportunities for people to live their faith. Moved by their charism, religious can create new opportunities for lay people to share the life, spirituality and apostolate proper to the community, especially its prayer and its service of the poor. In this area great progress has been made since Vatican II, but there still remains much to be done. A greater
participation of the laity in the Church means reformulating the role of the hierarchy, and, if you will, "relocating" the clergy. The Church's official documents highlight the secular activity of the laity, but do not limit them only to this area. In 20 centuries of history how far have we advanced along the path of participation and shared responsibility that were present in the early communities in which Priscilla and Aquila exercised a role of primary importance? These same documents also mention the possibility of lay people participating in the Church as ministers. Beginning with our communities, what has been done in practice? The document Vita Consecrata urges us to go further: "It is therefore urgently necessary to take certain concrete steps, beginning by providing room for women to participate in different fields and at all levels, including decision-making processes, above all in matters which concern women themselves." What steps should be taken at the level of our religious communities to achieve a more significant feminine presence in the Church and in society?

Conclusion

Collaboration will be profoundly ecclesial to the degree to which there exists a deep conviction in the Church about the universal call to holiness, about the universal call to mission, and about the universal call to create a civilization of love. On the other hand, collaboration will be realized more effectively to the degree that there is clarity and an incarnation and inculturation of the charism of the institutes themselves. And finally, collaboration will spring from the confidence and faith we have in the laity, and from the conviction that they have an increasingly important role to play in the Church today.

15 Vita Consecrata, 58.
Five Snapshots of Lesser-Known Vincentian “Saints”

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

In 1918 the historian, Lytton Strachey, stated that, when writing history, less is often more. In other words, true selectivity is much more important than volume. He wrote: “It is not by the direct method of scrupulous narration that the explorer of the past can hope to depict a singular epoch (or person). If he is wise, he will adopt a subtler strategy.... He will row out over the great ocean of material and lower down into it, here and there, a little bucket which will bring to the light of day some characteristic specimen... to be examined with a careful curiosity.”

Surely few events say more about a person than his death. Death not only closes life, it defines it. Christians have always regarded martyrdom as the preeminent form of the following of Christ. From the earliest time, martyrs captured the Christian imagination and inspired in others incredible heroism in living the gospels even to death.

Some, of course, renounce their faith rather than die a martyr’s death. But for others, even sometimes for people whose lives up until that time seemed mediocre, death is their finest hour. Shakespeare says of Macbeth: “Nothing in his life became him like the leaving of it. He died as one that had been studied in his death to throw away the dearest thing he owned as ’twere a careless trifle.”

In this brief conference, I offer a snapshot of the death of five lesser-known martyrs in our Vincentian Family. As the author of the second letter of Peter puts it, each of them, in times of persecution, was like “a lamp shining in a dark place until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.”

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1Lytton Strachey, Eminent Victorians (1918), as cited in Joseph Ellis, Founding Brothers (New York: Vintage, 2000), ix.
2Macbeth, Act. I, Scene IV (Forres. The palace).
32 Peter 1:19.
1. Thaddeus Lee

We know very little of Thady Lee and some of what we do know is uncertain. In the writings of St. Vincent he appears only once, in a postscript to a letter that Vincent wrote to Lambert aux Couteaux, the superior in Poland, on March 22, 1652.

Poor Brother Lye, who was in his native place, fell into enemy hands. They crushed his skull and cut off his feet and hands in the presence of his mother.:

Thaddeus Lee was born in 1623 in Tuogh, Ireland (near Adare, in County Limerick). He entered the Congregation of the Mission in Paris on October 21, 1643, and took his vows on October 7, 1645. While still a student (for that reason St. Vincent calls him “Brother”), he was sent to Ireland. He was probably among the eight missionaries whom St. Vincent mentions in his letter of October 15, 1656, to Edmund Dwyer, the Bishop of Limerick. Unfortunately, the list of those who comprised this group is incomplete, though St. Vincent mentions that five were Irish. What is certain is that Thady Lee was in Ireland in 1651, when one of Cromwell’s generals, Henry Ireton, laid siege to and captured Limerick. At first, St. Vincent thought that most of the confreres were among those “whom the English put to death at the capture of Limerick,” but afterwards he received news that several had escaped. It was in this context that he announced to Lambert aux Couteaux the martyrdom of “poor Brother Lye.”

In 1747, Pierre Collet wrote this about Lee’s death:

Of the three missioners who had remained in Ireland only two returned to Paris, after having passed at Limerick through all the terrors of pestilence and war. The third finished his course there: the others disguised themselves and escaped as they could. One of them retired to his own country with the Vicar-General of Cashel. The other found in the mountains a pious woman who concealed him for two months. A brother (Thady Lie) who waited on them was less fortunate, or rather more so. The

4SV IV, 343.
5SV III, 79-80.
6SV IV, 341.
heretics having discovered his retreat massacred him under the eyes of his mother. They smashed his head, after having cut off his feet and hands, an inhuman and barbarous punishment which served to show the priests what they might expect should they be captured.7

At a Provincial Council meeting, held in St. Joseph's, Blackrock, on November 7, 1917, this terse decision was made: that the case of Brother Lee, martyred near Limerick, be taken up and further investigations be made in order to promote his beatification. But Thaddeus Lee will probably never be beatified, since we know too little about him.

So, the first martyr in our Vincentian Family was a seminarian whom St. Vincent had known personally in Paris. He died isolated from his companions, tortured as his mother looked on.

2. Jean Le Vacher

Many also doubt whether Jean Le Vacher will ever be beatified, even though in 1885 the Superior General, Antoine Fiat, wrote: “Fr. Jean Le Vacher was a true saint and a glorious martyr. How I would like to introduce the cause of his beatification! Among the sons of St. Vincent it seems to me that there is no one more worthy than he.”

Jean was born in Val-d'Oise, France, on March 15, 1619, and entered the Congregation of the Mission with his brother Philippe on October 5, 1643. He was ordained a priest in 1647 and went to Tunis almost immediately. Within a year after his arrival, the superior of the mission there died, as did the French Consul. So Jean, at the age of 29, became head of the mission and French Consul. Two years later he also became Vicar Apostolic. In 1666 he returned to France, but two years later was sent to Algiers as Vicar Apostolic of Algiers and Tunis. In 1673 he became the French Consul in Algiers. That is the root of the problems surrounding his beatification. Jean was a zealous missionary, working especially among the slaves in the capital, whom he estimated to number about

15,000. But he was also the Consul, a difficult political position at a time when relations between France and Algeria steadily worsened.

In late June 1683, fighting broke out as the French fleet began to bombard Algiers. At the same time a plague raged within the city. The Turkish forces sent Le Vacher to mediate peace. He, two Turkish diplomats, and an interpreter arrived under a white flag at the French admiral’s ship. Admiral Duquesne was inflexible in negotiations and yelled at Le Vacher with disdain: “You’re more a Turk than a Christian!” The French were deceived by one of the Turkish diplomats, called Mezzomorto, who promised to work with them, so that they could regain control in Algeria. But, once back on land, he himself seized power and began to fire at the fleet again. When the French retaliated, he arrested Le Vacher and the few other French citizens who remained in the capital.

Le Vacher’s martyrdom took place on July 16, 1683, toward sunset, on a small pier in the port. He was asked to renounce his faith and declare himself a Muslim. Instead, he bid farewell to the Christian slaves in a loud, clear voice and exhorted them to remain firm in their faith. He was tied to a wooden frame which was then attached to the mouth of a cannon. Then there was a touching moment which I find encouraging to recall in the midst of all the strife in the Middle East and North Africa today. Witnesses state that none of the Muslims present was willing to light the fuse. A group of Jews were present also, but none of them was willing. Finally, a renegade Christian did the job. Le Vacher was blown to pieces. Ten other Frenchmen followed him to the same type of death.

The French Campaign was ultimately unsuccessful since Admiral Duquesne had to return to France because of a lack of supplies.

Actually the cause of Jean Le Vacher’s beatification did begin in 1923, but little progress has been made.

Because of his political role, some question whether he was really a martyr. Reading the accounts of his death, I have little doubt myself. He died professing his faith courageously and encouraging others to profess it too.

3. Sr. Marguerite Rutan

Marguerite Rutan was born in Metz in 1736. There, at the age of 20, she began her postulancy in a hospital as a Daughter of Charity. A year later, on her birthday, she entered the Seminary in Paris and just five months later she was sent to serve in a hospital in Pau. She had the happiness of seeing her two sisters enter the Company shortly after her and the sadness of seeing both of them die at a young age. From Pau she moved to several other hospitals, finally arriving in Dax, where she became Sister Servant in 1779.
Ten years later, with the outbreak of the Revolution, life became increasingly difficult for the sisters. Resources for the running of the hospital were scarce. The government provided fewer and fewer funds. After October 3, 1793, all sisters employed in running hospitals and schools had to choose between taking the oath or leaving the institutions where they served. Sr. Marguerite and her companions refused the oath. From then on they were constantly under surveillance, but their services in the hospital were so needed that they were allowed to continue. Finally, however, Sr. Marguerite was arrested on December 24, 1793, on charges of “corrupting and slowing down the revolutionary and republican spirit of the military who went into that hospital.” What had happened in fact was that a group of soldiers, to express gratitude for the care given in the hospital, returned to play some songs for the sisters. Sr. Marguerite stopped to listen to them, gave them some refreshments and also some money. That was her crime. She was taken to the prison at the Carmelites’.

At the beginning of March 1794, a guillotine was constructed in the Place Poyanne in Dax. Simultaneously, most prisoners were transferred to Pau, making the journey on foot, but Sr. Rutan was left in the Carmelite prison, a sign that her fate had already been decided.

After a brief trial, her name was placed upon the list of those to be guillotined. An extraordinary commission arrived in Dax to review the cases of those facing capital punishment. On April 9, after a brief hearing in which the same charges were repeated, Marguerite was condemned to death. The sentence was to be carried out immediately. She and the Curé de Gaube, also condemned, were tied back to back, placed on a cart, and, surrounded by soldiers, rushed to the execution place to the sound of tambourines. Having first witnessed the death of the Curé, she asked the executioner not to touch her as she herself removed the shawl from around her shoulders. She then placed her head on the guillotine and was executed.

What I find most remarkable in reading the accounts of Marguerite’s death was her dignity. She seems to have been undaunted, treating others gently, speaking her mind clearly and unflinchingly right to the end.
4. Sr. Martina Vázquez Gordo

Sr. Martina was born in Segovia, Spain on January 30, 1865. She entered the Daughters of Charity in February 1896. Martina was highly respected by her peers. As a young sister she was named superior of the Colegio of the Milagrosa in Zamora. Afterwards, she was superior of the hospital in Melilla. She returned to Madrid as a member of the Provincial Council and Assistant at the Provincial House. On various occasions the Queen sought her advice. Finally, she became superior at the hospital in Segorbe, where she initiated many works.

Those who lived with her attest that she was very intelligent and utterly absorbed in her works with the poor. They state that she was quite direct, even with those in authority. Her relatives wrote about her human qualities with great admiration.

After the breakout of the Civil War in Spain, the sisters remained in the hospital in Segorbe, where Sr. Martina, now 71 years of age, continued to serve. On July 27, 1936, militia men stormed the hospital with guns drawn and expelled the sisters, leaving them on the street. They sought refuge with a former student from one of their schools, staying there in seclusion until October.

Then one night, militiamen entered the house suddenly and went straight to Sr. Martina's room where she lay in bed. Ironically, she had recently cared for one of the group's leaders, called "Marchen," in the hospital. They shouted: "Get up. Get dressed, and come with us to make a declaration." She replied: "Did you come to get me to make a declaration or to kill me?" Martina's farewell to her sisters was simple: "Good-bye. See you in heaven." She was pushed into a car.

When they reached the main highway outside town, Martina said to her escort, "Are you going to kill me? If so, there's no need to go any further. Do it right here." They stopped and tied her to a tree. They wanted her to turn away from them so that they could shoot her in the back, but she refused. Rather, she said, "I want to see the face of those who kill me because they are the same faces of those whom I have fed so many times to kill their hunger." After blessing herself, she stated, "You can shoot now." They shot her. It was the 28th of October 1936.

What struck me most in reading the accounts of Sr. Martina's death? It was utterly senseless. She was killed by fanatics, whose
relentless promotion of their own ideals led them to combat, even hate, those who had other ideals. Martina's ideals as a Daughter of Charity, serving the poor each day, were quite clear to her. She was ready to die for them.

5. Joseph Chow Tsi-Che

Did you ever want to be pope? I have heard Catholics say, usually with a little bit of frustration and a little bit of humor: "If I were pope for a week, here is what I would do...!" Of course, none of us is ever offered that opportunity!

But actually, one of our Vincents was asked.

Joseph Chow was born in 1891 in Shijiazhuang. He made his vows in the Congregation of the Mission in 1915 and was ordained to the priesthood four years later. After serving as a professor in the minor seminary in Shijiazhuang and then as a philosophy professor in the major seminary of Chala, Beijing, he was ordained a bishop in 1931 and served initially as the Vicar Apostolic in Baoding, not far from his birthplace. In 1946, he was named the Archbishop of Nanchang, much further to the south, a city I stopped in a number of years ago.

In 1950, soon after the establishment of the revolutionary government in China, Joseph Chow received his invitation to become pope. A delegation from Beijing came to visit him. A writer of the time describes their conversation as follows:

- "You are so talented, you are just right to become head of the 'Chinese progressives.' Would you not like to become the pope of China?"
- Do you believe that I have the qualities necessary for that?
- Of course.
- In that case, I would prefer to become the pope of the whole world."

The delegation left, furious at his refusal. From then on, he was under constant surveillance. In May 1951, he was arrested, tried, found guilty, and thrown into prison. The charges against him were
that he had listened to the *Voice of America*, had opposed the reform of the Church, and had recruited members for the Legion of Mary. He remained in prison, condemned to forced-labor, for 22 years. Just before his death, he was released (so that he would not die in prison) and carried to the home of a Christian in Nanchang. There he died.

What strikes me about Joseph Chow is this. He renounced a very prestigious offer: he could have been the pope of China. Consequently, he died a long, arduous death. In the end, the government, by freeing him from prison several days before his death, wanted to deprive him of the title of martyr, but we recognize today that he was precisely that. Tertullian tells us that "the blood of Christians is seed." The martyrs encourage us. Their strength germinates in our hearts. They demonstrate that some things are worth dying for. By their witness they proclaim that fidelity to one's commitments is more important than life itself. In the darkness of persecutions, or of oppressive regimes, martyrs are like bolts of lightning that illuminate the nighttime sky. They are like a surge of electricity that energizes those of us who continue to live on. Our Vincentian Family has been blessed by many such martyrs, from the time of St. Vincent right up to the present. Today I pray that this great "cloud of witnesses" will strengthen all of us to be faithful, no matter what the cost, even to the end.

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"Apology 50, 13.

"Heb 12:1."
With the recent publication of Volume II of the *Writings* of St. Justin de Jacobis (*Letters*), we have the complete edition of the works of this great Vincentian missionary and apostle of Abyssinia, who died on 31 July 1860 and was canonized on 26 October 1975. Volume I was published in 2000 (centennial of his birth) and contains six parts of his *Diary*. The *Catechism* in the Amharic language, attributed to Justin de Jacobis, was edited by Propaganda Fide and printed in 1850 [cf., *Vincentiana* 37 (1993), 560-593].

This Volume II, entitled *Epistolario* (*Letters*), was edited by Fr. Giuseppe Guer1 a, with the cooperation of a team which collaborated profitably, as is mentioned in the Introduction, especially Fr. Vincenzo Lazzarini and Prof. Mario Guerra. Collected in the book are all the letters of De Jacobis which remain, either in the original, or in his drafts, or in copies. Even if this is not a critical edition in the most rigorous sense of the term, at the beginning and in the various notes, the scientific criteria, adopted to make reading easier and at the same time documented, are explained. At the end of the volume there is an index of the names of persons and places found in both the Letters and the Diary, whose index had been purposely put off.

In 1651 pages, 524 letters are collected: these have been transcribed from the Archives of the General Curia of the CM (this is a collection of 379 letters sent, among other addressees, to the Superior General, the Procurator General, or the Assistants General); from the Historical Archives of Propaganda Fide in Rome (some 100 letters addressed mainly to the Cardinal Prefect or to his Secretary). Some letters were found in the Archives of the Pontifical Work of Propaganda Fide in Paris and in Lyon, or in the Historical
Archives of the Foreign Ministry in Paris. Thirty-two letters are in the Archives of the Provincial House of the CM in Naples, from which Justin de Jacobis left for Africa in 1839.

Having these valuable sources available, it will certainly be easier for historians to verify and study in depth some fundamental aspects of De Jacobis’ biography. It will especially be possible to make the most of and show the topicality of some of his intuitions, which were valuable forerunners of modern missiology.

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General Bibliography


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